

## Press Release

Brussels, 1 March 2018

### *Belgium to take over the Facilitation of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership in 2018-2019*

The Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) comprises 105 members, including 10 countries in Central Africa and close to a hundred partners concerned with the forest ecosystems of the Congo Basin (ECCAS, COMIFAC, partner countries, civil society of the Congo Basin, international NGOS, multilateral organizations, research and training institutions, private sector actors).

Belgium, a member of the partnership since the initiative was launched in 2002, has just announced that it will be taking over the facilitation of the initiative for the next two years (2018- 2019). Mr. François-Xavier de Donnea, an Honorary Member of Parliament and Minister of State of the Kingdom of Belgium, will act as CBFP Facilitator during these two years.

"It is both an honor and a challenge for me to lead an initiative such as the CBFP" said the new Facilitator, who had previously served as Minister of Development Cooperation, Minister of National Defense, and Minister-President of the Region of Brussels-Capital throughout his long career in the service of the Belgian government.

"It is crucial, for Belgium and the other CBFP partners, to support the efforts the Central African countries are making to exploit their natural resources in a sustainable manner. Sustainably valuing the incredibly beautiful forests that are sheltered by these countries is one of the keys to their future development. Preserving their unique biodiversity and controlling the carbon stocks they contain are also global challenges, which call for global solutions. If these solutions are to materialize, actors need to work together and come up with relevant strategic guidelines that will be translated into action. That is why the CBFP matters".

The new Facilitator is pleased to note that the outgoing Facilitation, provided by the EU in 2016 and 2017, worked with partners to provide the partnership with an updated cooperation framework, which now helps to foster more effective policy and technical dialogue among the partners. "Of course, the Belgian Facilitation will be building on the results achieved by the European Facilitation," said the Minister of State. "My aim will be to mobilize the political actors to ensure that they take better ownership of the guidelines discussed within the CBFP, and thus strengthen the impact on the ground in terms of conservation of biodiversity, sustainable management of ecosystems and the fight against climate change".

One of our priorities for 2018 will be the fight against illegal trafficking in wild species. "The operations of organized poaching networks have devastating impacts, especially on some iconic species and endangered species such as the elephant. They disrupt local communities' living environment and pose major security threats in some of the Congo Basin's cross-border regions. Concerted responses to these issues are now urgently needed and the PFBC provides the right framework for devising them".

A roadmap of the Belgian Facilitation is currently being finalized. It will be shared with the partners and will equally be made available on the CBFP website in the next few weeks.