



Brussels Declaration

18th Meeting of Parties of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership

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, notably in protected areas, can help drive economic growth and wealth creation for current and future Central African populations;
- C. Emphasize that effective governance frameworks, involving an active participation of civil society, indigenous people, local communities, women and youth, 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 sustain the economic, biological and cultural values of renewable natural resources in Congo Basin forests;
 - The value of sustainable management of forests in the context of global efforts to address climate change;
 - The importance of smooth functioning of regional organizations working to conserve Central African forests and their values, 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, including funding, play a vital role in countries' efforts to preserve and sustainably manage their natural resources;
- G. Consider also that the numerous intergovernmental, international and/or 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:
 - Note 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. Wildlife trafficking and natural resource exploitation can also fund 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;
 - 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;
2. Regarding the **private sector's contribution** to the sustainable management of forest and natural resources in the Congo Basin:
 - 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 the development of sustainable business models by private entities thrive where clear policies and legal and fiscal 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, as appropriate, 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 and adaptation strategies and call for approaches 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 efforts by research organizations and training institutions in African, European and American countries to resort to a joint common strategy and to establish an international network of interdisciplinary studies on adding value to and conserving the natural resources of Congo Basin forests.