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GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY
INVESTING IN OUR PLANET

Remarks

by

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Global Environment Facility

Visit to Guinea Bissau

Bissau National Assembly, July 8, 2011¹

¹ Unicameral parliament: People's National Assembly (100 seats; members elected by popular vote for a four-year term)

President of the National Assembly;

Ministers,

Honorable Representatives,

Representatives of the diplomatic and consular corps,

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am very honored to be able to meet you today. I would like to pay tribute to my friend, Mr. Tomas Gomes Barbosa, Minister of State for the Environment, whose brilliant idea it was to propose this meeting to me.

I would like to begin by telling you a little bit about the Global Environment Facility—the GEF—an institution that is not necessarily well known in Guinea Bissau.

The GEF is a unique international financing partnership. We work with developing or transition countries to help them advance while improving the global environment. The GEF operates through a network of countries and partners to develop projects and programs. For their implementation, we encourage countries to reach out to the best-performing stakeholders on the ground, whether from the public or private sectors or civil society in general.

Currently, the GEF is the only public sector financial body working in an integrated manner toward mitigating risks to the global environment. It has

become de facto the only operational financial mechanism for the major international environment conventions.

During the current fifth replenishment phase (2010–2014), we will provide \$4.3 billion in grants to beneficiary countries—this remarkable effort by our donors in the context of a difficult global financial environment must be acknowledged. This effort comes as a reward for the results we obtained in the context of assistance to developing countries in the six intervention areas: preservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, collective management of transboundary water systems, control of land degradation, reduction of ozone-depleting substances, and elimination or reduction of persistent organic pollutants.

Apart from thematic approaches associated with the conventions, we also support crosscutting approaches, such as those relating to sustainable forest management. In addition to project-based approaches, we have also developed a programmatic approach that has largely benefited African countries since GEF-4.

For example, the projects in Guinea Bissau during GEF-4 were approved as part of a biodiversity conservation program for West Africa.

The GEF remains committed to providing support to the country's institutions, in collaboration with current partners.

The GEF, therefore, has a small but significant presence in your country. We started with capacity-building projects at the very beginning of our operations in this country. Our portfolio in Guinea Bissau has diversified over time to include a major \$4.8 million project on marine and coastal biodiversity management. This project helped to improve management of the five protected areas, strengthen the National Institute responsible for these protected areas, and create the Cantanhez National Park. With this experience, your country can take pride in having become a model in the region in the management of protected areas, owing to long-term vision and effective coordination of actions among donors.

These results have made it possible to proceed with the authorization of two million-dollar projects, during the GEF-4 cycle, to expand the network of protected areas to forest zones and support operationalization of the BioGuinée foundation. These efforts should be applauded.

Guinea Bissau is very important to us, even more so because Guinea Bissau's work is well regarded in international circles. In fact, Guinea Bissau was one of the few countries in Nagoya to propose more ambitious commitments with

respect to coverage of protected areas. While the previous objective was 10 percent, Guinea Bissau achieved coverage of 17 percent of the country, in particular with support from the GEF-3 project. The GEF-4 projects will facilitate the achievement of 24 percent coverage, which, of course, exceeds international commitments.

On several occasions we have also held Guinea Bissau up as an example in the region. We have also proposed to include Guinea Bissau among the 20 success stories in a publication being prepared for the GEF's 20-year anniversary and with an eye to **RIO +20**.

But you know better than I do the broad range of difficulties that exist, for example with respect to institutions and operational and financial capacities. However, even during the period of political uncertainty that you faced, Guinea Bissau remained engaged with the GEF. Thus, since its establishment, the GEF has invested over \$17.7 million here in 11 national projects. The results are impressive, in particular with respect to capacity building with the Institute for Biodiversity and Protected Areas (IBAP) and the creation and management of marine and coastal areas.

Naturally, all this was facilitated by the Government's long-term vision, a small team of motivated individuals, and sound coordination with the other donors (**European Commission, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), and private foundations such as FIBA and MAVA**).

With these achievements, Guinea Bissau is now poised to stand as a model country, with experience in creating protected areas and community development around protected areas, as is the case with the *Fonds des Initiatives Environnementales Locales (FIAL)*.²

We would like to encourage your country to build on this momentum.

To complement these achievements, on March 14 I approved a \$2 million project to support fishing activities, reduce illegal activity, and enhance the value added of fishing products. The World Bank, which is implementing this project, is contributing \$6 million.

In December 2010, I also approved a project that Guinea Bissau had previously identified as the top priority of the National Adaptation Program of

² Fundo de Iniciativas Ambientais Locais (FIAL) in Portuguese

Action and in line with the PRSP. This \$4 million project is financed by the Least-Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) and aims to help countries adapt to climate change while taking into account the effects on agricultural water resources and the implications for human health, agricultural production, livestock production, and food security. This project is essentially focused on institutional capacity building, but also includes—and I should stress this—demonstration sessions planned in the semi-arid rural areas of the eastern part of the country, in particular in the Gabú region and the areas of Pirada and Pitche, with a special focus on the role of women and NGOs on the ground. Finally, Guinea Bissau is also a newcomer to the GEF Small Grants Programme, to which we provide \$150,000 in grants. This program is often viewed as the public face of the GEF because it provides grants averaging \$20,000 to NGOs and grassroots communities for visible, on-site interventions. The idea is to strengthen the links between a given location and the activities that generate global environment benefits.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the course of the fifth GEF replenishment phase (2010–2014), and under the GEF's transparent Resource Allocation Framework, we have set aside a \$4.6 million grant for Guinea Bissau to address climate change, biodiversity, and land degradation. This national allocation may be supplemented with

other resources, in particular with respect to adaptation (up to \$6 million), chemical products, and international waters, through regional projects.

The Government will soon embark on an exercise to formulate GEF priorities for Guinea Bissau. This national consultation, which will include all stakeholders, will provide us with an indication of the projects for which these resources will be made available. This is also how the GEF operates—as a system in which countries decide how they would like to allocate the resources so that they are well aligned with national priorities.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate how happy I am to be at this meeting. I am aware of your critical role in a democracy. I have taken the time to explain to you what the GEF is so that you may better understand it and, therefore, be better equipped to understand the importance of the environment and ensure that this sector truly becomes a key pillar of sustainable development in Guinea Bissau.

I thank you most sincerely for the welcome extended to me.