

Draft Remarks
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Session 3: “The CBFP Celebrates 10 Years – 10 Years of Close and Fruitful Partnership in the Service of the Congo Basin”

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure to speak to this important audience. I was asked to discuss ten years of close and fruitful partnership in the service of the Congo Basin. I am grateful for the opportunity to make this presentation and the chance it affords to reflect on the meaning of this magnificent partnership, on where it fits in the panoply of global efforts to conserve and sustainably manage forests, and to consider the way forward from Douala.

First let me say that the United States strongly supports this partnership and we commend the governments of Central Africa, and all our partners here today, for their commitment, initiative, and determination to ensure a sustainable future for the region’s forest ecosystems. The United States has been here in force this week – with two Ambassadors and representatives from four U.S. government agencies, many of whom have dedicated years of their lives to the Congo Basin.

My remarks today will address three questions: (1) How is the CBFP relevant today; (2) How do we, as partners, help support and expand global efforts for

sustainable management of forests; and (3) What do we hope will follow from this meeting.

This June, the Rio+20 conference in Brazil will mark the ten-year anniversary of the CBFP, one of many “Type 2” partnerships born in Johannesburg at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. Some of you have been involved in the CBFP since its inception, and may recall those uncertain early days when nobody knew what to expect from this new partnership. The Type 2 structure was a departure from the norms of international cooperation, with no secretariat, no building, no permanent staff, and a loose informality that was not always comfortable. The first organizational meeting of the CBFP was challenging, I’m told, with serious questions about the leadership and management of the initiative.

At that time, several organizations and governments were active in the region on forests, but they did not yet have a mechanism to organize themselves, to cooperate strategically, or to maximize their resources and impact. The CBFP, with the close collaboration of COMIFAC and, later, the Plan de Convergence, filled that gap. It now serves as a platform for more than 60 partners to collaborate. The CBFP is also now a launch pad for the region, through COMIFAC, to build a presence in international negotiations. It is a ready mechanism for new partners, such as

Norway, to hit the ground running with a network of experienced counterparts, a huge body of knowledge, and the flexibility to respond to and address changing environmental and political priorities such as climate change. While there are still information gaps and opportunities for improvement, but as the saying goes, sticks in a bundle never break – today we are far ahead of where we might have been, if not for our collaboration through the CBFP.

So how do we, as partners, support and expand global efforts on forests?

Simply put, our success through the CBFP inspires actions in other regions of the world – actions that were pioneered in Central Africa: the landscape approach to land management planning, the State of the Forest Report, which brings the best of science and research to light for decision-makers, the use of geospatial technologies, and advances in forest certification and community engagement, to name a few. Collectively, we have trained thousands of people in conservation, worked with hundreds of stakeholder groups, made important advancements in forest governance, and developed new ways of thinking about the role ecosystems and natural capital play in human well-being. These achievements of our CBFP cooperation provide models for work in other regions.

Looking ahead, we hope to see three things emerge from Douala.

First is renewed commitment in the region to COMIFAC. It was the foresight of Central African heads of state that created COMIFAC in 1999. That, in turn, attracted more donor attention than any other forested region except the Amazon, because it demonstrated political will. With few exceptions, Central African government support for COMIFAC is now weak and uneven. Some Central African forest ministers have even abandoned it to the mercy of donors. But a river that forgets its source soon dries up. Continued neglect of this important organization sends the wrong signal to the international community – a signal that Central Africa’s will to sustain her forests is weak. That will, in turn, affect our own decisions in future years. Strong and sustained Central African support for COMIFAC and other key African organizations, on the other hand, will strengthen the commitment of the international community. One hand washes the other.

Second, reports of wildlife poaching in the region are spiking, most recently around large-scale elephant poaching in northern Cameroon, but this is a problem that spans the entire region. The United States is deeply concerned. We urge each country in this region to take emergency national measures to protect their biodiversity. We are co-sponsoring a workshop on wildlife poaching this April in

Libreville, and while there we hope to achieve an agreement, in principle, that all of the countries involved in our workshop will formally adopt the idea of developing a regional Wildlife Enforcement Network. The United States can advise on the creation of such a body, but our actions must be matched by urgent national actions on the ground in Central Africa.

Third, looking ahead to the Rio+20 meeting in Brazil this June, we see an excellent opportunity for partners here to highlight Central Africa and the CBFP, and to engage in side events on forests that are already beginning to take shape. We understand a number of forest events are being planned. For example, Brazil is organizing a Major Groups initiative in the context of the UN Forum on Forests, along with Germany and NGOs, from June 13-17 in Rio. It would be useful to reflect in Rio on our accomplishments of the last ten years and look forward to future opportunities. That would require the leadership of the Central African countries, and some fast footwork on the part of leaders to put together an event and engage the UN process on behalf of the region.

In closing, I would like to mention the enduring legacy of one of Africa's great environmental leaders and a champion of our collaboration on forests here in Central Africa, Wangari Maathai. Professor Maathai made forests relevant for the

environment but also for basic human rights and livelihoods for the rural poor in Africa and across the world, especially women. She taught us that planting a tree could be step towards economic empowerment for individuals and communities. These are important lessons in light of environmental change worldwide and growing global demand for natural resources. As we look ahead to the next ten years, let us honor Professor Maathai's spirit by continuing to work together, with courage in our hearts, and wisdom in our actions.

Thank you for your attention.