



**EXCERPTS OF REMARKS BY THE MINISTER FOR FOREST ECONOMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO, HON. DR. ROSALIE MATONDO, DURING THE OPENING SESSION OF THE CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP FOR CENTRAL AFRICA REGION**

The Minister for Forest Economy, who presided over the opening session, stated that the Government of Congo remains committed to the enforcement and effective implementation of international treaties aimed at enhancing cooperation among states in the fight against illegal trade in wild fauna and flora. She added that proceeds from wildlife crime only benefit the criminals, depriving our countries the much needed income. She emphasized that our iconic species such as the elephant, pangolin and timber are increasingly under threat and have borne the biggest brunt of poaching and illegal trade in their parts and derivatives. She underscored the fact that this problem is exacerbated by inadequate cooperation among states and agencies compounded by insufficient capacity to strengthen our efforts in addressing this vice which is rapidly soaring to worrying proportions in Africa. She reaffirmed that the Government of Congo was fully awake to this challenge and that is why they readily join other states and partners in formulating policies and implementing strategies /measures towards surmounting this unprecedented plunder of our invaluable natural resources.

She reported that Congo is, among other initiatives, expending effort to encourage African governments to implement commitments made at sub-regional, regional and international fora aimed at strengthening CITES implementation, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Nagoya and Cartagena protocols, the Convention on Migratory Species and also to ratify and domesticate instruments such as the Lusaka Agreement on Cooperative Enforcement Operations Directed at Illegal trade in Wild Fauna and Flora. She also welcomed the global attention that wildlife crime was receiving, crystallizing in commitments and interventions by nations and increased resource mobilization for wildlife conservation.

She pointed out the need to act jointly, decisively and swiftly in order to reverse the alarming trends. She lauded LATF for the success in transnational enforcement operations that had assisted Lusaka Agreement member states and neighbouring countries to address wildlife and forestry crime challenges in the region. She also commended the efforts of LATF, the African Union, COMIFAC and implementing countries for mobilizing support and spearheading initiatives including the Capacity Building Workshop, Wildlife Directors meeting and sensitization on the AU illegal wildlife trade strategy that bring together policy makers and wildlife managers to deliberate on salient issues that affect conservation and develop strategies towards surmounting the common challenges. In the same vein, she thanked the European Union Commission for funding the events as well as Interpol Regional Bureau for Central Africa, TRAFFIC, AWF, WWF and WCS for their technical support.

The Minister also took the opportunity to commend the States represented in the forum for participating in the events and indeed for a job well done in enhancing enforcement in their respective countries and the region at large. She emphasized the need to enhance regional and international cooperation as well as to put in place mechanisms to share information and intelligence on wildlife crimes amongst wildlife authorities through such consultative fora. She expressed her desire for plausible outcomes of the events including concrete strategies and action plans that will among other things bolster co-operation between the wildlife authorities and related agencies geared towards curtailing illegal taking of our much treasured wild fauna and flora in the region. She concluded her remarks by calling upon partners, international community and governments to increase their financial, moral and technical support in the fight against the wildlife crime scourge.

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