

Country package for Forests, Nature and Climate

Political statement establishing a partnership for forest ecosystems, nature and climate

Dubai, COP28, December 9, 2023

between the Republic of the Congo and the French Republic, the European Union, the Bezos Earth Fund, the Country Packages Seed Fund (Rob Walton Foundation, Conservation International, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation).

Recognizing the key role which the preservation of forests and wetlands plays in achieving the objectives of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement;

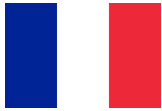
Highlighting the international commitment to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity in the Kunming-Montreal Agreement and more specifically the objectives to conserve 30% of terrestrial and marine areas by 2030 (Target 3), to sustainably manage forest areas (Target 10) and to increase total biodiversity related international financial resources from developed countries to developing countries to at least US\$25 billion per year by 2025, and to at least US\$30 billion per year by 2030 (Target 19);

Aware of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (VPA FLEGT) aiming to improve forest governance, signed in 2010; the EU-Congo Forest Partnership, launched in 2022, the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use, demonstrating the signatories' commitment to end deforestation, signed in 2021, as well as the Forest and Climate Leaders' Partnership (FCLP), launched in 2022, and the One Forest Summit, held in 2023, bringing together the main international public and private donors, wishing to contribute to the conservation of vital carbon and biodiversity reserves;

Aware that fuelwood is the main domestic energy source for over 80% of homes in the Republic of the Congo and one of the main causes of deforestation;

Considering the decision by the African Union Assembly/AU/draft/Dec.846 (XXXVI) 2023 on the establishment of an African and World Decade on Afforestation and Reforestation as a nature-based solution to limit deforestation and necessary to meet the objectives of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration which aims to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and in every ocean;

Aware of the Republic of the Congo's exceptional biodiversity, its preserved forest, the importance of the peat bogs and mangroves on its territory, as well as of the specific needs of heavily-forested countries with low deforestation rates; and of the major challenges facing the Republic of the Congo to promote sustainable development, based on the development of human capital and the diversification of the economy, contributing to global efforts to combat climate change and preserve and restore biodiversity;



Recalling law no. 43-2014 on guidelines for territorial planning and development, Article 1 of which sets out the legal framework for the territorial planning policy in compliance with the objectives and principles of sustainable development, Article 5 of which lists the three principles for the implementation of the national policy, including intersectoral coordination, the inclusive participation of stakeholders and consultation, and Article 34 of which prescribes the specific guidelines on forests, coasts, river corridors, rivers, lakes, flooded areas, mining and extraction, mountain areas, and special economic areas and zones;

Aware of the Republic of the Congo's efforts in terms of the sustainable management of forest ecosystems through the management of 60% of timber forests and the systematic application of the principle of reduced-impact logging, the allocated usage of 20% of forest areas for terrestrial and marine biodiversity and the launch of a national afforestation and reforestation programme with the aim of establishing 1 million hectares of forest and agroforestry plantations;

Recalling the Republic of the Congo's commitments through its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and its National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, which is being updated;

Highlighting the 2022-2026 National Development Plan (PND), the first pillar of which aims to lay the foundations for irreversible sustainable economic development, the revision of the National Action Plan for the Environment (PNAE) in 2021, the national sustainable development strategy (2016-2025), as well as the national forest conservation and sustainable management policy (2015-2025), the National REDD+ Strategy and its investment framework, the National Afforestation and Reforestation Programme and the Congo Basin Blue Fund;

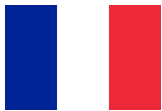
Recalling that France and the European Union are historic partners of the Congo in the sustainable management of forests, including through their support for the management and development of forested areas and also via the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI);

In order to step up its contribution to the fight against climate change, to consolidate its policy to preserve forests and protect peat bogs and mangroves, the Republic of the Congo has pledged to implement its commitment to protect 30% of its terrestrial and marine territory, prioritizing the most carbon- and biodiversity-rich areas.

The Republic of the Congo has pledged to extend and create three new national marine parks during 2024.

To realize this ambition, with the support of its partners, it has pledged to:

- I. **Strengthen material, financial and human capacities for scientific research at the national level to acquire better knowledge of and optimize the carbon resources in vegetation and soils and the country's biodiversity, with a specific focus on mangroves, peat bogs and natural forests:**
 1. Train a new generation of local scientists and researchers in fields linked to the functioning of forest, marine and aquatic ecosystems, and carbon and biodiversity resources. Scholarships should be

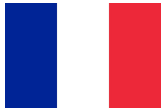


awarded, particularly in ecology, zoology, oceanography, pedology, geomatics, social and political sciences, the forest economy, environmental economics and financial engineering;

2. Strengthen the capabilities of national research organizations and public structures (national implementing agencies) and their networking at regional and international levels;
3. Map out and catalogue areas of ecological interest (HCV/HCS), mangroves and peat bogs, which can receive significant financing enabling them to be designated as protected areas or receive similar recognition (in compliance with the customary rights of indigenous and local communities), with a view to contributing to the target of protecting 30% of terrestrial and marine areas, while integrating conservation and protection series;
4. Study the costs and benefits, including the opportunity costs of protecting terrestrial and marine areas of ecological interest, including financially, but also from an environmental and social standpoint;
5. Set up a dynamic process to create, analyse and use national data on carbon and biodiversity stocks, including calculations of uncertainties and a site for users to access public data;
6. Establish a strong national monitoring system for biodiversity and carbon which can serve as a foundation for developing a credits and certificates market, incorporating the results into the data management system. This system recognizes and is connected to the MRV monitoring system for deforestation and degradation of forests, developed at the Ministry of Forest Economy;
7. Fully involve public structures (national implementing agencies) in implementing all field operations, in order to ensure greater ownership of the effects and impacts of the partnership;

II. Support and expand the network of protected and conserved areas by using rights-based landscape approaches, to protect 30% of terrestrial and marine areas by 2030, highlighting areas of high ecological integrity, biodiversity hotspots and carbon-rich areas, as well as sustainable development for communities:

8. Work together to develop and adopt a national sustainable management strategy for protected and preserved areas, which include and promote the contribution of sustainably managed forests (including their conservation and protection series), as well as sustainable fishing;
9. For each conservation and protection area, define a sustainable economic and financial model for mid- and long-term financing of this national protected area management strategy, including innovative mechanisms (carbon credits, biodiversity certificates, tourism, payments for ecosystem services, and other market-based mechanisms), drawing on the development of public-private partnerships;
10. Support the effective management of protected areas by building the capabilities of monitoring and management bodies for wildlife and protected areas (particularly the Congolese Agency for Wildlife and Protected Areas, including at decentralized level), including on aspects linked to monitoring terrestrial and marine areas by defining and implementing management plans;



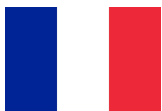
11. Expand its marine and terrestrial protected areas in 2024, by supporting the creation of new protected and conserved areas for the 2025-2030 period and their recognition internationally (IUCN Green List) to reach the goal of 30% by 2030 (land and sea), while respecting the principles of free, enlightened and prior consultation of the rights-holders;
12. Promote investments and payments for environmental services in order to enable sustainable socio-economic development in forest areas, in particular on the outskirts of protected areas, by taking a landscape approach to improve the quality of life of local communities and develop viable and sustainable livelihoods for the local and indigenous communities in and around the protected areas, with a view to preserving the Congo Basin Rainforest and not encouraging deforestation;
13. Explore cooperation approaches between the various stakeholders present in protected and conserved areas and in surrounding areas, with a landscape approach, in order to enhance their ecological integrity;
14. Build the capacities of those in charge of management of protected areas by increasing discussions and collaborations between protected areas and setting up a mentoring and technical assistance system for new or rejuvenated protected areas.

III. Support the implementation of the National Afforestation and Reforestation Program in the Republic of the Congo and the adoption of an African and World Decade of Afforestation and Reforestation:

15. Support the implementation of official and community afforestation programmes that respect biodiversity, to substitute wood fuel from natural forests with fuel from forest plantations, thereby mitigating deforestation;
16. Mobilize financing for agroforestry plantations that respect biodiversity to strengthen agricultural and forest production in order to combat poverty and the food crisis;
17. Support the Republic of the Congo in garnering buy-in from the international community for the initiative to establish an African and global Decade of Afforestation and Reforestation;

IV. Spread awareness systematically among the Congolese population about safeguarding biodiversity and the climate and the benefits of doing so:

18. Include the environment in national curricula and spread awareness about the challenges of protecting the environment and its potential in terms of sustainable socio-economic development;
19. Train teachers and educators on environmental education and its importance for the transition to a diversified and sustainable economy in the Congo;



20. Support initiatives in favour of environmental education, in particular for communities living in and around parks, so they may understand the benefits to be reaped from conservation, by capitalizing on structural partners and a multi-stakeholder approach, while fostering synergies with civil society;

Commitment of the partners

France, the European Union, the Bezos Earth Fund, the Country Package seed fund (Rob Walton Foundation, Conservation International, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation), with the technical support of the Wildlife Conservation Society, World Wildlife Fund and Noé are committed to supporting these actions through existing programmes and by supporting the mobilization of additional funds and technical expertise for their implementation.

An initial amount of \$50 million will be used to support the first initiatives, subject to an agreement concerning the implementation plan for this partnership, which must be gradually completed as progress is made, and technical support with a view to longer-term commitment.

Governance and implementation of the partnership

The partnership has a monitoring system and robust governance:

- A **steering committee**, chaired by the Prime Minister, Head of Government, seconded by a Deputy Chair having the status of Commissioner, designated by France, the European Union and their partners. This steering committee meets once per semester with all stakeholders, including: the ministries concerned, the donor countries, the technical and financial partners, civil society and the private sector.
- An interministerial technical follow-up committee, placed under the responsibility of the Minister of Forest Economy, bringing together experts from the various ministries involved, meets once per semester to take stock of progress in activities, which act as a prologue to the Steering Committee;
- A permanent secretariat, under the supervision of the Prime Minister's Office, staffed by an independent technical assistant, supported by experts nominated by each ministry concerned (ministries in charge of regional planning, agriculture and fisheries, the environment, forests, higher education and scientific research, primary and secondary education and state action at sea). It takes care of daily monitoring of the implementation of the activities of each component of the partnership and prepares the documents to be submitted for review to the Technical Committee, and then the Steering Committee;
- An **implementation plan** for the partnership, including activities with clear objectives, detailed costing of these activities, monitoring and evaluation indicators and an implementation schedule with stages, will be prepared and presented at the first Steering Committee meeting by the Permanent Secretary.