

Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP)
High Level Segment
Kinshasa, 10 December 2020

Statement by Norwegian ambassador Hans Brattskar

Dear Ministers, Ambassadors,

Dear colleagues and friends of the Congo Basin,

It is a great pleasure for Norway and for me personally, to be part of this important event. Sustainably managing the Congo Basin forest is more urgent than anytime. Let me briefly mention three reasons why we must intensify our efforts to preserve this important treasure:

First, sustainable forest management is key to ensuring the livelihood of millions of people. Timber and non-timber products represent an important contribution to the national economy in terms of jobs and revenues. This contribution can only be sustained if the forest resource is protected from depletion. Regrettably, according to a recent study from the University of Maryland, between year 2000 and 2014, the Congo Basin has lost a forest cover equivalent to almost half the entire land area of the Republic of Congo, [or more than 5 times the size of Belgium]. And the deforestation rates seem to be accelerating at alarming rates.

Second, a growing body of scientific evidence indicates that the Congo Basin forest generates large amounts of *humid air*, which is released as rainfall both within the Congo Basin or brought to distant locations with prevailing winds. If large-scale forest loss in the Congo Basin results in less rainfall, one can only imagine the impact on hydro-power production and even more importantly on food production, with social and political instability as a result.

Third, we must drastically step up our efforts to fight global climate change, and forests are absolutely essential to meet the 1.5 °C target. In fact, the world's forests contain more carbon than exploitable oil, gas, and coal deposits combined. Therefore, avoiding forest carbon emissions is just as urgent as halting fossil fuel use. Moreover, massive *reforestation* on available land will be a win-win both in terms of providing jobs and revenues and removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Consequently, it is imperative that we take urgent action. At present, around 84% of the forest loss in the Congo Basin is due to small-scale agriculture, and the most important underlying cause is increasing demographic pressure. In addition, the expansion of industrial agriculture represents an important future risk. On this basis, we need to join our efforts to address all major drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. We need to speed up reforms, improve land use planning, governance and agricultural practices, reap the economic benefits of the demographic dividend through family planning and increase investments, both public and not least private investments. To this end, Norway is co-funding the multi-donor regional Central African Forest Initiative, CAFI. We will continue to stay engaged at high levels as part of a multi-donor initiative.

Preserving the forest is above all about sustainable development. We encourage the donor community and private investors to partner with governments, civil society and the private sector in the region to substantially scale up investments in a zero-deforestation green economy that offers jobs and revenues to people and countries while maintaining the forest cover. We have to demonstrate that forest protection and economic development go hand in hand. Together we can make it. Thank you for your attention.