

Speaking Points for the President

Date: 25th November 2016, Congo Basin Forest Partnership, Kigali, Rwanda

Our host, The Government of Rwanda, The Minister for Environment, Ministers from the Congo Basin present, Our Donor Partners – the EU & USG, Private Sector Partners, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to be addressing you. I am particularly elated to be speaking to such a diverse congregation of experts. Your passion about the future of our continent’s natural resources is very clear.

Anecdote on Africa’s concern with governance – based on your experience meeting with Heads of State recently.

The Congo Basin is Changing. Africa is changing. **PAUSE.**

Anecdote on Africa’s transformation – based on economic growth, population, urbanization, elective democracy, connectivity.

The Congo Basin, can wear many faces depending on the lens through which you view it. To an oil and gas giant, the basin is an expanse of known and unknown oil and gas reserves. To a mineral extraction company, it beckons with more than 20% ownership of all global mineral reserves. When I look through my lens as a conservationist, I see an ecologically diverse Congo Basin – comprising almost 10% of the earth’s total land area. My lens don’t exclude other

visions of the Congo Basin. We just need to super impose all the “lens views” – the blueprints – infrastructure, logging, mining, oil and gas, agriculture, human settlements, etc. **The question is how do we line up all of these blueprints** – and marshal the various interest they represent – in a way that ensures wildlife and wildlands has a future in modern prosperous Congo Basin. It is a question this conference should be asking. **And the answer must come from multitude of stakeholders – governments, industry, private sector, civil society, and conservationists.**

The decisions we are making now are so important because they will determine the Africa we shall have and leave to the future generation. I have no doubt in my mind that we are running desperately out of time for Africa and **we must resolve to make the right call for all children and our grand children.**

We are the first generation to live in Africa where economic growth is averaging 4% in most countries. Foreign investment has tripled in many countries. We have a continent that is prospering, a continent that is peaceful and one that now more than ever before is electing its leaders democratically. This is a huge opportunity for our generation to be able to end poverty, and the last generation that can take steps to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. It is predicted that Africa will suffer most due to climate change impact. Future generations will judge us harshly **if we fail to uphold our moral and historical responsibilities.**

Ladies and Gentlemen, to fully understand the future, the past holds important lessons.

Please remember that our continent has over time and periods has been at the receiving end of several predicaments, and unfortunately under our own watch and sometime collaboration.

Africa has been under a regime of exploitation that has affected every fiber of our society. We lost our independence to colonialists, controlling much of our destiny. We were shipped as slaves to distant places and so many years later, we continue to loose our heritage to international trade.

This history has shaped Africa's natural resources governance. In a globalized world, the relationship between nation states has been reduced to trade. We have overwhelming evidence of this around us with trade relations superseding everything else. We have witnessed the emergence of powerful trade blocs and a greater play of private sector interests in state affairs. **But is trade and development in Africa the only important thing in defining relations between nation states?**

In the context of discussions on the Congo Basin's development, **we hear about how good for development, exploitation of natural resources is and how it's all growth-oriented.**

But growth and development are not the same things. When something grows it gets bigger, when something develops it becomes different. Not all growth is development. Not all growth leads to development. That's why the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls on nations to work toward eradicating poverty and hunger alongside protecting and restoring ecosystems. While poverty eradication and ecosystem protection might seem like contrasting issues, they are in fact interlinked. Poverty begets environmental degradation, but so does wealth if we do not ensure our consumption and production activities are carried out in a sustainable way.

In other words, if we want to succeed in building peaceful and productive societies, **it is imperative that we understand the role our ecosystems play in the development process.**

Our ministries of environment and our conservationists can't be the only ones who are environmentally literate. **All of society must possess this literacy**, including those in seemingly unrelated sectors, such as education, energy and transportation, urban development, agriculture, and economic planning. These sectors are responsible for many of the development-related decisions that impact our ecosystems.

However, the key to leveraging this opportunity is better governance, both in terms of overall governmental structure and also in the sense of accountability, integrity, and best of all, African ownership. **Development and the protection of our ecosystems need not be mutually exclusive. Without stopping the pace of development, we must make better choices to minimize the consequences and net impact on nature's ecosystems.** Fortunately we have the knowledge and the technology to identify and determine, for example, sustainable infrastructure development, community's livelihood and wildlife conservation.

All of these things demand galvanizing political will to do, In the past, Africa has done very poorly in integrity, commitment, and professionalism from those involved in governance structures, both in government and in private investing. Now is the time to reflect about various costs—social, environmental, and human, and to think about what's going to happen when our most precious assets and resources are depleted. **If we want to change this, we all have to work together.**

What does this mean to the Congo Basin?

The exploitation of its timber, oil, natural gas and rain forests is intensifying, and that means new infrastructure - roads and rail lines are opening up areas that were once difficult to traverse and putting increasing pressure on animal and plant populations.

This is a critical time for the people of the Congo Basin. Although, there are new and important opportunities for economic growth and an improved standard of living, must be balanced against the importance of preserving the basin's natural resources for future generations. Food and water security are ultimately impacted by how we manage our forests, combat climate change and cultivate our lands. The health of our bodies is tied to the health of the air we breathe, the soil in which we grow our food, and the water we consume. History, too, has shown us that the progress toward democracy can be upended when natural resources become scarce or compromised.

Together with our friends in the EU and USG, we are encouraged by the major regional programs seeking to protect the Congo Basin – ECOFAC, CARPE and CBFF - they have contributed more than US\$320 million to the Basin’s protected areas.

However despite the investments from both foreign and our governments, we still see – weak governance systems and ownership in government conservation programs– we have not been truthful, we haven’t faced up to the fact that 90% of Africans in the Congo Basin survive on natural resources, yet every day we act contrary to that reality.

Congo Basin forests provide critical water catchment services to Africa. A third of the 100 largest cities of the world, Kinshasa, Libreville, and Kigali included, depend on protected forest areas for their water supply. For local communities who practice subsistence agriculture, the forests ensure their food security and supports their livelihood needs. **As we witness other continents suffering air quality issues from rapid development, Africans can rely on the Congo Basin forests, which acts as the world’s “second lung” after the Amazon.**

The Founders, meeting in the Ethiopian capital in 1963, saw the unity of the African continent as the only means of economic liberation. In the words of the great Kwame Nkrumah – **‘Africa must Unite or Perish’**. The Nkrumah generation fought for our independence, founded institutions that we cherish – the AfDB, and the regional blocks, etc. Our generations challenge is going to be how we handle the climate change challenge and how we plan our uniquely Africa development trajectory.

It requires us to get everyone from communities, private sector people, and governments, all singly or together to get involved. Governance disconnect has been a major constraint on African development. We need to ensure that rights and responsibilities are clarified so that the benefits derived from our land and forests are equitably distributed and that our institutions and policies are forward-looking and equipped to respond to global changes. As a region, we

need to forge regional partnerships to acquire a greater voice in global forums and benefit from economies of scale.

We must ensure that Congo Basin's rich natural resources benefit the whole population and contribute to lasting development and poverty reduction. We must take an integrated approach towards Africa that takes into account foreign policy, development policy, security policy, environmental policy, and trade and industry policy, and how they can be mutually reinforcing. The progress made in Africa in recent years provides real opportunities for broader cooperation with African countries in all these areas.

I would like to end with the AU led Agenda 2063 - **The Africa We Want**

“We aspire that by 2063, Africa shall be a prosperous continent, with the means and resources to drive its own development, with sustainable and long-term stewardship of its resources and where Africa’s unique natural endowments, its environment and ecosystems, including its wildlife and wild lands are healthy, valued and protected, with climate resilient economies and communities”.

Clearly, there is a need for a paradigm shift in how Africa perceives, manages and benefits from her natural resource assets. The adoption of the Africa Agenda 2063 by the African Union presents the means and golden opportunity to achieve this shift.

As individual countries are less likely to be able to successfully operate this shift, regional integration – like the Congo Basin partnership - is an essential pre-requisite for Africa to govern and optimize benefits from her natural resource assets. Enhancing regional integration will also help Africa's institutions and governments to ensure policy coherence and coordination across sectors and among themselves.

The Congo Basin's collective challenge going forward is how to get governments, civil society, Diaspora and entrepreneurs to work together on the concrete implementation tasks that will give life to the grand ambitions of African socio-economic transformation by 2063 and the critical role of African natural resource assets in achieving inclusive and sustainable human development. This collective challenge and collective aspiration requires a progressive and transformational leadership and the adoption and implementation of transparent, accountable and developmental governance of African natural resources.

The Congo Basin Forest Partnership offers an excellent opportunity for us to show case what African leadership and governance really mean to the people of African in terms of benefits. The Congo Basin Partnership provides a valuable platform for those diverse groups to come together. Brings wider knowledge and experience into the Basin's conservation practices. A good place to coordinate action on complex regional problems.

If we do not resolve to take advantage of this partnership while we are still in the first chapters of our economic development story, our growth and growing prosperity could be short-lived, while the socioeconomic, political and environmental repercussions will be anything but. We are the authors of our fate, and we are in a unique position to write a new kind of success story.

I believe that a future that uplifts all Africans is within our reach, but only if we act boldly, decisively and with the utmost urgency. I hope your meeting this week, becomes part of the turning point.

I thank you for your attention!