

I thank the President, Government and people of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam for the warm welcome afforded my delegation.

I express my appreciation, also, to the Global Environmental Facility for its kind invitation and for the excellent arrangements made to facilitate my attendance at its Sixth Assembly.

Cooperative Republic of Guyana



# *Address*

*of*  
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*to the*  
Sixth Assembly of the Global Environmental Facility  
Vietnam

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## **Small states, strong regions**

The Sixth Assembly of the Global Environmental Facility recognizes the necessity and urgency of “delivering transformational change” to confront the challenges to the earth’s environment.

This Assembly’s conviction is that incremental change, while necessary, will not be sufficient to avert environmental catastrophe. Change must be comprehensive.

The Global Environmental Facility – the world’s foremost institution for financing environmental change – must aim at “delivering transformational change” by forging not only global

but, also, regional and local partnerships. It must leverage the potential of contiguous states at the local level to contribute to solutions at the global level.

Global environmental threats cannot be resolved only by the existing level and rate of everyday responses. International environmental cooperation must continuously seek comprehensive and cohesive solutions to stubborn, unchanging or deteriorating situations.

This Sixth Assembly, by identifying the prevalence and persistence of climate change, deforestation, land degradation and water pollution, and by proposing responses to these challenges, emphasizes the need for deeper and different approaches to international environmental cooperation.

This Sixth Assembly has reaffirmed the importance of international cooperation at the global and regional levels as a means of ensuring environmental security. The Facility's thirty-two constituencies embrace small-, medium- and large-sized states. These

constituencies might be administratively, financially or culturally convenient but their architecture could have unanticipated consequences.

It might be much more prudent, from an environmental perspective, to combine the forested, continental, Amazonian states such as Guyana, Suriname, Brazil and Colombia – which share similar threats and are located within the *Guiana Shield* – rather than with insular states such as The Bahamas or Barbados.

### **Sub-regional organizations**

Specific environmental hazards – air, water and ocean pollution, land degradation, desertification and disasters such as storms and hurricanes, for example, might be a firmer foundation on which to build sub-regional ‘environmental’ constituencies.

The Facility functions excellently at the ‘global’ level. It should not ignore the fact, however, that the environment is “local”. Death, human distress and damage are felt first and most at the local level

– in households, farms, factories, mines, offices, rivers and hillsides and in schools.

The global environmental landscape comprises significantly different ecological zones. Threats to the Pacific island states are different to those of the Caribbean island states, the states of the Sahel or those of the Indonesian archipelago, for example.

The GEF, faced with such extensive and extreme environmental events and challenges, must continue to emphasise local and sub-regional responses if it is to realize its grand, global objective.

Guyana is at the center of a geomorphic zone known as the ‘*Guiana Shield*’ which, with international cooperation and the combination of the efforts of its six constituent countries, could contribute even more to “delivering transformational environmental change” more comprehensively.

The *Shield* is one the earth’s largest and last remaining blocks of pristine tropical rainforest. It is one of the most biologically rich

and diverse areas on earth. The *Guiana Shield* can be developed as a model of international cooperation.

The GEF should continue to work with sub-regions – as it is doing in the Amazon Sustainable Landscape Programme – to confront common challenges. Such an initiative, involving the *Guiana Shield*, can become a model of how the GEF can work with small, medium and large-sized states in delivering “transformational change” and in advancing the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals No. 13-15.

The GEF was established to promote global environmental cooperation. There is no doubt, that for 27 years, the GEF has been a financial lifeline for projects for small states, enabling them to enhance their contribution to global environmental security.

Small states – comprising more than 25% of the international community – are most vulnerable to environmental threats and are most often victims of disasters which inflict death, economic and environmental damage and social dislocation.

Small states, notwithstanding their vulnerabilities, are making a ‘big’ contribution towards global environmental security. Their forests, conservation parks and protected areas serve as carbon sinks and provide essential, elemental environmental services.

Small states are decarbonizing their economies and energy sources to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Small states are foregoing natural resource extraction in order to preserve and protect biodiversity, freshwater supplies and the integrity of ecosystems.

Small states are starting to take concerted action to clean-up their coastal zones, reduce and eradicate the use of ozone-depleting substances and promote safe waste disposal.

Guyana stands as an example of how a small state can play a ‘big’ role in “delivering transformational environmental change”. Guyana, in 1989 – three years before the Rio Conference of 1992 – entered into an environmental covenant with the international community by dedicating 360,000 hectares of its rainforest as a permanent laboratory

for sustainable forest management and the conservation of biological diversity.

Guyana, twenty years later, entered into an agreement with the Kingdom of Norway:

*“...to work together to provide the world with a relevant, replicable model of how Reducing Emissions and Forest Degradation, plus conservation and sustainable forest management (REDD+) can align the development objectives of forest countries with the need to combat climate change.”*

Guyana presented the Kanashen Protected Area – a 7,000 km<sup>2</sup> zone of rainforest – to the Queen’s Commonwealth Canopy – a network of forest conservation projects.

Small states are limited not only in size but, usually also, in human resources, technology and capital. Small states need financing, technical assistance and partnerships to help build capacity which

will allow them be part of grand global initiatives to deliver transformational change.

The GEF is ideally suited to promote international environmental cooperation by assisting small states:

- to build greater capacity by ensuring financial mechanisms that are more flexible and accessible;
- to undertake environmental action that will yield benefits at the local, regional and global levels; and
- to collaborate more effectively by establishing multi-state, sub-regional organizations.

The sun is about to set on the GEF's Sixth Assembly but a new day is soon to dawn. This Assembly's momentum must not be slowed. The challenge of "delivering transformational change" at all levels and in all zones must be embraced in the days, months and years ahead.

There is no alternative earth. Eternity is at stake.

I thank you.