**Washington DC, August 31, 2020**

**Dear Stewards and Partners,**

On behalf of the GIFT Coordination Team, I would like to thank you profoundly for your participation at the 2020 General Stewards Meeting, held online from 24 to 28 August 2020. Your presence, presentations, inputs, and contributions to discussions and shared experiences meant that the meeting exceeded all expectations, vastly fulfilling its objectives. Your commitment to maintaining a vibrant, interactive and cohesive network, was strongly demonstrated through the attendance of more than 160 stewards and partners representatives throughout the 14 sessions. As always, budget officials and civil society organizations representatives met in a respectful manner with their peers and deeply engaged in constructive dialogues. The variety and intensity of the multiple encounters and working agendas put forward during the week fostered our learning and technical collaboration, including through peer support and peer pressure dynamics.

For those of you that unfortunately could not join us, or participate in some of the sessions, we will be posting the presentations online soon ([here](http://www.fiscaltransparency.net/meetingmaterials/#toggle-id-1)), together with the video recordings of the sessions. Like that, all members will have the opportunity to benefit from the incredible wealth of informed and challenging discussions that took place, some of which richly turned into workshop style sessions on certain topics.

Below are some of the lessons learned throughout the week, together with the next steps identified in the closing session of the meeting:

* The online platform allowed us to successfully meet. Although we greatly missed the personal contact, the warm halls encounters and networking around the coffee machine, we were still able to collectively see and engage with each other, importantly allowing us to together warmly welcome our new stewards. The once a year frequency of the meeting means that a lot of information needs to be processed in a relatively short period of time. We are thus considering moving towards more frequent, shorter meetings with more specialized agendas. Smaller, more frequent discussions on different topics will likely also have the positive effect of multiplying the peer learning opportunities provided, often cited as being one of the greatest benefits of our network.
* Some of the stewards put forward the idea of them leading group discussions on specific areas of interest. For instance, the Planning and Budget Office of Uruguay suggested that activities and discussions on fiscal transparency portals be organized. This is a welcome development that we are looking forward to accompany. Others, such as ACIJ (Argentina) and CABRI (Africa) led lively and relevant discussions on topics that are current and evolving, such as the relationship between fiscal transparency and fiscal justice and between accountability and financial management information systems, respectively. We thank them and aim to keep these discussions alive and evolving among us.
* The GIFT Encounter Dashboard has been significantly updated. Thank you to the vast number of you that have informed us of your new and up-to-date actions and commitments. We will be soon contacting those of you that still need to provide us with your latest news. We use this Dashboard to reach out to you on some of your plans and achievements, enhancing the opportunities for collaboration. In this vein, we will soon be reaching out to some of you to publish blog posts and organize meetings related to some of your achievements. We need to ensure that all our members are aware, and benefiting, from your efforts.
* The Fiscal Openness Accelerator project, that concentrates a significant portion of the network’s efforts on public participation, was shown as being a key project holding many expectations. While the project is specifically being undertaken in 5 countries (South Africa, Benin, Senegal, Nigeria and Liberia), a lot can be learnt from other experiences within the network, such as those from Chile, Brazil and Sierra Leone. Simultaneously, other stewards and partners can benefit from regularly hearing about the experiences within this project. As such, we will continue to bring other GIFT stewards into this conversation, assisting with the further development of norms and mechanisms.
* Naturally significant discussions took place on this year’s overwhelming topic, COVID-19. Many studies, articles and guides have been produced to provide assistance, notably the GIFT network’s own Fiscal Data for Emergency Response: Guide for COVID-19. This Guide was sanctioned at the General Stewards Meeting. As many lessons are being learnt in respect of responses to the emergency, one key finding is that countries that had basic transparency systems in place were able to move faster than others in publishing relevant information. In this respect, the GIFT network will continue to support those willing to learn from each other, providing a platform for the sharing of knowledge and the use of its Guide as a means to address with transparency the ongoing impacts and consequences of the pandemic.
* We also concluded that we can enhance our collaboration on communications. The network wants to be closer to its members in their discussions and dissemination of important activities. We want GIFT's social media (Twitter @fiscaltrans, Facebook and Instagram GIFT-Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency) to be able to, where appropriate, support your efforts in reaching our international community. We will be soon be organizing meetings on this matter, and in the coming days, we will also invite you to a new WhatsApp group that will provide for timely updates and greater collaboration in the use of social networks.

The GIFT Coordination Team is deeply grateful to you for the preparation of precise, illustrative and substantial presentations, the time you took to listen to others, and your openness to international dialogues. In all countries, the fiscal transparency and public participation agendas are highly complex, full of countless obstacles and often met with resistance. The General Stewards Meeting was however a testimony of how despite this, you as GIFT champions continually push these agendas forward with incredible determination. The network’s open, frank and rigorous discussions offer examples, answers and solutions that are stimulating and inspiring. With this thrust of renewed energy, we look forward to continuing our networking and engagement in the pursuit of advancing fiscal transparency and public participation, in your country and around the world.

**Juan Pablo Guerrero**

**Network Director**