By the Stop Ecocide International diplomatic director in Africa and francophone countries **Ms. Patricia Willocq**

On the occasion of the Diplomatic Dinner Co-Hosted by Stop Ecocide International and Members of the OACPS: the Republics of Vanuatu, Congo, Burundi, Zambia, Equatorial Guinea and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Thursday, March 26 2026

Excellencies, Distinguished guests and Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

Buenas tardes, good evening, bonsoir,

I would also like to express our sincere appreciation to the Republic of Vanuatu, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Burundi, and the Republic of Zambia for their shared commitment to advancing this important conversation.

And thank you distinguished guests for your presence that reflects a shared conviction: In a time of planetary crisis, **cooperation** remains our strongest tool.

My name is Patricia Willocq, and I serve as Diplomatic Director for Africa and Francophone countries at Stop Ecocide International.

Across the world, we are witnessing forms of environmental harm so severe that they affect not only ecosystems, but also human health, food systems, water security and economic stability.

From large-scale oil spills and deforestation to the contamination of rivers and the degradation of marine ecosystems, these impacts are often cumulative, transboundary and sometimes irreversible.

And while legal frameworks exist, they do not always fully capture the most serious forms of environmental destruction.

Our mission is simple: to support any State wishing to be informed, to explore, or to advance the legal recognition of the most severe forms of environmental harm, often referred to as ecocide.

When we began this work in 2017, ecocide had almost no visibility on the global stage. Today, it stands at the centre of legal, political and diplomatic discussions, in national legislatures, across international institutions, and at the highest levels of government.

This evolution reflects a broader reality.

A decisive moment came in 2021, when an Independent Expert Panel published the **first consensus legal definition of ecocide** that is :

"Unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts."

This definition offered governments a practical basis for reflection and action.

Since then, progress has been steady, and global.

At the international level, States are now driving concrete legal action. In 2024, **Vanuatu, Fiji and Samoa** formally tabled a proposal before the International Criminal Court to **amend the Rome Statute** and recognise ecocide as a fifth core international crime. A growing number of States across regions are actively supporting this initiative, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, whose **President, H.E. Félix Tshisekedi**, has raised the issue at the highest political level, including before the **United Nations General Assembly** and at major international summits. Governments and civil society are now bringing ecocide into multilateral discussions, including within the **United Nations Security Council.**

Across **regions and at the national level**, this momentum is translating into concrete legal and political developments. The **European Union** has strengthened criminal sanctions for serious environmental damage, including **offences comparable to ecocide**, while the **Council of Europe** has opened for signature a convention enabling the prosecution of particularly serious environmental offences, including conduct tantamount to ecocide. In Africa, Ministers are placing ecocide among continental priorities through the **African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN)** and examining its possible classification as a crime, with engagement from States

including the **Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo and Burundi alongside growing political engagement from Zambia.** In parallel, the **Inter-American Court of Human Rights** is reinforcing the legal obligation to prevent irreversible environmental harm. At the national level, countries such as **Belgium** have already criminalised ecocide.

Altogether, at least 34 States have formally expressed support for recognising ecocide in international fora, while 14 countries are currently developing or considering related legislation, reflecting a broad and increasingly coordinated shift across continents.

These developments across international, regional and national levels point to a clear and growing convergence toward stronger accountability for severe environmental harm.

Beyond governments, other actors are now engaging.

The **International Corporate Governance Network**, representing around 70 trillion US dollars in assets, has called on governments to consider the criminalisation of ecocide as part of addressing systemic environmental risk.

And businesses are also part of this shift.

The **Exponential Business Playbook** (developed with the engagement of major companies) includes a recommendation for businesses to support the inclusion of ecocide in legislation at all levels.

This signals a broader transformation: environmental harm is no longer only an ecological issue; it is now recognised as a systemic economic and financial risk.

That is showing us that the conversation has shifted from why to how.

This is essential.

Which is why these discussions are guided by key principles:
respect for sovereignty, equity across regions, and clarity in distinguishing legitimate development from severe environmental harm.

Progress must also be supported by technical expertise, cooperation, and alignment with broader frameworks such as climate finance and sustainable development.

And finally, one key point: this is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

There is no single pathway.

There is, rather, a range of avenues that States may choose to explore, whether through processes at the **International Criminal Court**, through regional engagement, including within the **African and Inter-American systems**, notably the **African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights**, through cross-regional platforms such as the **Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States**, or through **national legislation.**

This is a collective process, shaped by the leadership and priorities of all regions.

Stop Ecocide International stands ready to accompany any State wishing to explore or advance this path, technically, diplomatically and strategically.

Excellencies,

this is a moment of opportunity:

an opportunity to strengthen the protection of ecosystems,
to reinforce legal clarity,
and to contribute to a more balanced and accountable global framework.

We look forward to accompanying States wishing to include Ecocide into national, regional and international legislation.

Thank you very much.