

**5th ORDINARY SESSION OF THE COUNCIL OF
MINISTERS OF COMIFAC
BANGUI (CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC), 09 TO 11 SEPTEMBER 2008**



**GENERAL REPORT OF THE MEETING OF EXPERTS IN
PREPARATION FOR THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

Bangui, 10 September 2008

The meeting of experts in preparation for the 5th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers of the Commission for the Forests of Central Africa (COMIFAC) was held from 09 to 11 September 2008 at the National Assembly of Bangui, Central African Republic.

About a hundred participants attended, comprising:

- delegates and national coordinators from the Member States of COMIFAC: Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon
- representatives of international organisations and partners in development : FAO, GTZ, France, UNEP, USAID/CARPE, WWF, World Bank, WCS, European Union, CIDA, IUCN, ITTO, CIFOR, ICRAF, TRAFFIC, Facilitation CBFP, etc.
- representatives of sub-regional organisations: OCFSA, RAPAC, ATO – African Timber Organization, CICOS
- representatives of civil society.

The opening ceremony was chaired by H.E. Ms Yvonne Boissona, Minister of Water, Forests, Hunting, Fishing and the Environment of the Central African Republic, accompanied by several members of the government. This ceremony included two speeches – one by Professor Jonas Nagahuedi Mbongu Sodi, Executive Secretary of COMIFAC, and one by Ms Boissona, Minister of Water, Forests, Hunting, Fishing and the Environment of the Central African Republic.

In his speech the Executive Secretary of COMIFAC addressed his sincere thanks to the government and people of the Central African Republic for their warm welcome and the hospitality enjoyed by all the delegations since their arrival in Bangui. He then recapitulated some of the achievements of COMIFAC during the last two years and took this opportunity to thank the development partners for their contributions to the development of COMIFAC. In conclusion he outlined the points to be explored by the experts.

H.E. Ms Yvonne Boissona opened the work of the meeting of experts and took the opportunity to welcome all the delegations to Bangui. The Minister also recalled the commitments entered into by our heads of state in March 1999 and the attainments of her country with regard to conservation and sustainable management of forest ecosystems.

At the end of the opening ceremony the work of the meeting of experts took the following sequence:

- Appointment of officers
- Adoption of the draft agenda of the meeting and of the procedure
- Inputs followed by debate
- Committee work and recommendations.

The following officers were appointed:

1. Chair: Mr M. Gustave Doungoube of the Central African Republic
2. Vice Chair: Mr Jacques Tunguni of the Democratic Republic of the Congo
3. First Reporter: Honourable Gaston Komba of the Republic of Cameroon
4. Second Reporter: Mr Pierre Gakuba of the Republic of Burundi
5. Secretariat: Mr Martin Tadoum of the Executive Secretariat of COMIFAC.

The agenda points were adopted with some amendments. The chief amendment related to readjusting the planned schedule for committee number 4 to start work on drawing up recommendations for the ministers on preparing the negotiators and formulating the joint position of Central African states regarding the issues to be discussed at COP 15, the United Nations Climate Change Conference, to be held in Copenhagen in 2009. In view of the ministerial consultations on this subject scheduled for the second day of the meeting, the work of the aforementioned committee started earlier during the afternoon of the first day instead of on the second day as initially planned.

Once the work agenda had been adopted, various announcements were made and inputs given in the plenary session. Some of these were followed by debate, while others were intended to provide information.

The first series of talks concerned the following themes:

- The assessment of the activities of COMIFAC and partner institutions (September 2006 - August 2008) presented by the Deputy Executive Secretary of COMIFAC. This assessment covered the activities of the past two years, the administrative and financial management, the difficulties encountered and the perspectives of the institution.
- The two-year action plan of the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat (2009-2010) presented by the Deputy Executive Secretary of COMIFAC. This plan outlines the actions to be taken during the next two years in the fields of monitoring and evaluation of the convergence plan (Plan de Convergence), information and communication, the national and international consultation and dialogue, coordinating the implementation of the convergence plan, and finally the organisation and follow-up of decisions taken by the Council of Ministers.
- The draft two-year budget 2009 – 2010 presented by the Executive Secretary and the Administrative and Financial Director. This provisional budget is balanced, with revenues and expenditures totalling CFA Francs 2.16 billion, representing an increase of more than 100% over the preceding two-year budget. This increase is justified by budgeting for the new posts proposed in the organisation chart and assuming the financial responsibility for many planned activities. The speakers finally pointed out that such a budget could only be effective if COMIFAC had at its disposal regular financial resources secured by the autonomous financing mechanism.
- The Executive Secretary presented the draft organisation chart of the Executive Secretariat. This draft organisation chart provides for the creation of new positions to strengthen the human resources capacities of the Executive Secretariat.
- The report of the meeting of experts at the Extraordinary Council of Ministers in Mongomo, Equatorial Guinea in January 2008 was presented by the Deputy Executive Secretary of COMIFAC. This comprised an account of the points and recommendations drawn up by the experts in Mongomo for the attention of the ministers.
- The joint position of Central Africa with regard to the issues to be discussed at COP 15, the United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen scheduled for 2009 was presented by Ms Aline Malibangar, from the Climate Focal Point of the Central African Republic.

These talks resulted in fruitful exchanges from which the following salient points emerged:

- Regarding the two-year assessment of activities, the participants – while appreciating the achievements of the Executive Secretariat - suggested that the said assessment could be enriched further by integrating other ongoing activities such as the preparation of the report on the state of the forests in Central Africa in 2008.
- The two-year budget was considered very ambitious. In this respect and judging by the implementation of the preceding budget, the participants felt that it was not certain that sufficient funds could be mobilised to meet the needs of the Executive Secretariat. They also noted that there was no guarantee that the independent financing mechanism for COMIFAC would be operational by fiscal 2009. In view of this, it was suggested that a minimum budget be proposed as well that could be executed easily.
- As regards the draft organisation chart, it was suggested that this be simplified by reorganising certain proposed positions.

After these debates the participants of committee number 4 withdrew to examine and formulate recommendations on the following points:

- Preparation of Central African negotiators for the post-Kyoto climate regime as of 2012
- Consultation of experts from Central Africa to establish a joint strategy
- Definition of a joint platform and a plan of action to lead up to Copenhagen.

The second series of talks concerning the following points of information was conducted in the plenary session:

- The decision by the heads of state to grant COMIFAC the status of a specialised agency of CEEAC, presented by the Executive Secretary
- The progress of initiatives on the financing of the conservation and sustainable management of forest ecosystems in Central Africa, presented by Mr Martin Tadoum of the Executive Secretariat
- The account of the conclusions of the workshop on the contribution of forest revenues to the socio-economic development of the populations of the Congo Basin, presented by Mr Martin Tadoum of the Executive Secretariat
- The sub-regional agreement on forest supervision in Central Africa and the roadmap on the process of harmonisation of forestry policies, presented by Mr Roger Foteu, Regional Coordinator of the FAO support project at COMIFAC
- The sub-regional Action Programme to combat land degradation and desertification in Central Africa, presented by Mr Martin Tadoum of the Executive Secretariat
- The establishment of an Observatory for Central Africa Forests (OFAC), presented by Mr Martin Tadoum of the Executive Secretariat
- Revision of the rhythm of meetings of the Council of Ministers and Summits of the Heads of State, presented by the Deputy Executive Secretary
- The timeliness of organising a third Summit of Heads of State in 2009 to celebrate Yaoundé + 10, presented by the Deputy Executive Secretary.

Most of these topics had been ratified in advance by sub-regional workshops and were no longer the subject of discussions by the meeting of experts.

At the end of the announcements and inputs in the plenary session the participants divided into three committees with the following terms of reference:

Committee 1: Examine the following points and draw up recommendations:

- Assessment of the activities of COMIFAC and partners institutions (September 2006 – August 2008)
- Two-year plan of activities of the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat (2009-2010)
- Draft two-year budget 2009-2010
- Status of personnel and draft organisation chart of the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat

Committee 2: Draw up recommendations on the following points:

- Report of the meeting of experts of the extraordinary Council of Ministers at Mongomo (Equatorial Guinea) in January 2008
- Decision of the heads of state granting COMIFAC the status of a specialised agency of the ECCAS
- Progress of financing initiatives for the conservation and sustainable management of forest ecosystems in Central Africa
- Report of the workshop on the contribution of forest revenues to the socio-economic development of the populations of the Congo Basin
- Sub-regional agreement on forest supervision in Central Africa and the roadmap for the harmonisation of policies

Committee 3: Draw up recommendations on the following points:

- Sub-regional Action Programme to combat land degradation and desertification in Central Africa (PASR-LCD)
- Setting up of the Observatory for Central African Forests (OFAC)
- Revision of the rhythm of meetings of the Council of Ministers and Summits of the Heads of State
- Timeliness of organising a third Summit of Heads of State in 2009 to celebrate Yaoundé + 10

At the close of the committee work, the various groups reassembled for a plenary session and the meeting of experts agreed on the following recommendations:

1. As regards the draft organisation chart, the experts readjusted the positions, deleting or merging some of them. The following positions were retained:

- One Executive Secretary
- One Deputy Executive Secretary
- One Administrative and Financial Director
- One Forest/Conservation Programme Manager
- Two Forest/Conservation Technical Assistants
- One Legal and Fiscal Expert
- One Communications and Documentation Officer
- One Accountant
- Support staff comprising:
 - One personal assistant
 - One office boy

- One secretary/receptionist
- Four drivers
- Four custodians
- One maintenance technician.

The experts recommend that the ministers adopt the organisation chart of the Executive Secretariat with the proposed positions.

2. As regards the internal regulations and statutes of the COMIFAC personnel, the experts examined the texts and made some amendments. The experts recommended that the Council of Ministers adopt the internal regulations and statutes of the COMIFAC personnel.

3. For the two-year assessment 2007/2008, the experts regretted the absence of the programme of activity 2007-2008 and of the related budget. They also noted the lack of information on the financial implementation that would have allowed them to appraise the financial assessment objectively. To this end the experts recommended that the Council of Ministers instruct the Executive Secretariat of COMIFAC to produce a detailed assessment of the preceding fiscal year within a period of one month, taking into account the programme of activities and the budget adopted at Mongomo in September 2006.

4. As regards the two-year plan of action and the provisional budget 2009-2010 the experts noted that the plan of action did not correspond to the provisional budget as regards the activities, their cost and the total amount. Moreover this plan did not integrate the activities under the convergence plan to be performed by the sub-regional partner institutions and the national coordination points.

The experts recommended that the ministers instruct the Executive Secretariat of COMIFAC to produce the action plan and the two-year budget 2009-2010 conforming to the ECCAS format and integrating the activities of the partner institutions and the national coordination points within a period of one month. The documents relating to the assessment for the preceding fiscal year, to the plan of action and to the two-year budget 2009-2010 should be distributed to the Member States at **least fifteen (15) days** before the meeting of an Extraordinary Council, preferably before the end of the budget year 2008.

5. As regards the mandate of the current team of the Executive Secretariat, the experts noted that the team in place had been designated at the end of the Council of Ministers in May 2004, replacing the revoked team of June 2002. And on the basis of the provisions of the Treaty, the first mandate of this team had been due to expire in 2006, but the team had continued tacitly, even though the Treaty did not provide for tacit extension. The experts thus recommended that the Ministers look into the specific situation of the mandate of the team in place and take the appropriate steps.

6. As regards the independent financing mechanism for COMIFAC and the partner institutions, applying decision No. 8 of the 13th Conference of the Heads of States of 30 October 2007, the experts recommended that the Council of Ministers

- give the acting President of COMIFAC a mandate to consult with the ECCAS authorities in order to establish a secure mode of operation relating to the provision and management of the resources allocated to COMIFAC and its partner institutions
- supervise the effective implementation of the provisions agreed with the ECCAS.

7. As regards the British Congo Basin Forest Fund, the experts recommended that the Council of Ministers should request that the structures responsible for managing these funds accelerate the operationalisation process.

8. For the sub-regional directives on the sustainable management of non-timber forest products of vegetable origin, the experts recommended that the ministers

- adopt these directives
- invite the Member States to revise their legislation and forest rules and regulations to conform with the guiding spirit of these directives
- urge the development partners, particularly the FAO, to continue their support for the implementation of these directives in Member States and to elaborate a similar standard for non-timber forest products of animal origin not taken into account in the legal and regulatory frameworks in force in the Member States.

9. As regards the process of harmonising forestry policies in the sub-region, the experts recommended that the Council of Ministers

- adopt the draft sub-regional agreement on forest supervision to combat illegal exploitation of forest resources
- adopt the roadmap as a framework of reference for harmonising the forestry policies in the countries in the COMIFAC area
- invite the Member States to integrate the elements of the roadmap into their national programmes and to supervise their implementation
- invite all the countries to establish technical facilitation committees for the process of harmonising forestry policies
- note the tireless renewed efforts of the FAO and launch an appeal to other partners to support the countries concerned in implementing the activities laid out in the roadmap
- instruct the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat to undertake all appropriate measures vis à vis the FAO and other partners in order to find the support needed to implement these various instruments.

10. As regards the contribution of forest revenues to the socio-economic development of the local populations, the experts recommended that the Council of Ministers instruct the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat to evaluate the situation in the member countries with a view to proposing measures to improve the management of the forest revenues allocated to the local populations.

11. As regards the progress of financing initiatives for the conservation and sustainable management of forest ecosystems, the experts recommended that the Council of Ministers

- record the ongoing financing initiatives with a view to mobilising them effectively for the conservation of forest ecosystems in the Congo Basin
- note the lobby work conducted by Ms Wangari Mathai and encourage her to pursue this lobbying with a view to mobilising new financing for the forests of the Congo Basin
- note the substantial contributions made by the United Kingdom, Norway, the AfDB and the GEF in support of implementing the convergence plan.

12. For the sub-regional programme to combat land degradation and desertification in Central Africa, the experts recommended adopting the said sub-regional action programme and pursuing the strategy of mobilising finance to facilitate its implementation.

13. As regards the establishment of an Observatory for Central African Forests (OFAC) at COMIFAC, the meeting of experts recommended that the Council of Ministers instruct the Executive Secretariat to ensure the long-term future of the Observatory of Forests of Central Africa (OFAC), in particular regarding the acquisition of a satellite image receiving station.

14. As regards the revision of the rhythm of meetings of the Council of Ministers and the summits of the Heads of State, the experts did not consider it opportune to revise the rhythm of meetings of the Council of Ministers. The experts are of the opinion that the current rules and provisions of COMIFAC are sufficient to resolve the questions raised.

15. As regards the timeliness of organising a 3rd Summit of Heads of State in 2009 to celebrate Yaoundé + 10, the meeting of experts recommends that the Council of Ministers

- organise a 3rd Summit of Heads of States in 2009 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Yaoundé Declaration
- instruct the Executive Secretariat to work in collaboration with the host country for this event.

16. As regards questions relating to preparation of the “Climate/Forest” negotiators and the establishment of a joint Central African strategy on the post-Kyoto 2012 climate regime the experts recommended

- strengthening the regional group of multi-disciplinary negotiators for the countries of Central Africa charged with conducting the post-Kyoto 2012 process on issues relating to climate change
- reinforcing and ensuring a physical presence at all future meetings of the UNFCCC and the PK with the support of a small team of scientists working on the questions of deforestation, forest degradation, conservation and sustainable management of forests and the increase of carbon stocks, thanks to the support of UNEP, the Moore Foundation and the members of the CBF
- ensuring the implementation of the REDD work programme elaborated in the first half of 2008 by the countries of the Congo Basin
- ensuring synergy between the work of the regional negotiating group with other United Nations conventions
- basing future negotiations on the scientific work conducted by OFAC, FORAF, JRC, WWF, CIFOR, WCS, the Catholic University of Louvain...
- ensuring the stability and availability of the regional group of negotiators to participate in future negotiations between now and COP 15 in Copenhagen
- overcoming the language barrier in the various contact groups by identifying and giving responsibility in the regional group of negotiators to those with a sound command of English to reinforce the team of negotiators, especially as regards the four “building blocks” of the Bali roadmap, i.e. mitigation (here REDD), adaptation, technology and financing
- establishing under the administrative supervision of the ECCAS / COMIFAC, a regional receiving station for satellite images, defining its legal management and operational category

- ensuring the active participation of the negotiators from Central Africa in the High-Level Panel with the assistance of a bilingual negotiator
- involving a group of scientific experts charged with supporting the group of negotiators from the Congo Basin countries at the Climate Focal Points
- establishing an ad hoc working group responsible for defining the criteria for the negotiators and scientists
- working on the need to integrate national priorities in keeping with REDD across national sectoral policies and the convergence plan
- mobilising the funds assigned by donors, especially as regards the implementation of the REDD mechanism in keeping with the sustainable management of our forests
- establishing an inter-ministerial committee to define a national and regional strategy with the respect to the issues involved in climate change
- preparing the points for negotiation, defining the potential alliances and the non-negotiable issues with the African and world parties on questions linked to the Bali roadmap between now and the COP 15 in Copenhagen at the end of 2009
- elaborating and implementing an adaptation strategy at national and/regional level.

In addition to these recommendations on the preparation of negotiations on the new post-Kyoto 2012 climate regime, a declaration on the joint position was drawn up by the experts and submitted for the perusal of the Ministers of the Environment and/or Forests meeting for ministerial consultations in the afternoon of 10 September 2008 on the fringe of the COMIFAC Council of Ministers.

Bangui, 10 September 2008

The Experts