

**18th Meeting of Parties of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP)**  
**High Level Segment**  
**Brussels, 27 November 2018**

*Statement by Norwegian ambassador Ingrid Schulerud*

Your Royal Highness,

Dear Ministers, Ambassadors,

Dear colleagues and friends of the Congo Basin,

It is a great pleasure for Norway and for me personally, to be part of this important event. Sustainably managing the Congo Basin forest is more urgent than anytime. Let me briefly mention three important developments, which we believe plead in favour of intensifying our efforts to preserve this important treasure:

First, sustainable forest management is key to ensuring the livelihood of millions of people living in and around the forest. Timber and non-timber products represent an important contribution to the national economy in terms of jobs and revenues. This important contribution to social and economic development can only be sustained if the forest resource is protected from depletion. Regrettably, the Congo Basin is *not* a low-deforestation region anymore. According to a recent study from the University of Maryland, between year 2000 and 2014, the Congo Basin has lost a forest cover equivalent to more than 5 times the size of Belgium, and the deforestation rates are accelerating at alarming rates.

Second, the Congo Basin forest is not only important to the countries in Central Africa, but holds the key to sustained rainfall and agricultural production in wider parts of Africa. A growing body of scientific evidence indicates that the Congo Basin forest generates large amounts of *humid air*, which is released as rainfall both within the Congo Basin or brought to distant locations with prevailing winds. One can only imagine the impact on food security and social and political stability if large-scale forest loss in the Congo Basin results in less rainfall in Western Africa or Sahel.

Third, the recently released report on the 1.5°C target from UN's International Panel on Climate Change makes clear that we have to drastically step up our efforts to fight global climate change, and forests are absolutely essential to meet the 1.5 °C target. In fact, the world's forests contain more carbon than exploitable oil, gas, and coal deposits combined. Therefore, avoiding forest carbon emissions is just as urgent as halting fossil fuel use. Moreover, massive *reforestation* on available land will be a win-win both in terms of providing jobs and revenues and removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Consequently, it is imperative that we take urgent action. At present, around 84% of the forest loss in the Congo Basin is due to small-scale agriculture, and the most important underlying cause is increasing demographic pressure. In addition, the expansion of industrial agriculture represents an important future risk. On this basis, we need to join our efforts to address all major drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. We need to speed up reforms, improve land use planning, governance and agricultural practices, reap the

economic benefits of the demographic dividend through family planning and increase investments, both public and not least private investments. To this end, Norway has decided to channel its resources through the multi-donor regional Central African Forest Initiative, CAFI.

Preserving the forest is above all about sustainable development. We encourage the donor community and private investors to partner with governments, civil society and the private sector in the region to substantially scale up investments in a zero-deforestation green economy that offers jobs and revenues to people and countries while maintaining the forest cover. We have to demonstrate that forest protection and economic development go hand in hand. Together we can make it. Thank you for your attention.