

Excellencies, Partners, Colleagues and Friends:

Nos vives remerciements au Gouvernement, au peuple camerounais et plus particulièrement à vous son Excellence Monsieur le Ministre des forêts du Cameroun pour l'accueil chaleureux et votre hospitalité à l'endroit de tous les participants de la 15ième Réunion des partenaires du PFBC.

Over the past few years, it has been my pleasure to work with all of the committed, dynamic leaders present with us today to advance our common vision: to sustain this region's irreplaceable biodiversity and forest heritage. Whatever the barriers that confront us, we must never forget the *immense* potential and opportunity in each of our institutions and in each of us, to achieve our shared goals.

Look at the vast talent we have here today -- conservationists, scholars, entrepreneurs, decision-makers, and civil society leaders—an impressive group by any measure! We will be working together in six technical streams to offer the most valuable insights and recommendations from each of our sectors to the esteemed ministers presiding, who tomorrow in plenary will consider a common statement of intention for sound management of our biodiversity, forestry, communities, and commercial engagement. Our agenda is ambitious, but our objectives are clear: to discuss challenges, best practices, and practical ways that we can initiate actions on the ground.

The theme of this conference is Valuing Ecosystem Services: and in a region where minerals, timber and charcoal are valued in the billions we

must make the effort to value the essential services all require for life: our energy sources, soil, fresh water, food sources, non-timber forest products and biodiversity. If these conditions were to be degraded, our region would be irremediably impoverished. Sustaining these qualities are key to food security, productive livelihoods, economic prosperity and energy access – in short – the soils, waters, forests and natural resources of the region are the true wealth of our countries.

In the past few years, we have grown the CBFP family with strategic new linkages with organizations and institutions that make CBFP more inclusive and give us unprecedented access to a wealth of expertise. Organizations like LAGA's Eagle Network, an innovator in wildlife enforcement, or Transparency International, a world leader in promoting open governance; the Nature Conservancy, with its ground-breaking global partnerships, or visionary regional institutions like the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration. I am particularly excited about the expanding collaborations of the Academic Consortium of the Congo Basin and the immense opportunities its network represents to Central African researchers and scholars, which some of you may have the chance to see this Saturday in the field visit proposed .

The CBFP continues to advocate for support to strengthen the COMIFAC Secretariat through its varied Working Groups; trainings, and joint programming; we've supported COMIFAC Governance structures and have raised the COMIFAC profile at international events, such as the World Parks Congress. We have worked to secure partner support of new Burundian COMIFAC Presidency to assure a successful and active role over

the next two years at the helm of COMIFAC. Similarly, the CBFP Facilitation has experienced solid coordination with CEEAC in implementing CBFP activities, and we continue to advocate for the seamless coordination of CEEAC programs with technical aspects of COMIFAC.

Over the last two years, I have travelled often to meet with many of you and others outside the regions, who are inevitably fascinated when I describe the beauty and promise of the Congo Basin. I have had literally hundreds of meetings with decision-makers and students, investors and academics. They all, without exception, express wonder at the biodiversity and vast potential the Congo Basin offers in terms of as yet untapped research, tourism and economic development. But they also speak about the challenges that remain.

We are here to dialogue about the challenges and opportunities of diverse sectors -- sustainable agriculture, forest conservation, and ecotourism, economic development and expanding markets. We must be frank about how we can improve the conditions for growth, development and strengthen local capacity. Mobilizing change can be a daunting task, but it is possible, and the first step is constructive discourse.

The future of wildlife in the sub-region now hangs in the balance, and this is an area where clearly there is more to be done, and time is not on our side. While we applaud the strides that African ministers recently made to develop Emergency Action Plans Against Poaching in Brazzaville in April, to be effective, these plans must be not only be aspirational. They must be targeted, have measurable goals and yield concrete results. We look forward

to seeing such results in the draft plan under discussion for July's AU Summit and in the continuing engagement of the regional bodies committed with making sure we are not the last generation to see elephants, apes and pangolins in the wild.

In closing, I once again would like to applaud all of you for the work that has been accomplished since the CBFP was founded in 2002 and for sustaining our unique model for partnership among diverse stakeholders. Global and regional pressures on natural resources are on the increase, and let's keep in mind that the measure of our success will not only be our actions today, but in the results we can achieve together. How will we respond when the youth of tomorrow ask: what did you do to sustain our precious forests? Or, more hauntingly, will our unique wildlife survive for the next generation?

It has been an honor for me to serve and work with you these past two years as the leader of the U.S. Facilitation of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership. I am touched every time I see your dedication, passion, and the results of your work. Each of us has in our own way the capacity to inspire impactful change. Let us seize this spirit of constructive partnership and bring greater prosperity to this beloved region.

I will now close with a few words for our Portuguese, Spanish and French speakers.

Vive le Partenariat! Vive les forets du Bassin du Congo!