

Joint Statement by the Republic of Vanuatu, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Burundi, and the Republic of Zambia delivered by his Mr. **Thierry Ndongala**, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Kingdom of Belgium, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

Delivered at the diplomatic dinner entitled:

Ecocide law: A Roundtable over Dinner
Progress & relevance in national, regional, and international contexts

Held on the margins of the 11th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the OACPS
Sofitel Malabo Sipopo Le Golf

Thursday, 26 March 2026

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen Ministers,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen Ambassadors and Heads of Diplomatic Missions,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening, and thank you for joining us tonight.

We are honoured to welcome you to this meeting, co-organised by a group of OACPS Member States, namely: the Republic of Vanuatu, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Burundi, and the Republic of Zambia, together with our technical partner, Stop Ecocide International.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the host country, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, for its leadership in organising this Summit; for the quality of the welcome we have received since our arrival, and for the support that has contributed to the holding of this diplomatic dinner roundtable.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished guests,

Your participation in this event reflects a concern that is increasingly shared across all regions of the world: namely, the growing scale of environmental destruction and its consequences for our societies, our economies, and the stability of our planet.

Current scientific data are unequivocal. Climate disruptions, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem degradation are deeply interconnected. The actions we take against nature are, in reality, actions against ourselves and future generations.

Within the OACPS community, a large number of our nations find themselves on the front line of the challenges previously mentioned : from the coral reefs of the Pacific to the mangroves of the Caribbean, through to the tropical forests and peatlands of the Congo Basin, all these essential ecosystems are now under pressure.

This is why an increasing number of States are reflecting on how national and international legal frameworks can be adapted to address the most serious forms of environmental destruction, often referred to as ecocide.

In recent years, this debate has gained significant momentum.

At the international level, concrete progress has been made, notably through the submission by Vanuatu, Fiji and Samoa of a proposal to amend the Rome Statute before the Assembly of States Parties to the International Criminal Court, as well as through the adoption of a motion within the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

At the regional level, notable progress is also being made. In this regard, it should be noted that within the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), States have recently agreed to establish an ad hoc committee on ecocide, marking an important step in exploring how African leadership can contribute to strengthening environmental protection. These initiatives are consistent with the efforts of the Congo Basin Climate Commission, which highlights the urgency of protecting our transboundary ecosystems as a condition sine qua non for our collective survival.

At the national level, a growing number of countries are also considering or developing legislation aimed at addressing the most serious forms of environmental destruction.

Taken together, these developments reflect a growing recognition of a simple principle: the most serious and widespread destruction of nature must not remain without significant legal consequences.

While many States have already established national frameworks for environmental protection, a growing number recognize that the scale and severity of current environmental harm exceed what national systems alone can address. This awareness has led to increased interest in strengthening accountability for the most serious forms of environmental damage.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished guests,

For many of our countries, this is not an abstract legal debate. Our peoples depend directly on the health of ecosystems for their security, their livelihoods and their future. The most serious forms of environmental destruction threaten these essential balances (forests, oceans and biodiversity) which are vital to climate stability. They also threaten communities, livelihoods and cultural heritage, and in certain contexts may contribute to instability, displacement and conflict.

Protecting nature is therefore not only an environmental imperative. It is also a matter of human security, economic stability, recognition of the value of ecosystem services, and intergenerational justice.

For these reasons, the co-organising countries of this meeting wish to encourage an open and constructive dialogue among OACPS member States and partners on how we might collectively strengthen legal and governance frameworks to prevent and address the most serious forms of environmental harm.

Such dialogue could explore several possible avenues, including:

- Considering the potential introduction of the crime of ecocide into national legislation, on a sovereign basis;
- Encouraging discussions within regional organisations, including within the OACPS and other regional bodies;
- And continuing engagement in international legal and environmental forums.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished guests,

Our intention this evening is not to propose a single model or prescribe a particular legal pathway.Rather, it is to invite all interested States to exchange perspectives, share experiences, and explore avenues for cooperation.

Protecting the natural world is not the responsibility of a single nation. It is a collective responsibility. By strengthening cooperation across regions and legal traditions, we can ensure that our global governance system evolves to meet the environmental challenges of our time.

In this spirit, we warmly invite all interested States to continue this dialogue in the months ahead. Let us therefore work together to ensure that the legal and governance frameworks of our time are capable of protecting the environment upon which all our societies depend.

In this dynamic, and with full respect for the sovereignty of each State, we would be encouraged to see these reflections relating to ecocide, reflected, where appropriate, in future ministerial declarations and political commitments.

Thank you very much for your kind attention, and I wish you an excellent evening.