

Brussels
The Egmont Palace
27 February 2007

Declaration of Brussels
On sustainable forest management in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The DRC conference on sustainable forest management, whose official opening was honoured by the presence of HRH Prince Philippe of Belgium, took place at the Egmont Palace in Brussels on 26 and 27 February 2007 under the aegis of, and with support from, the World Bank, the European Commission, the British Cooperation for Development, the French Cooperation for Development, the Belgian Cooperation for Development and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

- The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, represented by HE Mr. Didace PEMBE BOKIAGA, Minister of the Environment, and
- The Belgian Government, represented by HE Mr. Armand DE DECKER, Minister of Cooperation for Development, initiator of the Conference;

put forward the following conclusions concerning sustainable forest management in the DRC.

The Conference, continuing in a direct line from the forums on forests in the DRC held in Kinshasa in 2004 and 2006, in view of the presentation of initiatives currently in progress, also emphasised the need to focus even more on **innovative management and financing systems**.

The Conference gave rise to many rich and productive presentations, exchanges and discussions which brought to light the following points:

- ❑ **The forests of the DRC are a shared national heritage of inestimable value for both the people of the Congo and for humanity as a whole.** They need to be managed with the aim of reducing poverty and protecting the environment. This constitutes a great responsibility for the Congolese Government, the towns and cities of the Congo and the international community alike.
- ❑ **The maintenance of the biodiversity of the Congo's forests, their genetic potential and their contribution to the Earth's environmental balance** are also global issues that go far beyond the boundaries of the Congo itself. They highlight the relevance of innovative systems addressed during the conference, and the need for mobilisation on a regional and international scale.

- ❑ In the past, the management of forests, like that of other natural resources, focused on short-term advantages while ignoring **social equality and the durability of ecosystems and resources**. Local and indigenous populations were marginalised. Despite the efforts involved, biodiversity and natural spaces are continuing to deteriorate.
- ❑ Today, **the peace and democracy re-established in the DRC present unique opportunities**, but a number of risks as well. The forest can generate new jobs and revenue for the people of the Congo, serve as an example to improve governance in other sectors, restore the DRC's image on the international scene and underpin innovative partnerships for environmental protection throughout the world.
- ❑ However, these collective benefits cannot materialise as long former practices continue. The people of the Congo and the global environment are still in danger of being the losers. To reverse this trend, **there needs to be a radical change in policy and governance**.
- ❑ Any policy on the exploitation of wood needs to promote more sustainable practices, and **adhere to a modern principle of social justice, respect the laws, and be socially, environmentally and economically sustainable**.
- ❑ At the same time, it is vital to **stimulate innovative systems for managing and financing forests**, which will foster local development and transform the protection of forests into an attractive option for the DRC. This opportunity exists today, and needs to be grasped.
- ❑ It is necessary for all the stakeholders to join forces in achieving these shared goals. Given the complexity of the stakes at issue, a single party cannot meet the challenge alone. **Multi-player partnerships** are now more crucial than ever, and international involvement is a vital factor.
- ❑ Since 2002, President Joseph KABILA KABANGE has focused on establishing better governance in this sector. A new Forestry Code and a Priority Reform Agenda have been adopted. These have achieved some progress in practical terms, but have also met with a number of setbacks. Their **application must be continued**, their implementation speeded up and any **errors corrected**. However, we can take heart from the fact that a large number of non-valid forest concessions have been reviewed.

The Conference makes use of this occasion to congratulate the Congolese Government, associations and people for all the efforts accomplished in a difficult situation, and recommends continuing the important legislative work currently under way, and the implementation of the Priority Reform Agenda, in particular through:

- ☞ **The simultaneous implementation of the three pillars of the forest code:** the reform of industrial logging, decentralisation through community-based forest governance, and the safeguarding of biodiversity and environmental services.
- ☞ **The maintenance of the moratorium on the allocation of new concessions** until the accomplishment of the conditions laid down in the Presidential decree of 2005. The penalties stipulated by law must be applied to crack down on any infringements of this moratorium.

- ☞ **The completion of the legal review of former concessions** by rigorously applying the requirements of the 2005 decree, and **cancelling non-valid concessions** in accordance with this decree
- ☞ **The maintenance of the traditional rights of local populations** in all the forests. The initiation of a **participative zoning** effort on a national level. The introduction of **local information drives** to keep people informed of every new decision on the use of forests, according to the **principle of prior, free and informed consent**.
- ☞ **The reinforcement of forestry control**, in view of stamping out illegal exploitation and improving the economic climate, in order to welcome and assist **companies that are responsible** from the social, fiscal and environmental point of view, and offer them a framework favourable to obtaining **independent certification**.
- ☞ **The piloting of numerous community-based management initiatives**. These pilot experiments should be carried out in damaged zones as well as those that are virtually intact, where institutional measures that generate appropriate revenues for the inhabitants, while guaranteeing the preservation of the ecosystem, have not yet been invented.
- ☞ **The reinforcement of the power of public institutions and civil organisations** to fulfil their vital roles of control, creating awareness, and monitoring.
- ☞ **The promotion of scientific research** to provide material, as reliable and as validated as possible, for political decisions on the management of forest ecosystems. There are a number of top-priority areas of research. These include developing further knowledge on forest biodiversity as well as the socio-economic and cultural aspects of these zones; understanding and taking account of customs, rules and traditional practices; studying the dynamics involved in carbon sequestration; mapping out the plant life, and improving knowledge about the technical characteristics and opportunities of forest products.
- ☞ **The involvement of civil society**, the provision of information to the public in all its forms, and the participation of independent observers in monitoring resources and following up reforms.
- ☞ **Support for implementing the traceability process for forest products** in view of their legality (FLEGT: Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade) and certification.

Above and beyond the pursuit and reinforcement of these actions, the Conference wishes to put the accent on the urgent need to implement certain actions such as:

- **The protection of the most threatened species and ecosystems**, the rehabilitation of national parks and World Heritage Sites and the identification of new protected areas, while fostering participatory approaches and the respect of traditional rights, and guaranteeing that no forest concessions will be allocated or confirmed in the buffer zones of protected areas.
- **The recognition of traditional forest land management methods and the establishment of their legal security** by local communities: support for small family or community forest-based businesses, in view of helping them to work their way out of poverty without exhausting the natural resources on which they depend.

In these areas, the Conference marks its **support for new approaches**, whereby the Government can delegate land management to local communities or private operators while continuing to fulfil its duty as a guarantor of public well-being.

The Conference stresses the **priority that should be given to reactivating the training programme for forestry engineers and other forestry technicians** which has been dormant for two decades, so as to ensure the sustainable management of the DRC's forests.

The Conference **acknowledges the innovative character** of several initiatives, such as **the creation of carbon sinks** through afforestation and reforestation, and avoiding deforestation; the creation of a fiduciary fund for conservation concessions and the set-up of a multi-donor trust fund for the forest governance, together with initiatives in the private finance sector, positioning the DRC as a supplier of environmental services, and which aim to set up market mechanisms to remunerate these services.

The Conference **notes**:

- the **foregone revenues** declared by the DRC Government, assessed at US\$1.5 billion, due to restrictions on logging activities;
- the commitment of the Government of the Kingdom of Belgium, in partnership with other countries of the European Union, **to provide technical assistance** to the Government of the DRC, including in the following areas: the **ongoing conversion** process, the set-up of a **national timber traceability system**, the strengthening of the national Administration's in terms of **forestry control** and the **implementation of the FLEGT process**, and support in various forms to the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature through the creation of a **fiduciary fund for the conservation of nature**.

The Conference **recognises the urgent need to set up alternative mechanisms** for financing actions in favour of sustainable forest management in the DRC, **given that current innovative mechanisms will only be set in motion in the medium- and long-term**.

The Conference considers that **a meeting to follow up its conclusions** between the Conference organisers, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, together with the other active or interested donors concerned by this important issue, **could be held at the upcoming Spring Meetings of the World Bank in Washington**.

The Conference recommends that the **important issue of sustainable forest management in the DRC** should be **included in the agenda of the upcoming G8 Summit**.

The Conference **stresses the importance of creating an institutional and legal framework** favourable to establishing partnerships that would involve civil society, the private sector, research institutions and State organisations, and which could lead to the emergence of mechanisms based on shared benefits and mutual obligations.

The Conference **encourages** the DRC, the investors concerned and the general public to make a commitment to such partnerships. It recommends that public development agencies assist the DRC and the investors concerned in making contracts legally secure, and in facilitating their implementation in the field. It also recommends that this issue be brought to the attention of the very highest Congolese and world bodies engaged in governance, environmental protection and the fight against poverty.

The Conference **thanks** the Kingdom of Belgium and the Belgian Cooperation for Development for organising the Conference and for the actions already set in motion in favour of sustainable forest

management in the DRC, in partnership with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the World Bank, the FAO, the UNEP, UNESCO, the European Union, the French Cooperation, the German Cooperation, the British Cooperation, the African Wildlife Foundation, the Conservation International, Greenpeace, the Rainforest Foundation, the SNV, the Wildlife Conservation Society, the WWF, and the Congolese Civilian Society.

The Conference **encourages the DRC** to unremittingly pursue the efforts regarding governance that it is undertaking as part of the Priority Agenda, and encourages partners in the public sector to help the DRC in a national sectorwide programme for forests and nature conservation, in accordance with the Declaration of Paris on the harmonisation of aid and in line with the Millennium Development Goals.

Executed in Brussels, on 27 February 2007

The Conference