

62nd GEF Council

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Hilton McLean, Tysons Corner, Virginia

Opening of the Meeting

Remarks by

**Carlos Manuel Rodriguez,
GEF CEO and Chairperson**

Transcript

Before I open the 62nd GEF Council meeting, I have to begin by sharing some unfortunate news.

Council members, alternates, agencies, representatives, CSO networks, and dear friends.

Our Council member from West Africa, Mr. Delphin Aidji, passed away this weekend.

I'm very sorry to share this bad news with you all.

I would like to ask if we can stand and give a minute of silence in memory of Delphin.

Thank you so much.

Delphin was the Council Member representative from West Africa.

He represented Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

I would like to ask the alternate member from West Africa, Alimata Kone, to address the floor.

Thank you so much, Alimata.

Peace to his soul.

Condolences to his family.

On behalf of the GEF partnership, the Secretariat will send the condolences to his government and to his family. Thank you so much.

With this, and having quorum, I formally open the 62nd Council meeting of the GEF.

As CEO and Chairperson of this Council, I'm extremely happy we are here.

I want to thank everybody for the personal effort to join us in person.

Exactly two years ago, I was appointed by this same Council.

It was not until now that I had the pleasure and the joy to be able to chair the 62nd Council meeting in person.

Those who have been unable to join us, and are joining us in a virtual setting, I want to send my regards to all of you.

Of course, I feel very honored and very happy.

Nevertheless, I don't feel 100% comfortable, because one of our most important staff members, and even, I can say a mentor to many of us, Ambassador William Ehlers is not with us.

Helping us, guiding us, supporting us, through the Council process, he's not able to be with us in person, as he tested positive [for COVID-19] a couple of days ago, so William is joining us virtually, and he will be supporting us through the whole week.

Of course, my big thanks to William and his team for doing the extra effort in putting together this first in-person Council meeting.

Of course, we will miss him because we won't have him in person. I hope everything goes well with him. And I want to publicly thank him for that.

Additionally, I want to also express my honor and happiness to be joined here, as chair, with Ambassador Feturi, who is going to be my co-chair in this Council meeting, and the next Council meeting that we will be having in December.

I'm honored, not just because of the long diplomatic experience of Ambassador Feturi, that for many years has been on the frontline of international negotiations, particularly on topics associated with the core of business of the GEF, but also because he is a fabulous human being.

His experience as a representative of a SIDS (Small Island Developing State) is important.

This will probably be the last time I say the word SIDS, because I will be in the future saying LOSIDS: Large Oceanic Small Islands Developing States.

We tend to call them SIDS because they are tiny, in terms of the terrestrial space, but these are large oceanic nations.

I hope I can be supported by you all, so we can recognize that these nations are large oceanic nations: LOSDIDS.

So we've got a representative of the LOSIDS with us, and I'm very honored to work together this whole week with Ambassador Feturi as our co-chair.

I want to give him a big round of applause as our co-chair during this week.

Of course, I've been waiting for this moment for the last two years.

I officially moved to DC, and this is my home nowadays.

We have an ongoing process to open the GEFSEC offices here in Washington this year.

I want to thank the whole staff of the Secretariat for their effort in the reopening of the offices.

It hasn't been an easy process, but I'm happy we are moving towards these new realities where we will be proposing to the Council a few ideas on how we should be able to operate and work, based on the fact we learned quite a few good lessons out of the virtual reality due to the pandemic.

Before I dive into the busy agenda that we have for this week, I want to take a moment to recognize the hardships and challenges all of us, colleagues, and friends have been through in this pandemic.

Of course, the pandemic is not over, but I extend my sincere best wishes to everyone still dealing with the consequences of COVID-19 and the impacts of the pandemic.

As we finish this week with GEF-7, and look to the future of GEF-8, I want to underline once more what we brought to the attention of all of you during the replenishment with regards to the needs of the GEF to play a critical role in “building back better.”

This is not an empty slogan.

This is something that we need to take very seriously, because all the evidence tells us that building back better is not necessarily a green, blue, resilient, and clean one.

It’s up to us in the context of GEF-8 to be able to engage with all stakeholders, particularly with recipient countries in this effort.

Also, it’s important to recognize, as I’m able to have more exchanges and interactions with recipient countries about their own institutional and financial realities, that there is no single developing country that hasn’t been struck economically speaking in terms of the pandemic.

There’s recession, fiscal deficit, and death.

All those elements are playing against our aspiration of having a very successful implementation of GEF-7, and a very successful process of project design for GEF-8.

So, I strongly believe that the implementation of GEF-7, and the approaches and objectives for GEF-8 are very well situated.

We need to be a source of inspiration and hope in the context of this very challenging moment, where business as usual becomes an option to the economic recession and to the human aspiration for jobs, prosperity, and growth.

I also want to recognize the work that this Council has done in supporting this Secretariat.

I want to recognize at the same time the work of the Secretariat, the agencies, the operational focal points, and without any doubt, the work that the CSO Network does with us, in dealing with the multiple impacts that were generated throughout GEF-7 with regards to the pandemic, and the many different challenges and situations that all countries have gone through.

These have been exceptional times, and I think the GEF partnership has been able to cope with these exceptional circumstances.

This week we will be presenting the last work program for GEF-7.

I feel very happy, and I’m very grateful to all of you, for all of your flexibility, guidance, and wisdom, with all of the decisions we are taking to be able to finish GEF-7 in the context of a huge global pandemic, without much consequences in terms of our portfolio, without much consequences in terms of maximizing and optimizing the limited resources that we have in the GEF.

I think that we delivered very well, in terms of the pandemic in GEF-7.

I also want to publicly recognize that we need to feel proud of what we did in GEF-7, but also very importantly, what we were able to accomplish during the replenishment.

It's a record-setting replenishment, in moments of political and human crisis in the world.

The GEF is becoming the beacon on a hill, in terms of hope, aspiration, in terms of long-term vision.

It is truly something that we need to all be very proud of.

The last few months, I've been able to travel, attending different national events, different COPs. I've been able to visit some projects.

Definitely, we have become a source of inspiration in terms of generating consensus on such challenging topics, like sustainability, climate change, chemicals and waste, conservation of nature, and how we go through a real recovery that is based on the wise use of our natural capital.

That is, that respects the rights of minorities, and aspires to comply with the many very ambitious goals and targets from the multilateral environmental mechanisms.

Still, there is a lot to be done.

Many people will think that \$5.3 billion is a large sum of money, but at the end of the day, it isn't.

In terms of the global challenges, we know very well the global financial gaps, in terms of climate action, nature conservation.

People - in a very simplistic manner - will say that \$5.3 billion is just a small drop in the ocean.

Let me assure you all that the small drop of water of the GEF is very powerful.

We need to feel proud that we have created this powerful drop of water that will have impacts by the end of this decade.

Remember that many of the things that we have done throughout the GEF-8 process is because we have a very clear vision of where we need to be by the end of this decade, meaning by the end of GEF-9.

There's this renewed confidence put to the GEF, which is a testament of the ideas around integration, impact programming, system change.

Under the supervision and guidance of the previous CEO of the GEF: Mrs. Naoko Ishii, I want to publicly recognize the work that she did in the GEF.

I think we are concluding a period that looked for impact, systems change, more integration in GEF-8.

And now we look to a process of GEF-8 and GEF-9, where I strongly believe that by the end of GEF-9, we would be able to achieve progress in the ultimate political objective of sustainability, which is the need for the GEF to be supporting countries in creating the right policies and the right frameworks, whereby all private and public investments by the end of this decade are 100% aligned with the Paris Agreement, with the new CBD framework, and with the multilateral environmental agreements.

That's our ultimate goal.

We're beginning this process in GEF-8 and I feel confident that we have an opportunity to change the driver of environmental degradation and help address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

This can only be done if we work with governments, private sector, and CSOs.

And that is why the important emphasis that GEF-8 is doing on civil society organizations, not just in the work that we do with our CSO Network, the Small Grants Programme, but is fully recognizing in everything that the GEF does, the role of non-state actors.

If we do this by the end of the decade, we can make an enormous difference in the way our future generations will live.

I would like to conclude my introductory remarks by showing you a few images.

Let me begin with this simple image.

This is me a couple of months ago with three freezers.

Normally we all have one in our homes.

This was the first time I was in the middle of the Sahel, in central Senegal. In the village called Soussanne.

But there is no energy, no refrigeration, no light, and the GEF came with a project based on climate adaptation, improving life for the people, and brought energy for the first time to this community.

This was the first time that the kids of this community could eat ice cream in their lives.

This is the first time the community had the possibility to have medicines, and to plan in terms of their own development.

We were able, through a GEF project, to support this and another 25 communities working on climate resilience.

This is the frontline of the drylands. This is the frontline of the desert.

In the Sahel, on an annual basis, the desert expands 4 km per year.

And these are the communities which are on the frontline of climate change.

The GEF, with this initiative has brought solar energy, new practices for cattle ranching, forestry, has been investing in water security.

But one of the most important elements I saw in this community, is that we did most of the work through the women of this community.

These are the people that work and operate the solar systems in the community.

And by doing this, we were not only able to achieve our goals and aspirations in terms of climate adaptation, we were empowering women through GEF investment.

And these are some of the places that we visited

I grew up with cattle and coffee in the highlands of Costa Rica.

I know a lot of things about cattle, and I was very struck by many things that I saw that we are doing.

These cows in Indonesia, the owners don't have a need to milk or use them for meat.

They use the cow waste for fertilizing the fields, and for using them as a source of clean energy.

We are really having an impact at the village level.

Unfortunately, we are not having an impact at the landscape level.

And this is the challenge we are confronted with in GEF-8 and GEF-9.

I feel confident that we are on the right track and are making the right decisions.

I'm super impressed by the wisdom and the commitment of the countries and the technical abilities of the GEF agencies.

These are the kids of Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Indonesia.

There's hope.

We are a source of hope to them.

I would like to begin the GEF-8 as we finish this week in the GEF-7 period, with a positive note in reinforcing our commitment to those kids of the planet.

We're the ones who are called to step in and deliver.

I thank you so much for your attention today.

I will finalize by saying that during the last two months, I've been able to attend different COPs, the Minamata COP, the BRS COP, the UNCCD COP.

I personally want to thank Rolph, Monika, Andrea, and Ibrahim for the great job they have done in those COPs.

It was clear and evident to me that more integration is being asked by all parties.

I think that we, during the replenishment process, were ahead of the curve, in terms of aspiration, more integration, across the different conventions.

I welcome so much the very positive outcomes from Minamata and BRS.

It's extremely encouraging because we need to address the planetary crisis in an integrated comprehensive manner.

With this, I finish here my introductory remarks.

I want to welcome everybody once more. Let me pass the floor to my co-chair, Ambassador Feturi.