



Dr. Stephen F. Lintner, Senior Advisor, World Bank

Your Royal Highness Prince Phillippe

Your Excellencies, Ministers,

Dear Colleagues,

I am honoured to have been called upon to speak to you briefly on behalf of Mr. Paul Wolfowitz, President of the World Bank and Mr. Pedro Alba, Director of Operations for the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Like the illustrious speakers who have preceded me, the World Bank also wishes to thank the Belgian government for having taken the initiative to organise this International Conference on Sustainable Forest Management in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and for having invited the august assembly gathered here today in the splendid setting of Brussels' Egmont Palace. It is a privilege for our institution to take part in these sessions, alongside the representatives of several governments, civil society, the private sector, the scientific world, international organisations, and the media.

This conference is taking place at a unique moment in the history of the DRC. The success of the first elections is a sign of hope that an era of stability and progress is beginning for the Congolese people. Hope that these newly elected institutions will be able to address the contradiction that the DRC has struggled with throughout its history: that of extreme economic poverty in a country exceptionally rich in natural resources. And the hope that is the focus of this conference, that this extraordinary natural heritage can fully benefit the Congolese population, while continuing to serve the global environment. These are the goals that the World Bank seeks to support in the DRC.

Against this background, we are pleased to see that forests have been allocated a significant place in the Poverty Reduction Strategy agreed in June 2006 and in the Governance Contract adopted a few days ago by the new government. Forests also play a central role in our Country Assistance Strategy.

I do not wish to dwell here on the difficult problems of the past, or the risks that the present economic recovery present for the forests today. But I would like to recall, that, when our sectoral



dialogue resumed in 2002, half of the DRC's immense forestry heritage was tied up in concessions, most often developed without any local consultation, requirements for management, or consideration for other uses, and with few benefits for the country or local communities.

On the advice of the World Bank, the government embarked upon a Priority Reform Agenda: 25 million hectares of invalid concessions were returned to the public domain – this is the size of the United Kingdom –, and a moratorium on new allocations was declared. Today, a legal review of the remaining concessions is in progress. Valid concessions will require management plans, which will lead the way to independent certification. A third-party observer is also currently being recruited to help combat illegal exploitation.

The advances made by the Priority Reform Agenda since 2002 need to be affirmed, and weaknesses corrected. As the new government takes office, the World Bank recommends that these efforts continue, and that mistakes be corrected. Most notably, the legal review of the old concessions should be completed, according to the terms of the October 2005 decree; responsible behaviour that conforms to the law and contracts should be encouraged and this should serve to discourage fraud; and the moratorium on new concessions should be extended until satisfactory standards are established in the existing concessions.

Apart from the opportunity to undertake such measures, the return of peace to the DRC is above all a unique opportunity for all of us to take a fresh look at the second largest tropical forest in the world, and to reflect on the best possible approach for its sustainable use. At a time when tropical forests are under increasing pressure around the globe, when biological diversity and the climate of our planet are in danger, and in a country the size of a continent where nearly 40 million of the world's poorest people depend on the forest for their day-to-day survival, alternative models for forest management and financing must be developed urgently. There is no ready-made model applicable to the specific characteristics of the Congolese setting. This should not be seen as an obstacle, but rather as an additional reason for us to engage in a creative initiative and to explore new models, which might combine, for example, the traditional uses of the forest with payments for environmental services.

Tomorrow, we will hear a presentation on the Bio-Carbon Fund in which the World Bank acts as an intermediary, facilitating the establishment of contracts between the suppliers and acquirers of



carbon emission credits. This mechanism currently functions using credits from the sequestration of 'additional carbon'. In the future, we would like to see it extended to credits resulting from deforestation that is avoided, which would permit the inclusion of the natural forests. Similarly, as a part of our technical services, the feasibility of a Fund for 'Conservation Concessions' in DRC is being explored. This would facilitate the establishment of contracts for biodiversity protection between the DRC and public or private parties interested in the protection of nature and local development of DRC forests in areas that would otherwise be destined for industrial scale extractive activities.

The Priority Reform Agenda which I have described briefly is discussed in more detail in the sectoral review document entitled *The Forests in Post-Conflict DRC*. This document is the fruit of collaboration among teams from the World Bank, and several research centres and non-governmental organisations. It is available here and will be presented during the course of these sessions.

Together with key political decisions, on-the-ground implementation is a crucial focus of our approach. In addition to surveillance systems, progress will require the strengthening of capabilities. With this in mind, the Bank has begun preparation of a sectoral program of approximately 30 million US dollars, in order to aid the public institutions, civil society organisations and local communities to implement the new policies on the ground. In the same vein, the World Bank is supporting the Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation in the regeneration of the Virunga and Garamba National Parks. Lastly, in partnership with the European Commission, Belgium and France, the World Bank is also setting up a Multi-Partner Trust Fund for the Forests of the DRC.

Allow me to underline that we who are gathered here today, who seek to champion the public good and environmental protection, share a joint responsibility vis-à-vis the challenge represented by more sustainable and equitable management of the forests in DRC. The scale of this challenge is so unusual that it is likely that no party can succeed alone, and that we will succeed, or fail, together. Consequently, the World Bank is calling on all cooperating parties to join hands and to work together in a constructive fashion to achieve our shared aims.

I would like to conclude by emphasising that the forests of the Democratic Republic of Congo lie at the intersection of the struggle against poverty, protection of the environment, post-conflict



reconstruction and governance of natural resources. These issues and the need for action, are sufficiently important to merit the raising of this agenda before the very highest decision-makers, for example at the next Group of Eight Summit planned for this June in Germany. In this way, the international community can be mobilised and innovative approaches adopted to benefit both the environment and the forest dependent populations in the Democratic Republic of Congo.