



# *Commission for the Forests of Central Africa*

## *COMIFAC*

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### **Fifth Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers**

#### **FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ**

The fifth ordinary session of the Council of Ministers of the Commission for the Forests of Central Africa (COMIFAC) was held on 11 September 2008 at Bangui in the Central African Republic under the esteemed patronage of His Excellency, General François Bozize, President of the Central African Republic and head of state.

The session was preceded on 9 and 10 September 2008 by the meeting of experts.

The following member countries attended: Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon.

The meeting was also attended by the representatives of the following organisations and donors: France, Germany in the person of the Facilitator of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP), FAO, GTZ, UNEP, USAID/CARPE, WWF, World Bank, CIDA, IUCN, ITTO, ICRAF, TRAFFIC, Fondation TNS, REPAR-CEFDHAC, OCFSA, RAPAC, ATO, CICOS, and representatives of civil society.

The official opening ceremony was marked by four addresses, given by the second Vice President of the special delegation of the city of Bangui, the Facilitator of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) the Vice Minister of Agriculture and Forestry from Equatorial Guinea representing the outgoing acting President of COMIFAC, and the Prime Minister and head of government of the Central African Republic.

In her address, the second Vice-President of the special delegation of the city of Bangui expressed her delight and that of the people of Bangui at being able to host an event of this sort. She welcomed all delegations to Bangui and wished them a pleasant stay. Finally, the second Vice-President underscored the commitment of the city of Bangui to the principles of sustainable management

of forest ecosystems and underlined the efforts made to preserve forest cover in the city.

In his turn, Mr Hans Schipulle, Facilitator of the CBF, reminded his audience that the CBF was put in place to support the efforts of the Central African states to preserve their forest ecosystems and ensure sustainable management. In this context he referred to several important instances of ongoing financial support, in particular the provision of 200 million US dollars by the United Kingdom and Norway within the framework of the Congo Basin Forest Fund. He wound up by paying his deepest respects to the Minister of Water, Forests, Hunting, Fishing and the Environment of the Central African Republic, the incoming acting President of COMIFAC, for her commitment, which, he said, gave every reason to look forward to consolidated dynamism of the institution .

Taking the stage, the representative of the acting President of COMIFAC, His Excellency Mr Domingo Olomo Mve, Vice Minister of Agriculture and Forestry of Equatorial Guinea, summed up the achievements of the presidency of Equatorial Guinea from September 2006 to 11 September 2008. He presented the most important accomplishments of COMIFAC during his country's mandate. He concluded his address by wishing the new acting president of COMIFAC every success and assuring her that all ministers would do all they could to support the actions of the presidency of the Central African Republic.

His Excellency, the Prime Minister and head of government of the Central African Republic, opened the work of the fifth ordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers of COMIFAC. He recalled the dedication of the heads of state and listed the activities undertaken by the Central African Republic in terms of conservation and sustainable management of forest ecosystems.

The following officers were appointed:

- Chair: Central African Republic
- Vice Chair: Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Reporter: Republic of Burundi

The appointment of officers was followed by a reading of the general report on the meeting of experts. After this report had been adopted, the ministers retired for talks behind closed doors.

During these talks, the ministers discussed the following points:

1. Assessment of the activities of COMIFAC and its partner institutions (September 2006 – August 2008)

2. Two-year action plan of the Executive Secretariat of COMIFAC (2009-2010)
3. Two-year draft budget 2009-2010
4. Decision of heads of state according COMIFAC the status of a specialised agency of the ECCAS
5. The process of establishing the independent financing mechanism for COMIFAC and the decision of the heads of state to accord COMIFAC the status of a specialised agency of the ECCAS
6. The reform of the CEFDHAC, OCFSA and ADIE
7. The state of progress made on financing initiatives for the conservation and sustainable management of forest ecosystems in Central Africa
8. Contribution made by forest revenues to socioeconomic development of the people living in the Congo Basin
9. The sub-regional agreement on forestry control in Central Africa and the roadmap for the harmonisation of forestry policies
10. Sub-regional directives pertaining to the sustainable management of non-timber forest products in Central Africa
11. Sub-regional Action Programme to combat land degradation and desertification in Central Africa (PASR-LCD)
12. The establishment of the Observatory for Central African Forests (OFAC)
13. Internal regulation and personnel statutes (draft organisation chart for the Executive Secretariat of COMIFAC)
14. Status of the COMIFAC statutory executives
15. Miscellaneous issues
  - Intervals at which council meetings to be held
  - Timeliness of organising a third summit of heads of state in 2009 to mark Yaoundé + 10
  - A conference to be held by the ATO
  - The holding of the 6<sup>th</sup> World Forum of Sustainable Development at Brazzaville from 27 to 30 October 2008.

After the points on the agenda had been discussed, the ministers adopted the following resolutions:

1. With respect to the draft organisation chart and taking account of the current financial climate, the Council of Ministers adopted the organisation chart with the following posts:

- 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 Communication and Documentation Officer
- One Accountant
- Support staff consisting of:
  - o One personal assistant
  - o One office boy
  - o One secretary/receptionist
  - o Four drivers
  - o Four custodians
  - o One maintenance technician.

These posts will be filled gradually, taking into account the funding required and the funds available.

Moreover, in order to face up to the new challenges posed by climate change, the fight against desertification and the need to preserve biodiversity, the Council decided to recruit one expert for each field, specialising in these questions who will report to the Deputy Executive Secretary – Technical Coordinator.

2. Concerning the internal regulation and the statutes of COMIFAC staff, the ministers instructed the Executive Secretary to pass on the documents modified and completed by the meeting of experts to member countries within a period of a fortnight for their perusal, prior to being adopted at the next extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers.

3. For the accounts 2007-2008 the Council of Ministers instructed the COMIFAC Executive Secretariat to produce, within a period of one month, a detailed balance sheet of the previous accounting period, taking into account the programme of activities and the budget adopted in September 2006 at Mongomo. This point is to be examined at the next extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers.

4. As for the two-year action plan and the provisional budget 2009-2010, the ministers instructed the Executive Secretariat of COMIFAC to produce within a period of one month the action plan and the two-year budget for the period 2009-2010 in line with the ECCAS format, integrating the activities of partner institutions and national coordination points. Furthermore the national coordination points are to pass on their programmes of action to the Executive Secretariat within a fortnight so that their activities can be integrated into the two-year action plan 2009-2010. This point should also be examined at the next extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers.

5. With respect to the mandate of the current team of the Executive Secretariat, the Council of Ministers decided to make available the vacancies of statutory executives of the Executive Secretariat. This decision will, however, come into effect only after the extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers scheduled for 26 October 2008 in Brazzaville.

The ministers instructed the Executive Secretary to pass on the job descriptions and profiles of candidates to all COMIFAC member countries. Each country may propose a maximum of three candidates for each post.

6. In terms of the independent financing mechanism for COMIFAC and its partner institutions and in application of decision no. 8 of the 13<sup>th</sup> Conference of Heads of State held on 30 October 2007, the Council of Ministers has mandated the acting president of COMIFAC to consult with the authorities of the ECCAS in order to put in place a secure mode of operation in terms of disbursing and managing the resources allocated to COMIFAC and its partner institutions. The Council invited the acting president to monitor the effective implementation of the agreements reached with the ECCAS.

Moreover, the Council instructed the Executive Secretariat to draw up a rigorous budget taking account of the needs of the convergence plan (Plan de Convergence) and integrating the priorities of Burundi, Rwanda, and Sao Tome and Principe.

7. For the reform of CEFDHAC, the Conference on Central African Moist-Forest Ecosystems, the ministers adopted the documents approved by the 6<sup>th</sup> CEFDHAC held in November 2007 at Libreville, in particular the statutes, the internal regulations, the organisational structure and the draft cooperation agreement between COMIFAC and CEFDHAC. They decided to look at the question of the headquarters of CEFDHAC at their next extraordinary meeting.

8. With respect to the British Congo Basin Forest Fund, the ministers requested that the structures responsible for managing this fund speed up the operationalisation process. They also expressed their hope that candidates from the sub-region will be given precedence for the post of executive director of the fund.

9. Regarding the draft sub-regional directives pertaining to the sustainable management of non-timber forest products from Central Africa, the Council of Ministers instructed the Executive Secretariat to pass this document on to member countries for their perusal before the document is adopted at the next session of the Council of Ministers.

10. Concerning the process of harmonising forestry policies in the sub-region, the Council of Ministers instructed the Executive Secretariat to pass on the draft sub-regional agreement on forestry supervision in Central Africa and the road map for the process of harmonising forestry policies to all member countries for perusal before they are adopted at the next meeting of the Council of Ministers.

11. Concerning the contribution made by forestry revenues to the socioeconomic development of the people living in the Congo Basin, the Council of Ministers instructed the Executive Secretariat of COMIFAC to carry out an evaluation of the situation in member countries with a view to proposing measures to improve the management of forestry revenues allocated to local population groups.

12. With respect to the state of progress made on financing initiatives for the conservation and sustainable management of forest ecosystems in Central Africa, the ministers noted the ongoing financing initiatives. They thanked Madame Wangari Maathai for the efforts made and encouraged her to continue her endeavours to mobilise new funding.

The ministers congratulated themselves on substantial financial assistance received from the United Kingdom, Norway the ADB and GEF for the implementation of the convergence plan.

13. Concerning the sub-regional Action Programme to combat land degradation and desertification in Central Africa (PASR-LCD), the ministers adopted the programme along with the strategy for the mobilisation of financing in order to facilitate implementation.

14. As for the establishment of the Observatory for Central African Forests (OFAC), the ministers instructed the Executive Secretary to ensure the long-term future of this body, in particular by acquiring a station to receive satellite images country by country.

15. Regarding the intervals at which meetings of the Council of Ministers are to be held, the ministers instructed the Executive Secretariat to provide for an annual extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers in the internal regulation. The report on activities, the budget of the Executive Secretariat and the financial status will then be examined annually.

16. Concerning the timeliness of organising a Third Summit of Heads of State in 2009 to mark Yaoundé + 10, the ministers approved the general idea of holding a Third Summit of Heads of State in 2009 to mark the tenth anniversary of the Yaoundé Declaration. The Minister of Environment, Nature Conservation, Water and Forests of the Democratic Republic of the Congo took this

opportunity to inform his opposite numbers that his country would be more than willing to host the event.

17. The ministers of forests of Central Africa noted the need to resolve the problems currently facing the African Timber Organization (ATO) and decided to meet again on 26 October 2008 at Brazzaville to make the necessary decisions.

18. The ministers were informed about the 6th World Forum of Sustainable Development to be held at Brazzaville from 27 to 30 October 2008. In view of the strategic role played by forests in the Congo Basin in sustainable development, COMIFAC is invited to become involved in the organisation of this event.

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On concluding its deliberations, the Council of Ministers expressed its thanks to the people of the Central African Republic, its President and its government for the warm welcome they had received.

The ministers then signed the Declaration of Bangui, laying out the common position of the states of Central Africa with respect to the preparations for negotiations on the new post-Kyoto climate regime as of 2012.

In line with the provisions of the Treaty, the ministers agreed that the next ordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers will be held in 2010 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; the precise date will be set at a later date.

Bangui, 11 September 2008

The Ministers