

69th GEF Council

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Opening of the Meeting

Introductory Remarks by

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GEF CEO and Chairperson

As Delivered

First let me express my thanks to Richard, Council Member from Australia, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea, for joining us all as the co-chair of the 69th GEF Council meeting.

It was a great pleasure to visit you in Sydney last year for the Global Nature Summit, and our trip to Canberra.

We had the opportunity to really exchange with decision makers from the executive branch as well as in congress. It was wonderful

to hear and witness the passion and commitment of the Australian government and the people, for the environment.

I'm very much looking forward to working with you closely, Richard, as our co-chair for this week and also for the upcoming December 2025 Council meeting.

To start, let me make some reflections of what we went through in our first replenishment meeting in Paris a couple of weeks ago.

I think it was a very productive, successful, and constructive meeting. And it starts setting the tone for the strategic discussions around the replenishment.

First, I would like to once more take the opportunity to thank the French government for their warm and active welcome and participation, particularly to the Minister of Ecological Transition, Biodiversity, Forests, Sea, and Fisheries, of France, Agnès Pannier-Runacher, who opened the meeting and made interesting remarks on the importance of ensuring a high level of ambition in GEF- 9, alongside the efforts of increasing our efficiency, equity, versatility, flexibility, and accountability.

In terms of our next steps, with regards to the replenishment, there was an agreement to have a second replenishment meeting, this time in Botswana, from October 8-10 of this year.

We also plan to convene a series of technical briefing sessions on thematic areas before that date.

After this, a series of meetings are proposed before we arrive at the GEF Assembly next year.

This includes a third replenishment meeting from January 19-21, 2026. Please note that we plan to make this in-person with a virtual option, and we are currently considering the best location to maximize attendance. We received quite a few observations on sites that fit the needs and the circumstances of many of the participants who were in Paris.

Also finally, the GEF Assembly will be proposed for the last week of May 2026. And a decision is before you this week on the final date and location that will be presented to us by a very special guest that we will have this week.

Dear friends and colleagues,

I came away from the Paris meeting more determined than ever to work with you and the wider GEF family to scale up our ambitions at this critical time for people and the planet.

We know what the recent assessments have been showing us. Where we see alarming declines in ecosystems, vitality, biodiversity, and climate stability, with growing threats like droughts, water scarcity, and pollution impacting both nature and human well-being.

Over half of the world's GDP is moderately or highly dependent on nature, which is the determining element that helps us generate that balance between human systems and natural systems.

Nevertheless, habitat loss, over-exploitation, pollution, and climate change are the main drivers of biodiversity loss, and they continue to undermine many of the national and multilateral efforts being done.

These pressures are intertwined and urgent, so integrated action is needed to restore ecosystems and limit climate change in line with the global goals.

The next four years are a make-or-break for these and other 2030 targets.

Delivering on the remainder of GEF-8 and a strong support for GEF-9 will be vital to achieve all of these objectives.

Within this context, we have a busy five days in front of us.

This morning, we will present for your review and approval the GEF Trust Fund work program and FY26 business plan and corporate budget.

Other items on our agenda include the GEF-8 Midterm Review for all STAR on full flexibility, and an update of the implementation of the recent Communications and Visibility Policy.

There will also be an opportunity for Council to deliberate on the potential expansion of the GEF partnership.

Later in the week, we will hear from the heads of the environmental conventions for which the GEF serves as the financial mechanism; as well as a special guest.

We will also be discussing proposed policy changes to continue streamlining the GEF project cycle, a topic that is extremely important to all of us.

Several evaluations will be presented by the GEF Independent Evaluation Office, including an assessment of the International Waters Focal Area, socioeconomic co-benefits, and nature-based solutions.

And we will hear, as usual, from the STAP Chairperson, which is a presentation and a discussion that we always enjoy a lot.

Following the GEF Trust Fund meeting, we will convene for the 38th LDCF/SCCF Council and continue with the 4th GBFF Council meeting.

The GEF Trust Fund, the Least Developed Countries Fund, the Special Climate Change Fund, and the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund work together as a flexible, unified platform for maximum reach.

And among us today, I'm pleased to welcome the presence of Mr. Kasse, Chair of the African Group of Negotiators on Biodiversity, and Mr. Toure, Executive Director of A3E Company and Former Advisor to the GEF CEO.

Both of them are coming due to ongoing coordination, collaborations, and conversation between the GEF Secretariat and the African political focal points on issues that are relevant to the GEF business.

This week also, we will work on understanding what is the role of the GEF in narrowing financial gaps through simultaneous actions.

On one side, stimulating the increase of financing to the environment and using that financing to foster greater policy coherence.

One of the key initiatives in this regard is the support that the GEF gives to the biodiversity finance initiative called BIOFIN. This is an ongoing global initiative designed to address the financial gap - domestic financial gap - by equipping countries with tools to assess their biodiversity finance needs, identify inefficiencies in current spending, and mobilize additional resources.

To this end, I'm delighted to have with us this week Onno van den Heuvel, Senior Technical Advisor of Nature Finance, UNDP, to share with us the experiences of BIOFIN and the work that we've been doing together.

We've got around 130 countries today working on the finances of biodiversity, which is no more, no less than the work of GBF Target 19, which aims for all countries - members of the CBD - to mobilize \$200 billion from all sources by 2030.

I strongly believe that the GEF is in the frontline, and at the same time at the cutting edge in terms of new approaches and new tools, in helping all recipient countries have their own financial strategies in place, so we can be able to be on track for that great, big complex and very ambitious target of mobilizing \$200 billion from all sources by 2030.

With regards to GEF-8, I want to report that the GEF continues to be a unique partnership for the people and for the planet, and it serves as a glue supporting cohesive action, yielding results that stick for the long term.

In the Paris meeting, I reminded replenishment participants of some of the things that we committed to and accomplished in GEF-8. I think it's worth repeating some of them.

The GEF-8 partnership is on course to achieve all environmental results targets, with eight targets already over 75 percent achieved.

Over 40 GEF-8 policy commitments have been already delivered.

Countries have accessed 75 percent of their allocation resources and co-finance contribution has exceeded the agreed target established in the previous replenishment.

Project speed has further increased with the time from project concept to CEO endorsement being reduced by over six months during GEF-8.

We are addressing also the topic of agency concentration.

We have reformed the GEF Small Grants Program to expand access, foster innovation, and deepen impact.

And the Gustavo Fonseca Leadership Program has launched with \$10 million in funding. It's a program that is supporting 180 fellows from developing countries in this first phase.

We are expanding support to Indigenous Peoples in local communities through funding initiatives like the Inclusive Conservation Initiative.

Dear friends and colleagues, the GEF is a one-of-a-kind multilateral organization that connects 186 countries with international

institutions, civil society, and the private sector, addressing environmental challenges in an integrated way.

The GEF is the only financial mechanism mandated to work across six environmental conventions, relying heavily on the structure of grant-making mechanisms.

And we are confronted today with rapidly advancing global environmental challenges, and geopolitical challenges as well that are having real impacts on international aid and multilateralism.

By working cohesively, as a partnership and as a family, we can face and conquer these challenges all together.

The GEF continues to enable developing countries to make progress against major environmental problems.

And we stand to make major breakthroughs ahead.

Key to this is the GEF's growing focus on policy coherence and integrated programming that connects transformative action and effectiveness across sectors and geographies, and its 'whole-of-society' approach involving all levels of government plus women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities.

Private sector engagement is key to incubating and scaling nature-positive solutions and needs to be increasingly emphasized in projects and in programs.

It is also important to prioritize innovation, and to share successful approaches widely through strong knowledge and learning platforms and strategic political communication to improve visibility.

The meetings this week will continue to lay a solid foundation for the years ahead.

We have a unique, strong, inclusive partnership with tremendous technical and political range and experience. But also, expertise.

But I strongly believe that these strong assets that our partnership possesses needs to be scaled up and strengthened.

In particular, I am very much interested in opening a discussion on how the GEF partnership goes from being a relatively effective and efficient operational partnership into a real political partnership where we generate coherence across the multiple conventions that we work with.

Looking at the COPs and the Conventions and Secretariat, but also very importantly on how we operate at the country level.

We still believe that the strengthening of the operational focal points is key for the empowerment of countries of the GEF portfolio, and by doing that we will generate more coherence on how countries prepare and negotiate themselves in the multiple conventions that we serve.

It's not a secret to all of us, that our operational focal points have challenges to talk and coordinate and complement with the CBD focal point and the multiple other focal points that represent countries in the multilateral environmental Conventions.

Going in that line towards going from an effective operational partnership into a real political partnership is something that we are putting a lot of attention into.

We're bringing these issues for consideration, and we will be presenting some actions and ideas throughout the replenishment that will help us move towards that condition. That condition will give us, definitely, a lot more political resilience in a world of high uncertainties.

So, I think that, altogether, we can have the right conditions, not just to conclude this decade with a very strong replenishment, and I'm not talking just on financial elements, GEF-9 is a very strong component of something that started as an idea.

GEF-6 began taking shape in GEF-7, full investment on that concept of integration in GEF-8, and now GEF-9 as we conclude this decade puts us under two big responsibilities.

One is to be able to close the circle of integration and effectiveness that the GEF is doing and being able to do as much as we can do to support, with limited resources, the needs of the countries in the multiple 2030 targets.

But at the same time the whole-of-government approach, the whole-of-society approach, is no more, no less than the basis of a new business model for the future decades that the GEF will embark with.

So with this, I would like to thank everyone for joining us over here and let me pass the word to my co-chair for his opening remarks.

Thank you so much.