

Speech by Prof Philip Dearden, Head of Centre for International Development and Training (CIDT), University of Wolverhampton on behalf of PASGOF SNOIE Congo project led by the CIDT

Excellences,

Minister of Forest Economy;

Ambassador, Head of the European Union delegation;

Executive Secretary of COMIFAC

Co-facilitator PBFC

All other protocol respected;

Members of PASGOF-SNOIE project consortium

Experts, national and international

Members of the media

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a real pleasure for me to speak at this ceremony to launch the 13th Forest Governance Forum here in the Republic of Congo under the framework of the PASGOF SNOIE project which seeks to support sustainable and inclusive management of Forests in the Republic of Congo through the promotion of non mandated and standardised independent forest monitoring.

Allow me, on behalf of the Vice Chancellor of the University of Wolverhampton, Professor Ian Campbell, and our 8 NGO partners involved in this project, to thank you for having honoured this ceremony with your presence.

Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen

This is also an opportunity for us to express our appreciation the Minister – Madame Matondo for her continuous support for our activities here in the Republic of Congo. We were privileged that she presided over the 11th Forest Governance Forum, which took place in this venue in 2018. Our appreciation is also with the creation of the steering group that has overseen the design and implementation of this forum. May I also take the opportunity to thank the members of this steering group for making this event possible.

The PASGOF-SNOIE project under which the present forum is organised is financed by the European Union with contributions from the UK government's Forest Governance Markets and Climate Programme. We are deeply grateful for your continuous support for our activities. Important to note that the EU's support to our activities in the Congo Basin span a

decade and today we are further honoured by the presence of the Ambassador and his team. I wish to thank Camille who has worked closely with our team at CIDT to refine and shape this event in different ways.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Civil society, in its mission to contribute to the improvement of forest governance and sustainable management of forests in the Republic of Congo, has the ambition to do everything possible working alongside the administration and what we might call the 'virtuous' private sector, to participate in the effort to implement the government's agenda for the forest sector, its new forest code and the effective implementation of the FLEGT VPA.

Indeed, for more than a decade, your Excellences, you have seen and supported the involvement and contributions of civil society in the Republic of Congo starting from FLEGT VPA negotiations to the development of the forest policy and the forest code. Throughout these processes we – CIDT and our partners here today - acknowledge the openness shown by the forestry administration.

The support of the EU and her Excellency to independent forest monitoring initiatives under our last CV4C project makes us confident that we will continue to work collaboratively to progress the national government's agenda for sustainable and inclusive forest governance. As the new forestry code is further operationalised, we hope that this openness and support will continue in the process of developing the application texts of the forestry code providing the space for civil society contributions.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Early last year, the Minister and the EU Ambassador launched two independent forest monitoring projects in the Republic of Congo to support mandated IFM and non mandated IFM.

CAGDF has demonstrated its relevance in supporting the government actions through mandated forest monitoring with more than 15 years of experience and benefiting from support under the CV4C project funded by the EU and FCDO. With support from FCDO we initiated the initial process of developing the new SNOIE programme with our regional partner FODER Cameroon and today, this project complements the efforts of CAGDF as mandated IM. This complementarity is already demonstrated in the development of a national strategy for IFM which was validated by national stakeholders this year and both systems are on course for certification. This is tangible proof that the Congo is truly a leader pushing for inclusive and transparent forest management. We will work together to achieve ISO 9001 certification for both types of IFM and hence further improve the quality of IFM and its contribution to inclusive sustainable forest management in the Republic of Congo.

It is my pleasure to introduce the project team here at CIDT that has worked assiduously to convene and organise this forum, Richard Nyirenda, Habiba Mohsen, Russell Geoff, Prof Aurelian Mbzibain and our admin and finance team. CJJ led by Lilian Barros and his team has worked tirelessly with the Office of the Minister and our national, regional and international partners – **PLEASE STAND** - CABS, CIRECK, CJJ, EJID, FGDH, OCDH, FODER Cameroon and Fern Based in Brussels to make this event possible. **Please give them a hand.**

This forum is unique as it occurs at a time when CIDT is celebrating its 50th Anniversary. For five decades we have delivered capacity strengthening in over 140 countries, through programmes, projects and consultancies aimed at enhancing capacity across a range of sectors. 30 years of this work has been in the Congo Basin supporting civil society organisations and their networks and national governments to pursue sustainable forest management and Climate Goals. I wish to take this opportunity to thank all of you here present for your support and collaboration throughout these years. This is also an opportunity for us to restate our commitment to the Congo Basin and to continue to do all in our capacity with your support deliver on our mutual goals. Thank you very much for your patronage.

Your Excellences, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for your kind attention and I hope that these two days provide the space and opportunity for frank exchange, experience sharing as we pursue our collective effort to support national and regional efforts to improve sustainable forest management and the climate goals.

Long Live the Republic of Congo

Long Live the EU

Long live the UK

Long live international development cooperation for addressing the climate agency.

Thank you.

Professor Philip Dearden

Head of Centre for International Development (CIDT,

University of Wolverhampton .