

Zijne Koninklijke Hoogheid, Prins Philippe van België
Mr Armand De Decker, Federaal Minister voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking
Mr Didier Pembe Bokiaga, Ministre de l'Environnement, Conservation de la Nature, Eaux et Forêts du Rep Dem Congo
Mr Bruno Tobbacq, Federaal Minister voor Leefmilieu
Mr Gareth Thomas, Minister for International Development, United Kingdom
Mr Jan Grauls, Voorzitter van de FOD Buitenlandse Zaken, Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking
Mr le Représentant de la Banque Mondiale en RepDemCon, Jean Michel Happi
Dhr Carl Michiels, Voorzitter Directiecomité van de Belgische Technische Coöperatie Excellences Ambassadeurs
Geachte Collega's
Dames en Heren,

Het is een grote eer om U hier vandaag te kunnen verwelkomen op deze Internationale Conferentie over het duurzame beheer van de bossen in de Democratische Republiek Congo. Deze conferentie brengt politici, beleidspersonen, wetenschappers, NGO's en de privé sector samen met als doel om de betrokken partners te sensibiliseren en te mobiliseren voor een duurzamer beheer van het congolese woud.

Le forêt tropical du Congo est le plus important du monde après le forêt d'Amazonie, et est donc le deuxième poumon de notre planète et a une importance cruciale pour le maintien de la biodiversité. Mais ce forêt a aussi une énorme valeur économique et sociale pour les peuples de la RDC. Après le succès des élections et la formation d'un gouvernement, la RDC est arrivé maintenant à un point tournant, et la façon que les forêts seront gérés sera décisif pour le développement macro-économique et les changements sociaux du pays.

Recent evidence about global climate change reinforces the need to act urgently and in concertation. Failure to do so could lead to an ecological catastrophe and human tragedy.

I would therefore like to thank our Minister of Development Cooperation not only for taking the initiative in organizing this conference but also for the strong messages he has put across about this topic. And the presence today of HRH, Prince Philippe, who is also Honorary President of the Federal Council for Sustainable Development is of enormous symbolic importance in supporting the goals of the conference and I wish to express my appreciation to you Monsigneur for your presence today.

I also welcome the presence of partners from so many sectors (representatives from private sector, civil society, high ranking policymakers as well as scientists) and institutions: Congo's forests constitute a strong rallying point of international commitment (mention specifically WB, EU, DfID, France as donors and co-organisers of the conference.. While we may sometimes hold different perspectives or approaches we share a common goal.

We urge the private sector to work closely with Congolese authorities and NGOs: their presence at this conference is proof of their interest in sustainable forest management and willingness to work together as responsible partners.

I would like to emphasize that this conference is not a one-shot event: it is part of a process that will result in an international effort to support our congolese partners to implement the priority agenda.

Finally I would like to express my sincere thanks to the task force who made this conference possible in a relatively short period of time - very special thanks to Carl Michiels of Belgian Technical Cooperation for coordinating this task force and for his step-by-step involvement, also special thanks to our partners in DGDC, the Cabinet of our Minister, and the staff of RMCA and BTC, especially Paola Vallejo merits an enormous bunch of flowers and a basket of forest fruits.

I am confident that this conference will be the crossroads of scientific debates aimed at strengthening policy actions for the benefit of the sustainable management of DRC forests.

May I now invite Mr Armand De Decker, Federal Minister for Development cooperation to deliver the opening address.

Thank you