

A NEW VISION FOR THE CONGO FORESTS

**Event on DRC Forests hosted by the DRC, Belgium and the World Bank
14 April 2007**

**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE UK SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, RT HON HILARY BENN**

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- First, let me express my thanks to Minister Bokiaga, the Belgian Government and President Wolfowitz for hosting this important event. This is a defining moment for the forests of the DRC and the Congo Basin – and for the millions of people whose livelihoods depend on them. The future of the forests will depend on governments' political commitment to reform – and the international community's commitment to help.
- I welcome the important commitments made in the Brussels Declaration to maintaining the moratorium on new logging in DRC and other important reforms. The challenge now is to ensure that these reforms are implemented on the ground. As you know, my colleague, Gareth Thomas MP, announced at the Brussels conference a \$500,000 UK contribution to the Multi-donor Trust Fund which will be used to help improve forest governance in the DRC.
- I am also very pleased to confirm that the UK government is creating a new international Environmental Transformation Fund of \$1.6 billion (£800 million). As the first priority of this new Fund, the UK has committed financial support of \$100 million (£50 million) for the conservation of the Congo Basin Forests. I highly commend the leadership and commitment for environmental stewardship shown through this initiative by Professor Wangari Maathai and the COMIFAC countries; and commit to working closely with the other donors and institutions already playing a vital role in building partnerships for conservation in the region.

- The UK recognises that existing models of forest use in tropical countries have not always yielded sufficient benefits for poor people or the environment, and alternatives are needed now. That's why we're supporting the DRC Roundtable Review to find innovative ways of financing alternative forest uses which have greater social, economic and environmental benefits. The challenge is to find ways of turning the global environmental services that the Congo forests can provide into tangible benefits for local people.
- The UK shares the goal of building a new Vision for the Congo Forests; and we look forward to working together with all of you towards achieving this goal.