



18th Meeting of Parties of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership

Brussels Declaration

FINAL DRAFT

For discussion and approval during the High Level Policy Dialogue, Brussels, 28 November 2018

The member countries and organizations of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, meeting in Brussels within the framework of the 18th Meeting of Parties, together with participants in the high-level policy dialogue organized by the Belgian CBFP Facilitation:

- A. Note that the Congo Basin forests, which occupy the planet's second largest tropical rainforest basin and span two million km², provide a living environment to thirty million people, are home to globally unique biodiversity, contribute to global efforts to address climate change, and represent a reservoir of renewable resources for the sustainable development of Central African countries;
- B. Believe that these forests, managed sustainably as renewable resources, can help drive economic growth and wealth creation for current and future Central African populations;
- C. Emphasize that effective governance frameworks are necessary to protect the potential of Congo Basin forests and to avoid irretrievably depleting their abundance and exceptional biodiversity;
- D. Emphasize their continued commitment to the ideals of conservation and sustainable management of the Congo Basin forests, the rich biodiversity they hold, and their potential to improve the lives and livelihoods of those who, both locally and elsewhere in the world, benefit from the Congo Basin's resources and ecosystem services;
- E. Reiterate the need:
 - For effective implementation of national legal and regulatory frameworks, to serve as the main pillars of governance to sustainably increase the value of renewable natural resources in Congo Basin forests;
 - For progress in the structural reforms initiated within global efforts to address climate change;
 - To ensure the smooth functioning of regional organizations working to conserve Central African forests or to sustainably increase their value, considering commitments made by the Central African States in the Yaounde Declaration (1999), COMIFAC's constitutive treaty (2005) and the decision which established COMIFAC as a specialized body of ECCAS (2007);
- F. Consider that partnerships among Central African countries and with the international community play a vital role in countries' efforts to preserve and sustainably manage their natural resources;
- G. Consider also that the numerous international conventions and initiatives that promote global sustainable development can complement national efforts and bilateral partnerships that support appropriate governance frameworks for sustainable management in Congo Basin forests and can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals;

1. With respect to efforts to **conserve and sustainably manage ecosystems, biodiversity, and the unique wildlife resources** of Congo Basin forests:
 - Recall that the United Nations Security Council has acknowledged that wildlife trafficking in Central Africa fuels conflict and poses a threat to regional and national security, since it is a source of funding for militias and terrorist groups;
 - Underscore the importance of concerted cross-sectoral efforts to combat organized cross-border poaching across Central Africa, including engaging Ministries of Environment and Forestry, Defense, and Agriculture, as well as Ministries of Justice and law enforcement;
 - Emphasize destination countries of trafficking and international bodies (such as CITES) have important roles in approaches to strengthen surveillance, deter traffickers, and support sub-regional anti-poaching operational frameworks;
2. Regarding the **private sector's contribution** to the sustainable management of forest and natural resources in the Congo Basin:
 - Recall that illegal logging and other illegal exploitation practices of land and natural resources also threaten the Congo Basin forests, erode the rule of law and are also catalysts for conflict;
 - Encourage the private sector to improve transparency and to utilize voluntary best practice frameworks that exist for several economic sectors that affect Congo Basin forests;
 - Emphasize that socially and environmentally responsible private entities thrive where clear policies and legal certainty exist, including in land use planning, and encourage Central African countries and their international partners to provide that clarity and certainty;
3. Regarding the joint efforts carried out in the Congo Basin to **combat climate change**:
 - Urge for coordination and coherence of strategies, support programs and funding mechanisms in Congo Basin countries, particularly with regard to REDD+ (*Reduction of Emission from Deforestation and Degradation*), the formulation of NDC (*Nationally Determined Contributions* in the framework of the Paris Agreement) and implementation of the Bonn Challenge (forest landscape restoration);
 - Emphasize the key global role of the Congo Basin peatlands in mitigation strategies and call for an appropriate framework for their sustainable management;
4. Regarding the contribution of **scientific research and training institutions** to sustainable management and conservation in the Congo Basin:
 - Welcome diverse research initiatives to enhance knowledge of the environmental and biological dynamics affecting the maintenance and renewal of natural resources in Congo Basin forests, particularly with regard to the contribution of these forests to climate change mitigation efforts;
 - Appreciate and encourage joint efforts by research organizations and training institutions in Central African countries, Europe and the United States to establish an international network of interdisciplinary studies on adding value to and conserving the natural resources of Congo Basin forests.