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Groundbreaking climate change mitigation program to protect 9 million hectares of forest and benefit 1.8 million people in the Congo Basin

New York City – 25 September 2014 – In the midst of the UN Climate Summit, on Wednesday, 24 September, His Excellency Minister N'sa Mputu Elima, Minister of Environment, Conservation of Nature and Tourism for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Mike Korchinsky, Founder and President of Wildlife Works presented a groundbreaking national REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) program to protect the Congo Basin Forest through Africa's largest pay-for-performance initiative designed to capture the natural value of standing forests.

The presentation followed the announcement of The New York Declaration on Forests in which world leaders from governments, businesses and NGOs joined together to commit to drastically reduce emissions to combat climate change by slowing, halting and reversing forest loss by 2020.

"The United Nations has framed the climate change problem and the Government of the DRC has presented a compelling solution," Korchinsky said. "There is a window of opportunity right now for the private sector to join the sovereign funds and do their part to invest in our collective future by reducing the impact of their unavoidable emissions through the protection of the Congo Basin Forest."

The DRC Government came to New York to present its solution to save the Congo Basin Forest to policy makers, corporate leaders and foundation directors. Minister Elima informed the audience that the DRC Government has completed a multi-year strategic planning effort for a massive green development program to be financed by the sale of emission reductions earned only if the DRC can dramatically reduce deforestation. "The DRC accepts its responsibility to protect its forests for the benefit of humanity," Minister Elima said. "But as a developing country for us to move from planning to implementation, we require a partnership with industrialized nations to provide the financial support needed by the program. We hope this innovative climate change mitigation program can become a model for the Congo Basin Forest Nations of Africa and perhaps for forest nations throughout the developing world. We believe this program can demonstrate the transformational power of REDD+ to conserve our forests for future generations while providing unprecedented green development for our citizens."

The DRC's pilot program is a landmark initiative built upon the success of Mai Ndombe, Wildlife Works' pioneering REDD+ project in the DRC. The program will safeguard about 10% of the DRC's forest estate utilizing the UN's REDD+ mechanism to protect nearly 9M hectares of primary tropical rainforest within a 12M-hectare landscape, almost the size of England. The area is home to more than 1.8M people as well as magnificent endangered species, including the forest

elephant and the bonobo, the great ape that is the closest relative to humans and that lives only in the DRC.

The DRC holds 155M hectares of forest, which is more than 50% of all of Africa's forests. The DRC's Congo Basin Forest is second only to Brazil's Amazon in global size and significance. But the DRC also has the lowest score on the United Nations' Human Development Index as a consequence of decades of civil war and political instability that have only recently ended. With peace will come development, and that development will either be fueled by the destruction of forest resources, or funded by the success of this program.

The program has garnered high-level support from the scientific and policy communities.

"The Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC is essentially the first time that we have given so much importance to forestry and we have clearly stated that if we want to limit temperature increase to 2 degrees Celsius, then we will have to stop deforestation and expand forest area," said Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) at Wednesday's event. "REDD+ embodies the importance that science places on expanding forest cover and doing away with deforestation – and doing it in a manner that is market friendly."

Mario Bocuzzi, Head of the UN-REDD Secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland also acknowledged the program's significance. "Ever since the emergence of REDD+ under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the DRC has been one of the leading countries in advancing REDD+ and moving the process forward both nationally and internationally. Today, with this event, it proves again its leadership on REDD+ and its ability to convene a number of partners in its support. This is a tribute to the level of political will and commitment towards REDD+ in the country, a political will that the Summit yesterday sought to achieve in other countries as well. The UN-REDD Programme congratulates the DRC for its resolve and we hope that support from all partners will meet the same level of ambition in realizing the potential of REDD+ as a powerful incentive for green economic development."

The World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility recently acknowledged the innovative nature and global significance of this emission reductions program by accepting the DRC into the Carbon Fund pipeline. The Carbon Fund is a World Bank program that will pay selected forest nations for proving they can reduce emissions from deforestation. The DRC is under consideration for this program, but even if selected will need to find significant additional sources of financing to ensure the program achieves its full potential for success.

Sovereign funds and multilateral banks have already pledged billions of dollars to support early action national REDD+ programs in Brazil and Indonesia, the world's first and third largest tropical forest nations, and those with the highest historical deforestation rates. The DRC is the second largest forest nation, and has stepped up to meet the challenge of finding a new development pathway that can avoid the massive destruction seen in Brazil and Indonesia. Success in the DRC will catalyze a massive scaling of REDD+ that can quickly and efficiently mitigate hundreds of millions of tons of annual emissions and at the same time provide substantial green development for local forest communities.

Wildlife Works is investing alongside the DRC Government to help design and implement the program. “We believe the DRC Government's REDD+ green development plan may be the single most vital social and environmental initiative of our time as this program's success will prove that the most impoverished communities in one of the most impoverished countries on earth can find a way to meet their economic development needs without destroying their forests. If the DRC can succeed then surely all other forest nations can follow suit,” said Korchinsky.

Wildlife Works is one of the key organizations on the advisory team supporting the DRC Government on the development of its national REDD+ program. Other partners in program design and development include WWF and a broad network of local civil society organizations in the DRC.

About Wildlife Works

Wildlife Works is a unique private sector forest conservation company founded in 2009 and based in Mill Valley, CA. The company aims to make a massive contribution to reducing global emissions while protecting some of the most important and highly threatened tropical forests in the world.

Wildlife Works is currently engaged in several developing country forest communities, managing their transition away from forest destruction and towards sustainable economic development. Wildlife Works is a private company using the innovative market mechanism REDD+ to finance activities and to provide the financial incentives for those communities and governments to protect their forests.

REDD+ places a value on the natural capital of standing forests as the key element in mitigating climate change and sells that value to willing corporate leaders who are committed to reducing the carbon footprint of their organizations. In addition to reducing emissions from avoiding deforestation, Wildlife Works REDD+ projects deliver unprecedented environmental and social benefits to seriously impoverished parts of Africa that are in desperate need of change.

Wildlife Works is a business that protects forests and the wildlife that live within them, and provides communities with a sustainable and transformative development path.

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