

OPENING REMARKS BY THE MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, NATURE CONSERVATION AND TOURISM

Ladies and Gentlemen of the diplomatic corps, heads of department, representatives of national and international NGOs, distinguished guests ...

Dear participants,

It was with genuine pleasure that I accepted the honour of opening this International Dialogue on Forests. Sponsored by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and organised by the Cercle pour la Défense de l'Environnement (CEDEN) and the Forest Peoples Programme (FPP), in partnership with Coordination Nationale REDD (CN-REDD), this international dialogue is being held for the very first time in our country and takes as its theme Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

As you are aware, the pressing concern of the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo, under the leadership of His Excellency Prime Minister Augustin Matata Ponyo, is to forge ahead with long-term improvements to the living conditions of local and indigenous communities in all parts of the Republic.

This goal is clearly embodied in the "Revolution of Modernity", the vision expressed by the Head of State, His Excellency Joseph Kabila Kabange, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The REDD+ process is regarded as an important pillar in the current version of the DRC's Strategic Growth and Poverty Reduction Document (DSCR II). As you know, since the adoption of the national road map on the Process of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo has undertaken to develop a national strategy, through participatory and scientific approaches, by December 2012. In the context of this process, the government's main objective is to achieve concrete results, especially with regard to long-term improvements to the livelihood of local communities, the equitable sharing of revenues between stakeholders and rights holders at both national and international level, respect for the law, effective reduction of deforestation and forest degradation, promotion of environmental services and the increase and conservation of biodiversity.

In order to achieve these goals, the emphasis must be on participation and transparency, and on recognising and respecting the rights of all stakeholders, including local and indigenous communities, at every stage of the REDD process in our country. The credibility of this process depends not only on its robustness, but also and especially on its participatory dimension. We must develop flexible and effective mechanisms so that all the actors involved, in particular local communities, are able to participate effectively and efficiently.

These are the concerns that this International Dialogue on the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of local and indigenous peoples will address during the course of its proceedings.

The concept of FPIC is now recognised by a number of international institutions, in particular the United Nations (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted on 13 September 2007).

Free, Prior and Informed Consent refers to the right of local and indigenous peoples to give or withhold their free, prior and informed consent to activities that may adversely affect their rights to their land, territories and other resources. Free, prior and informed consent has become a key principle of international law and of jurisprudence in relation to indigenous peoples. It has become a significant factor in sectors such as dam building, the extractive industry, forestry, plantations, environmental conservation, bioprospecting and environmental impact studies.

This conference should therefore help us to arrive at a common understanding of the concept of FPIC so that we can study the ways and means of its implementation in the DRC.

In addition, the proceedings should facilitate:

- The creation of a network of professionals within the RDC that will share the lessons drawn from the implementation of Free, Prior and Informed Consent and foster collaboration on this subject throughout the country.
- The stimulation of the national Process piloted by Coordination Nationale REDD (CN-REDD) so that the FPIC approach is effectively and efficiently integrated into REDD Phase 2 (the investment phase).
- The creation of a synergy between actions and a multi-actor partnership in order to sustain the national FPIC process with a concerted road map (developing a common approach involving both national and international actors) that clearly defines the role and responsibilities of each participant.
- The communication of information to the multilateral bodies which have designed REDD+ Programmes (reduction of emissions linked to deforestation and forest degradation) based on Free, Prior and Informed Consent.

I am sure you will agree that we can expect many such conferences at this crucial stage of the REDD+ process in our country (just a few months before the finalisation of Phase 1 of the Process: the construction of the national strategy).

On this note of hope, I declare that the International Dialogue on Free, Prior and Informed Consent in the DRC is now open.

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