

**Statement by Mr. Achim Steiner
Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme**

**Launch of the
DR Congo Post-Conflict Environment Assessment – Synthesis for Policy Makers
Grand Hotel Kinshasa
10 October 2011**

Your Excellency, Monsieur le Ministre de l'Environnement, Conservation de la Nature et Tourisme, Monsieur José Endundo,
Mr. Fidèle Sarassoro, the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General,
Excellencies and Honourable Ministers,
Professeur Labana Lasay Abar, Recteur de l'Université de Kinshasa
Members of the Media,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
All protocol duly observed:

On the notable and timely occasion of this *High-level Forum on Forests and Climate Change*, I am very pleased to present to you the UN Environment Programme's Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was conducted in partnership with the Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation and Tourism.

This comprehensive assessment – one of the largest field assessments ever carried out by my organization – is an important milestone in tackling the environmental challenges faced by this country, and setting the nation on a more sustainable course, capitalizing on the opportunities offered by a green economy in DR Congo.

This report provides the most comprehensive environmental portrait ever produced of the DR Congo. It covers the entire country and encompasses 15 themes and sectors ranging from key economic sectors such as mining, forestry, water, agriculture, fisheries and energy to environmental governance and regional cooperation, as well as the environmental consequences of conflict and population displacement.

Your Excellency, Monsieur le Ministre,

I would like to take this opportunity to express our thanks and appreciation to you and to the Prime Minister's Office for your leadership and collaboration in ensuring that this post-conflict assessment received the necessary support from your Government. This

included facilitating field access that allowed UNEP's team to cover the entire country despite the difficult terrain and logistics, and enabling consultations with a wide range of stakeholders and partners at the national, provincial and local levels.

I wish to stress that this report is the output of an extraordinary collaborative effort. We are indebted to the more than 50 partners who gave their time and generously shared their invaluable knowledge, experiences and critical analysis, including: government ministries and agencies, our colleagues in the UN Country Team and MONUSCO, development partners, international and national NGOs and regional bodies and universities. I also extend our thanks to the Government of Norway for their generous support.

Our heartfelt thanks also go to the many Congolese - farmers, fishermen, water vendors, artisanal miners and loggers, forestry and park guards, traders and small and large businesses - who opened their doors and shared with UNEP their problems, solutions and dreams.

Excellencies,

This assessment details a wide range of environmental and development challenges faced by the DR Congo. It also highlights successful initiatives as well as strategic opportunities that can support the sustainability of the DR Congo's post-conflict economic reconstruction and serve to accelerate peace consolidation efforts.

Let me focus on some of the study's key findings and recommendations.

First and foremost, this UNEP assessment confirms the DR Congo's enviable position as one of the world's most important natural areas. Its massive resource endowment includes:

- more than half of Africa's forests and freshwater;
- an exceptional mega-biodiversity reservoir rated as one of the world's top biological hotspots;
- 13% of global hydropower potential;
- some 80 million hectares of arable land;
- the largest and most diverse inland fisheries on the continent; and
- trillions of dollars worth of mineral reserves.

In short, the DR Congo is a land of superlatives. A 'Green giant' that is at the heart of Africa's Amazon - our second set of lungs.

The good news is that we have found the DR Congo's natural capital to be relatively intact and in good condition. Moreover, much of the existing environmental degradation is still reversible.

There are, however, a number of alarming signs indicating serious cause for concern:

1. Increasing deforestation particularly around urban centres to satisfy a burgeoning energy demand, as well as from extensive small-scale slash and burn agriculture. Gallery forests are bearing the full brunt of this ever expanding deforestation frontline.
2. Species depletion and habitat fragmentation causing irreversible biodiversity losses: 190 species in the DR Congo are classified as critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.
3. Extensive environmental liabilities caused by over a century of industrial mining in the Katanga Copperbelt, with heavy metal pollution representing a threat to the population's health and wildlife. Substantial use of highly toxic mercury in artisanal gold processing - estimated at 15 tonnes per annum - is also of serious concern.
4. An acute drinking water crisis, with an estimated 51 million Congolese not having access to potable water.
5. Phenomenal gully erosion in many of the DR Congo's cities arising from unprecedentedly rapid and unplanned urbanization.

There is also the underlying paradox that the DR Congo's abundant natural resources - particularly its high-value minerals - have played an important role in fuelling and perpetuating many of the conflicts and related human tragedies that have plagued its development over the last decades. The Congo needs to redouble its efforts to break the links between illegal natural resource extraction and trade and violent conflict, and transform an economy based on natural rent capture into a new 'green' economy that can lead the nation on a sustainable development path.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This report calls for closer attention to the concession model of natural resource extraction at the foundation of the DR Congo's historic development from ivory and rubber in the late 19th Century to copper, coltan and oil today.

The fact is that more than half of the DR Congo's immense territory is covered by mining, forestry and oil exploitation and exploration permits that not only often overlap with each other but also with protected areas, including those listed as natural wonders under the World Heritage list. This issue needs to be acknowledged and discussed through open and constructive dialogue.

An important shortcoming of this concession system is that it has not succeeded in creating employment on the scale required or reduced poverty. It is also recognized as playing an important part in causing social conflict, depleting the DR Congo's natural capital and damaging the ecosystem services on which the poor are most dependent for their livelihoods.

Even though the DR Congo has made major strides in improving concession governance, the benefits of many concession agreements continue to be one-sided and have not percolated to people on the ground. It is therefore important that the DR Congo continue its positive efforts to raise the governance threshold, and enhance the transparency and accountability of its large-scale concessions.

UNEP's assessment underscores the need to explore additional and complementary avenues for a more balanced development; particularly those which prioritize job creation and improve the livelihoods of the Congolese people, as called for under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy Paper.

The report makes the case for capitalizing on the spontaneous establishment of "associations" by the Congolese population to meet their own development needs. This "association" phenomenon which cuts across key natural resources sectors – agriculture, mining, forestry, fisheries and water – in fact points to the genesis of an embryonic community-based economy that has the ability to generate employment on the needed scale. If well managed and promoted, it represents a viable alternative with considerable growth potential and a lever for sustainable recovery.

UNEP's assessment shows that building on the momentum of flexible people-based social enterprises as an engine for employment-led green development is central to successful post-conflict recovery and the pursuit of sustainable peace in the DR Congo. By integrating environmental objectives and standards, the DR Congo's nascent social enterprises can also play a critical transformative role in modernizing and leading the DR Congo's green transition. This includes playing a lead role in promoting 'green jobs' and offering alternative livelihoods for former combatants.

Indeed, UNEP believes that ‘green economy’ framework provides a range of policy options and tools that can support the DR Congo’s social economy organizations and small-scale sector to emerge as a key actor in creating decent, well-paid jobs – particularly for youth – and improve natural resource management. Priority should therefore be accorded to providing supporting policies, laws and financial services – including micro-credit – for these nascent social enterprises including small and medium enterprises to develop and prosper in a coherent and sustainable fashion.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Pursuing the recommendations of this report will require a considerable investment tentatively estimated at USD 200 million per annum.

The most promising strategy for mobilizing this large-scale financing is from market-based instruments for ecosystem services. Specifically, the DR Congo’s 1.55 million square kilometres of forest provide a huge opportunity for revenue generation through the carbon market. The key instruments are the Reducing Emissions from Forest Deforestation and Forest Degradation (UN-REDD) and the Kyoto Protocol’s Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), in which the DR Congo has already achieved remarkable progress.

Yet, it is equally important to emphasize that there are numerous opportunities including Payment for Environmental Services which the DR Congo can capitalize on such as the voluntary carbon market and related schemes based on ecotourism, biodiversity benefits and watershed protection.

At the same time, UNEP invites all friends and partners of the DR Congo to mobilize their support and assist the country use its unique natural resource assets in a truly equitable and sustainable manner. Specifically, we call on the international community and development partners to double Official Development Assistance to the DR Congo – which unfortunately remains well below the per capita average for sub-Saharan Africa – in accordance with international pledges.

Honourable Guests,

The DR Congo’s development and environmental strategies are today at a critical crossroads which will not only determine the sustainability of its economic recovery and national and regional peace; it will have an important global dimension.

It is imperative that this African giant emerge from its current position as one of the least developed countries in the world and realize its immense potential as a powerhouse of African growth and development. Indeed, Africa needs an ambitious and determined Congo.

The people of the DRC have demonstrated their strength and ability to cope with extreme adversity. I truly believe that they have the creative genius to find solutions for their own recovery including by merging their innovative social entrepreneurship with green economy thinking, which requires our full and whole hearted support.

I am confident that the Government of DR Congo, as well as the UN system and other international partners, can use the findings and recommendations of this report to assist the DR Congo pursue a new and environmentally sustainable economy and achieve lasting peace.

UNEP for its part stands ready to accompany the Congolese Government and people, as well as their development partners, in the quest for the prosperous and peaceful life that this great nation rightfully deserves.

Thank you for this opportunity and kind attention.