

Ambassador Hoza's Plenary Statement
15th Congo Basin Forest Partnership Meeting of Partners
Thursday, June 18, 2015
Palais de Congres, Yaounde, Cameroon

REMARKS

Excellencies, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure to be here with you at the beautiful Palais de Congress this afternoon.

Over the past two days, I have had the honor to meet with many of you and learn more about the work all of us are undertaking through the Congo Basin Forest Partnership to address the very real and significant challenges impacting Central Africa's natural resources.

From initiatives tackling wildlife trafficking, sustainable forest management, and climate change to programs supporting greater regional connectivity and increased technical and institutional capacity, I am impressed with the breadth of cooperation in this partnership.

In particular, the work of the CBFP signals to me the very substantial commitment Central Africa is making toward a sustainable future—a future in which the sustainable management and use of forests, minerals, wildlife and other natural resources is paramount.

These resources underpin our economic and social well-being- we rely on them for healthy environments, food and water, recreation, industry and energy.

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Their mismanagement has very real consequences: it impacts food and energy security, it impacts regional peace and stability, and it impacts the ability of governments to more effectively provide for the economic needs of its citizens.

Long before today's buzz words like climate change adaptation and green growth were popular, the United States and all of you understood the importance of Central Africa's uniquely biodiverse environment to the region and the world as a whole when we established the Partnership in 2002.

Since that time, the United States has taken its commitment to the people of Central Africa seriously, investing tens of millions of dollars into activities supporting partnership goals. With over \$17 million USD slated to programs in 2015 and beyond, our dedication to the Partnership and this region remains a top priority for me and the entire U.S. administration.

When the United States became Facilitator in 2013, we listened to you and worked with you all to develop a strong roadmap to guide the Partnership forward. This plan centered on three main objectives:

- Firstly, we sought to enhance AFRICAN leadership in sustainable resource management by strengthening regional institutional capacity and governance.
- Secondly, we wanted to enhance coordinated action to address critical threats to the region's biodiversity and forests, especially illegal logging, unsustainable resource extraction and wildlife trafficking.
- Thirdly, we encouraged greater efforts to ensure full participation of all stakeholders—from local communities and civil society to smaller ministries

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and regional economic bodies—in decision making on natural resource management.

Over the past 2 years and looking forward toward the next three, the United States has targeted its resources toward meeting these objectives. But I want to stress that no country, no donor and no civil society organization works in a vacuum. To make any effort successful, it takes coordination, collaboration and cooperation at all levels. I have seen the results of our shared approach throughout the past year.

Together, we increased the sectorial reach of the CBFP with new strategic civil society organizations and academic institutions. These new partners not only make CBFP more inclusive of a diverse range of viewpoints, but they exponentially improve our access to a globally recognized cadre of experts. Organizations like Transparency International, a world leader in promoting open governance, and The Nature Conservancy, with its strong international presence, complement well our new local partners such the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration. I am particularly excited about the collaboration between ITTA and the U.S. University of California Los Angeles and what opportunities this exciting, new campus offers to Central African research scholars.

In a region where gold, minerals, timber, charcoal and wildlife products valued in the billions are exploited and profits have been linked to destabilizing forces in conflict zones such as the eastern DRC, governmental actions such as ivory destructions are extremely important.

The negative impacts of this trade are felt within Africa, and throughout the world- - and global economy -- it disrupts legal trade, thwarts the ability of governments

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to collect tax revenues, and sends profits to criminal gangs rather than local communities.

As our global understanding of the relationship between natural resource crime and economic, environmental and social well-being, many nations are strengthening their laws to address these issues, including the United States.

Recently, our government released its Implementation Plan for the U.S. National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking, which outlines the steps the United States pledges to take within our own borders and around the world to reduce demand for illegally obtained wildlife and wildlife products and to enable key partners to do the same.

CBPF is one of those key partners, and the United States will continue to work with the Partnership to increase law enforcement capacity, strengthen national legislation, build consumer awareness, enhance cooperation, sharing information essential to tracking and disrupting illegal operations.

I would also like to note the achievements of several of our member states which have recently taken very public and concrete steps toward halting the illegal trade in one of our most endangered and iconic global species—the elephant.

This past April the Republic of Congo, in partnership with the African Union, brought over a thousand delegates from African states for the International Conference on the Illegal Exploitation and Trade in African Wildlife in Brazzaville. The Presidents of both the Republic of Congo and Chad stood side by side with a torch and set fire to five tons of confiscated ivory, as a powerful symbol

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that no one will profit from the murder of an iconic species. This conference, which welcomed those in Central Africa and beyond, built off other regional conferences in the past year – from Botswana, to Tanzania, to Egypt – further demonstrating the importance and value of African and international voices standing together against this pernicious trade.

But there is more to be done. While we applaud these strides these plans must be not only be aspirational but effective-- they should be targeted and have measurable goals. Drafting declarations, signing agreements, and discussing with partners are necessary first steps, but we must then take action-- empower communities, share lessons learned, and collaborate to implement these joint objectives.

We also must continue to increase and deepen our engagement with regional economic and trade organizations. We have made excellent progress in this area and I strongly encourage the Partnership to keep up the momentum of the U.S. to COMIFAC and ECCAS.

For its part, the U.S. continues its ample technical support to the COMIFAC Secretariat through the Protected Area and Wildlife Working Group; Climate Working Group, training, collaboration and joint programming; we've contributed to the revitalization of the COMIFAC Governance Working Group and ensured synergies among key actors, including the ECCAS FLEGT Cell; TI, Governance Forum; 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.

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The U.S. Facilitation continues to engage other regional organizations and member partners to support COMIFAC in addressing regional challenges.

- We have experienced solid participation and coordination with CEEAC in implementing CBFP activities, and we continue to advocate for the seamless coordination of CEEAC programs with technical aspects of COMIFAC.
- We have mobilized financial partners, such as GEF, the EU, and Germany, to support the implementation of the actual and revised Plan de Convergence, which is the foundation of concerted forestry governance in the region.
- Finally, the U.S. continues to work with key partners to further action on key issues, including support to and engagement with COMIFAC Countries and CBFP Members on REDD+ issues in the Congo Basin; we are certain that together we can make REDD+ benefits widely accessible to societies and not a far off dream.

In closing, I once again would like to express my keen appreciation for the progress the CBFP has made since 2002. This platform offers a unique model for others and a strong platform to address key environmental issues from diverse stakeholder and thematic perspectives. We come together at these meetings to greet old and new friends and partners, share updates, listen to new thoughts, and inspire each other to take action to preserve the Congo Basin. In the sessions ahead, I encourage you to overcome any doubt that conservation and responsible management of this critical region is too daunting a task, and remember all that we have accomplished in the last thirteen years, and all that we will accomplish in the years ahead.

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Global and regional pressures on natural resources will only increase as populations grow and demands skyrocket. And, in order to find timely, effective and suitable solutions for all stakeholders, we must work together. Coordination, collaboration, and cooperation—it is the core mission of CBFP and the United States remains ready to support it.

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