



## **7<sup>th</sup> GEF Assembly**

**August 24, 2023**

**Vancouver Convention Center, Vancouver, Canada**

### **Opening of the Meeting**

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

*Remarks as Delivered*

Ministers, ladies, and gentlemen  
Good morning.

Thank you, Minister Hussen, for your remarks.

I would like to add my congratulations to Mr. Mahat, the Minister of Finance of Nepal, and Mr. Matsuzawa, Vice Minister of Global Environmental Affairs in Japan, for your election as Vice-Chairs of this Assembly.

What a pleasure it is to welcome you to the Seventh GEF Assembly here in the beautiful city of Vancouver.

I would also like to thank the members of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations for hosting the GEF Assembly on their traditional, unceded lands.

Let me also express my sincere thanks to the Government of Canada, and all the associated Canadian partners, for making this event happen.

Before I proceed further, I would like us to take a moment to extend deepest condolences on behalf of the entire GEF partnership to the family, friends, and colleagues of Dr. Mohamed T. El-Ashry following his recent passing. Dr. El-Ashry was the first GEF CEO, the mastermind behind this great organization. My condolences to his family.

Thank you so much for being with us today.

I want to begin by expressing my solidarity and sympathy with the millions of Canadians impacted by the devastating wildfires all over the country, including here in British Columbia.

I am struck by the fact that, one month ago, I woke up in Washington, DC to a dark and hazy day because of the Canada wildfires. Now here, in Vancouver, a month later, I experienced the same thing.

This reminds me of one of my favorite sayings – it is always darkest before the dawn.

We are in a cloud of smoke and haze. But, there is light in front of us.

That light is the willingness to come together and work together.

An international drive that we see now, like never before.

Environmental pressures are evident here in British Columbia, and all around the world. They are growing in frequency and intensity.

But at the same time, these very challenges are leading to an unprecedented international cooperation and action.

In this vein I want to acknowledge the leadership of Canada, China, and the CBD Secretariat on the agreement of the monumental Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

This year we also saw international agreement on the High Seas Treaty, and there are ongoing negotiations on a plastics treaty.

The Global Environment Facility is at the center of these discussions, being the host of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund, and part of the financial mechanism of the High Seas Treaty.

So, this Seventh GEF Assembly is coming at a crucial time.

We can see that increasing challenges are being met by increasing cooperation.

However, more is not necessarily better.

The Global Environment Facility is now 30 years old. Its very beginning, rooted in the Rio Conventions, was itself an unprecedented innovation.

But, over these 30 years, despite some changes in the margins, we have seen that the field of international cooperation has remained fairly static in its approach.

The world continues to do the same things, over and over, and yet keeps expecting a different result.

As environmental disasters from around the world unfold on our television screens every night, it is evident that we are not having the results that are needed.

As such, the role of multilateralism is under increasing debate.

International conversations are recognizing the need for a new paradigm in how we address global issues, environmental or otherwise.

We hear, loud and clear, the calls for reform.

We hear, loud and clear, the calls for inclusiveness.

We hear, loud and clear, the need for a whole of society approach that brings to the table all stakeholders in an integrated and cohesive manner.

Business as usual - the current GEF business model - is no longer an option if we want increased impacts and results.

A systemic crisis requires a systemic approach from the GEF partnership, from all of us, at all levels.

We need to bring to the table the voices of civil society.

Not only are they the ones whose livelihoods and rights are most impacted by the current state of our environment – they are also the ones who are the key to its protection and sustainable use.

It is increasingly recognized by many people that this approach is needed.

International discourse is now reflecting this.

And countries worldwide are showing their aspiration, through their commitments to these global agreements that are beginning to articulate this as a guiding principle.

Now a leading global financial mechanism, the GEF is taking concrete steps towards tangible action.

So, members of civil society will no longer be in the bleachers, looking down on what is happening in the playing field. Now, they will be playing on the field.

We will give civil society, women, Indigenous groups, the youth, a possibility to share in the decision-making process of the GEF partnership.

We will actively involve the philanthropic organizations and, of course, the private sector.

We will examine sub-national levels of decision making as well.

Through the outcomes and spirit of the GEF-8 replenishment, and the GEF Councils in the last two years, we have received a mandate to increase impacts and results.

And the only way to do this, is to provide concrete financial support on these three themes, making them a fundamental core principle of the work that we need to do into the future.

This will happen through change. Multiple changes at multiple levels

Yes, that change can be uncomfortable. But without change, we will not make the difference that we need.

All will acknowledge that this is the right thing to do, that we have a moral imperative.

The Global Environment Facility will say: it is not just a moral imperative – it is simply an imperative.

It is the only way we can maximize the sustainable impact of the limited resources at our disposal to fill the nature and climate financing gaps.

The GEF is bold enough to recognize this, to say this, to start taking action towards this, to deliver on these promises with concrete actions.

This Assembly is an example of that. The first example of the changing paradigm.

Until now the GEF has used “integration” as the main principle for increasing our ambition and impact with our resources towards a better global environment.

Today, we now recognize that we also need to be inclusive if we are to move to the next level of ambition and impact.

And more importantly, this will also ensure that our collective impact is owned by all and is lasting for future generations.

So now we will not only speak of integration, but also of inclusiveness and impact.

These three inter-connected themes are everywhere around us, from the Assembly taking place on the lands of the First Nations of Canada, to yesterday's Partnerships Forum, to the high-level plenary discussions today and tomorrow, to every single roundtable and side event during this week.

This approach will inform the implementation of the current funding cycle (GEF-8) and will lay the foundation for the next one (GEF-9), towards 2030 goals.

The GEF is being reformed to tackle the challenges that are on our doorstep and windows.

The GEF continues to have integration at the core – integrated solutions, partnerships, and financing.

The GEF is increasing in its agility and efficiency.

The GEF multiplies the impact of limited ODA through the work we do along the partnership.

And the GEF delivers.

We thank you for being a part of the GEF Partnership. together, shoulder to shoulder, we must ensure a new era, an era of solutions.

With that, I thank you, and I hand it over to our Chairman, Minister Hussen.