

**64th GEF Council**

**June 26, 2023**

**Centro de Eventos e Convenções Brasil 21, Brasília, Brazil**

**Adoption of the Agenda**

**Introductory Remarks by**

**Carlos Manuel Rodriguez,**

**GEF CEO and Chairperson**

**Transcript**

Allow me to greet you all once more and wish you good day, and good morning. It is my pleasure to open the 64<sup>th</sup> meeting of the GEF Council here in this wonderful city of Brasilia and to welcome our elected co-chair, Mr. Tom Bui from Canada.

Tom's joyous and optimistic spirit always impacts us positively, in any setting. So, I am delighted to be working with him closely - for this Council, and for the next one.

I also want to express once more my deep appreciation to the Government of Brazil for hosting this important meeting, and for the presence of the many Ministers and Vice-Ministers who were with us a while ago.

Furthermore, let me welcome David Cooper, the Acting Executive Secretary for the CBD Secretariat, whom you will be hearing from in a few minutes.

This Council meeting is historic for many reasons, not least because we are holding it in a GEF recipient country.

And I can think of no country better than Brazil for this moment.

Brazil as you all know is a biodiversity superpower, and a global environmental leader. This week Brazil is hosting not only the GEF Council meeting but also the CIF Council meeting, and Brazil will assume the leadership of the G20 next year. And, most likely, Brazil will host the UNFCCC COP30 in the Amazon basin in 2025.

It is no surprise that Brazil has been one of the GEF's closest and most impactful partners for decades. The story of the transformative partnership between the GEF and Brazil is described in a new publication that has been shared with all of you.

Also, Brazil is one of the largest recipient countries of GEF resources. Over the last 30 years, the GEF has invested more than US\$1.2 billion, and this has generated an additional \$5 billion in co-financing.

The global environmental benefits from these GEF investments are huge, such as the creation and improvement of over 22 million hectares of terrestrial protected areas, and the mitigation of nearly 200 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions.

Some of these investments have led to a significant enhancement of Brazil's institutional capacities, such as the establishment of FUNBIO and the support of hundreds of CSOs through the Small Grants Programme. Some have also been globally examples, such as the ARPA program, which has been the most ambitious tropical forest conservation program ever attempted in the world.

In fact, last week, several Council members had a field visit to the Anavilhanas National Park and the Puranga Conquista State Reserve, which are part of the ARPA program. It was a great pleasure to spend time with many of you, and to see all together the direct benefits, and the direct challenges, of the work that we do on the ground.

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Dear friends, and colleagues.

I don't need to remind you of the growing environmental threats which countries and communities are dealing with on a daily basis

I don't need to remind you of the rising political tensions, economic, and social strains around the world putting pressure on peoples and livelihoods.

It is also easy to forget just how much the devastating COVID-19 pandemic revealed in terms of our fragility and how much we all depend on a healthy planet.

I don't need to remind you of the groundswell movement from multiple sources to reform our current multilateral system, in order to more effectively address global challenges, and deliver lasting results.

BUT,

It is my duty to remind you, and ourselves, that despite all of these challenges, we at the GEF partnership have a unique opportunity.

- an opportunity to combat the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.
- an opportunity to accelerate the transition from our dependency on fossil fuels and destructive extractive industrial and monoculture practices.
- an opportunity to achieve balance with the cycle of life on the planet while providing energy and water for 1 billion people who lack access to these basic services and opportunities
- an opportunity to spark a just, green transition
- an opportunity to bring about shared prosperity and sustainable development which is our ultimate development goal.

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I am optimistic that these changes can be achieved, and will happen, during our lifetime, as a result of the work of each one of you in this council.

We have a call to action, and we have to heed it together so that the GEF, and the wider GEF partnership, will directly contribute to the global advancements that we need. The responsibility is ours, and we must act.

To that end, I firmly believe that international cooperation is the only way forward. To me, there is no other option to effectively deal with our collective global challenges.

BUT, today's multilateralism needs to extend beyond states, and include a broader range of non-state actors who are the largely unrecognized constituencies that give us the sustainability in our aspiration to generate global environmental benefits.

This is not only morally right, but also the smart and most effective thing to do. The future multilateral architecture must put equity and social principles at its heart.

And this needs to happen soon.

As CEO and Chairperson of the GEF partnership, I am already beginning to dedicate work so that the GEF can be a strong and direct supporter to the youth, to civil society, to women, and to subnational governments and city mayors.

And I will be proposing, in the next replenishment, even more ideas along these lines.

Now, let's get down to the business of this week. We have an extremely diverse and important agenda ahead of us.

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It is often said at the start of these meetings that “this is the most important Council meeting.”

But, believe me – this IS the most important GEF Council meeting in recent years.

Later today, the Council will consider a record \$1.4 billion work program – the largest work program in GEF history!

This is set to generate another \$9.1 billion in co-financing from other sources, for a total support package of \$10.5 billion.

This spans 94 percent of all countries eligible for GEF support, including Least Developed Countries, and Large Ocean Small Island Developing States. I will continue calling them as they are – Large Ocean Small Islands Developing States.

Much of this is set to be delivered through six of the 11 GEF-8 Integrated Programs.

This work program also includes the first tranche of the GEF-8 Small Grants Programme 2.0.

Of course, we have already been discussing for several months through many consultations, two documents on the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund – on its establishment, and on its programming directions.

I want to thank you all for your constructive engagement, and your hard work, that has allowed us to reach this advanced point, and I count on your continued support to bring this over the finishing line this week.

That we are able to establish the contours for the new fund just six months after COP-15 in Montreal, is truly remarkable, and a testament to our collective dedication and commitment.

The GEF's Business Plan and Corporate Budget reflects our core business priorities to ensure full and effective delivery of the ambitious GEF-8 programming and policy agenda. It is also designed to complement the wider work that I have been undertaking on the internal restructuring of the GEF Secretariat. Tomorrow you will have the opportunity to hear more about my restructuring plans in an informal lunch.

Some other notable agenda items include an analysis of the GEF partnership, our first formal council discussion on Policy Coherence, an updated Communications and Visibility Policy, a new Strategy for Knowledge Management and Learning, and preparation for the GEF to serve as part of the financial mechanism on this international agreement that has committed to protect biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions.

In my capacity as CEO and Chairperson of the GEF, I want to congratulate all of your governments for your wisdom and the ambition in agreeing on this historic new international treaty that will help us sustainably manage the high seas.

For us at the GEF this is a great opportunity to work with many countries that do have exclusive economic zones, but also for us at the GEF this is a great opportunity to engage with landlocked nations, working with them with those resources, the resources of all of the nations on the planet. I will be promoting an effort to strategically engage with landlocked nations, in order to put them in the front line of actions and ambition in regards to BBNJ.

And, as usual, we will also hear important reports and updates from our colleagues at the IEO and STAP.

Last, but by no means least, this meeting is a stepping-stone to the GEF Assembly, which brings together government, business, and civil society representatives from across the GEF's 185 member countries. It

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will take place in Vancouver in August, and I am extremely grateful to Tom and the Canadian Government for their leadership and support.

So, as you can see from the significant items on this Council agenda - the effectiveness, and the impact of the GEF is growing. We are efficient in our programming of resources and leverage significant additional financing. We are increasingly agile in our support. The GEF portfolio has impact at the country level. The GEF is working to further facilitate access to finance. The GEF is also advancing, we are improving, we are becoming more and more transformative. And need the support of the larger partnership, to be able to provide those aspirational goals that we all look for.

We know that you continue to place huge trust in the GEF. We are deeply grateful. And we are deeply committed – to continue to be worthy of that trust, and to continue to deliver on it.

With that, I thank you for your attention, and let me turn you over to my co-chair, Tom Bui.

Tom – the floor is yours.