

**56th GEF Council Meeting
World Bank, Washington DC**

**Opening remarks by Naoko Ishii
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Check Against Delivery

Good morning everyone. Welcome to the 56th Council Meeting.

I am excited as this Council meeting presents a great opportunity to reflect on the huge challenges we are facing and what we can do to address them.

Let me start by reflecting on the challenges that are facing us.

I recall at the last Council meeting in December, we touched upon the IPCC 1.5 degree report which pointed to the scale, magnitude and speed of the climate crisis, and which urged us to begin the transformation of almost every aspect of our economy and society. The IPCC report told us that we have only 12 years to bend the curve.

Last month IPBES painted another very worrisome picture. We are losing biodiversity at 100-1000 times higher than the

natural rate. Out of the eight million plant and animal species on Earth, one million are threatened with extinction.

These concerns were echoed by the Global Environment Outlook published by UN Environment. It concluded that “a major species extinction event, compromising planetary integrity and Earth’s capacity to meet human needs, is unfolding.”

Importantly, both reports point to the same main causes of degradation and biodiversity loss, namely our food and land-use system, and the associated habitat destruction and pollution.

Another report, the Global Chemical Outlook tells us that hazardous chemicals and other pollutants such as plastic waste and pharmaceutical products continue to be released in large quantities, highlighting the need to avoid future legacies through sustainable materials management and circular business models.

My take-away is that science provides us with the crystal-clear message that the natural world is under attack. We humans have pushed the carrying capacity of planet Earth to its limits. Unless we urgently change the way we live, we will lose the favorable Earth conditions that are the very foundation of our own prosperity.

I am very pleased that during this meeting, we will have an opportunity to hear directly from science. In addition to our usual inputs from STAP, I am delighted that Bob Watson, the outgoing Chair of IPBES, has agreed to brief us over lunch today.

While the challenge is daunting, the good news is that the momentum to respond to these challenges is growing.

I have two observations on the response.

At the international level, nature is rising on the agenda. A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to attend the G7 Environment Minister's meeting hosted by France in Metz. Also, this coming weekend, I will be attending the G20 Environment Ministers meeting in Karuizawa, hosted by Japan. Similarly, back in April, the Government of Canada hosted the Nature Champions Summit to build momentum for next year's biodiversity COP, while just last week, China hosted their annual CCICED meeting focusing on nature, and how the environment can be even more strongly incorporated in their upcoming 14th Five-year plan.

What is interesting to me, is that all these meetings clearly recognize that the challenge we are facing is not "only" climate change—what we are seeing is a much broader set of challenges, the nature agenda, including for example biodiversity loss, marine plastic, and circular economy have been pushed to the center stage of the discussions.

Another important feature of the recent response is the strong engagement by non-state actors. Multi-stakeholder coalitions among business, governments, CSOs and academia are emerging and are ramping up their activities. For instance, the Food and Land Use Coalition and TFA 2020 are working to stop deforestation by transforming the food sector. There are several active coalitions on circular economy, plastic and e-waste, and I was very interested to hear the conclusion from the CSO discussions yesterday, joined by governments and business, that focused on marine plastics. Moreover, there are alliances among mayors working on sustainable cities. And very recently, the concept of a “new deal for nature”, looking at what kind of coalition can be made, has been capturing the imagination of governments, CSOs and business ahead of COP15 in 2020.

What is our, the GEF’s, part in all this?

As you know, with encouragement by partners and in response to messages from science, we at the GEF have been evolving our strategy for the past few years. GEF 2020, adopted by this Council in 2014, shifted focus from “symptoms” to “causes” or “drivers” of environmental degradation; it puts “transformation”, or systems change, as a center piece of our efforts to maximize impacts, and “integration” as an effective way of delivery. We emphasize the importance of taking a multi-stakeholder approach given that no single actor can catalyze systems change on its own.

In this context, I am proud of the Work Program presented to this Council. This will be the single largest Work Program, if approved, in the history of the GEF. And, it covers 91 countries, including 30 LDCs and 32 SIDS.

This directly addresses the need presented by the recent scientific reports, meaning the needs for transformational change in key economic systems.

The center piece to the Work Program are the “Impact Programs”, which are set out to bring countries, (as well as business, CSOs and communities) together in an integrated manner and directed at tackling the drivers of environmental destruction, and not just its symptoms. The Food, Land Use and Restoration Program is meant to help transform the food and land use system, which is identified as the major cause of biodiversity loss by IPBES, and other scientific reports.

The Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) programs, namely, Amazon and Congo Basin, will address the most significant and terribly threatened biomes on the planet in a different manner from the past.

The Impact Programs are cutting edge designed programs with high ambition. It has been a lot of work on the ground, and I have had the opportunity to visit a number of countries to see how they have been put together.

It is very encouraging to see how the programs have helped bring agriculture and environment ministers together, how they have helped bring local and national governments together, and how the private sector has been brought in.

These have been huge tasks, but I am convinced that doing this work on the ground is one of the real values that these programs can bring. I am also pleased to note that our new results measurement system tells the promising story that with the Impact Programs we can expect even bigger results per dollar.

In addition to the Impact Programs, I want to highlight that the Work Program also includes other exciting programs to address emerging issues which requires immediate actions through the creation of effective platforms. They are the Global Wildlife Program, the e-mobility program and SIDS chemical platform.

Overall, I am pleased to see that this Work Program provides resources to 91 countries, including 30 LDCs and 32 SIDS.

I would also like to emphasize that this Council meeting is not only about the Work Program, but also about our continued work to strengthen the GEF's institutional framework. This is critical to deliver on the ambition in GEF 2020 to ensure cost effective delivery.

As usual, we will also hear from the IEO to give us pointers about where additional improvements may be made.

During lunch tomorrow, MOPAN will share with us findings of their assessment of the GEF.

Going forward...

I feel the challenge we are facing is becoming bigger and more urgent. At the same time, our ability to address these challenges is becoming stronger. We have more scientific knowledge, more understanding of what works and what does not. We have more champions, in government, the political sphere, business leaders, CSOs and communities. And, we need to capitalize on the momentum coming from this group.

We are heading for a “Super year” 2020, with the CBD COP in China, where the post-Aichi framework needs to be agreed, with the Climate COP where the Paris agreement will be reviewed and NDCs will be updated, and with the UN Ocean Conference.

We have a historic opportunity to come together to make a difference. This may be the last chance to change the course. I am thrilled to say that we, the GEF, are a part of those efforts and movements.

As I look ahead to my last year as the GEF CEO, I am very proud to say that we have come a long way from the GEF 2020 vision to now implementing an integrated and systems-oriented strategy.

I am pleased with what we have accomplished so far, but I am also clear that there is no room for complacency. There is still a lot to be done, and I look forward to putting all my energy into that in the coming year, together with you.

Let us have good deliberation for the coming days and let us now get on with business!

Thank you.