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Fabien Dethier, Head of Cabinet - Cabinet of the Belgian Federal Minister for Mobility, Climate and the Environment
Speech on the occasion of diplomatic reception at the Radisson, Brussels: *"Advancing Ecocide Recognition: A Diplomatic Initiative for OACPS and COP30"*

Thursday 13th March 2025

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege and a great responsibility to stand before you today as Chief of Staff to the Minister of Mobility, Climate, and Environmental Transition, responsible for sustainable development.

We are indeed at a pivotal moment in our history. The well-being, if not the survival, of our planet and future generations depends on the decisions we make today. Our commitment to environmental justice must go beyond words; it must be reflected in a legal framework that holds accountable those who deliberately harm our planet.

The urgency of this mission cannot and must not be underestimated. Around the world, we are witnessing escalating environmental destruction—deforestation, pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate destabilization—that threatens the very foundations of life.

Belgium as a Committed Actor in the Fight Against Ecocide

We can be proud that Belgium is one of the leaders in combating severe, widespread, and long-lasting damage to the environment, commonly known as "ecocide." **Belgium is notably one of the first European countries to recognize ecocide as a crime under its national law**.

In 2021, the Belgian Parliament adopted a resolution "calling for the inclusion of the crime of ecocide in international criminal law." By this resolution, the Belgian Parliament asked the federal government to do two things. First, to examine whether the crime of

ecocide could be incorporated into Belgian criminal law, and second, to support the initiative of the State of Vanuatu and the Maldives to amend the statutes of the International Criminal Court to include the crime of ecocide.

Belgium is thus aligned with countries such as the Maldives, Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa, New Zealand, Finland, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which are actively advocating for ecocide to be included as the fifth international crime, alongside genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression.

On a national level, Belgium eventually amended its penal code in February 2024 to incorporate the crime of ecocide, making it one of the first European countries to modify its criminal code in this regard. Internationally, Belgium has been actively contributing since 2020 to debates on environmental crime within the International Criminal Court and the United Nations Assembly.

Within the EU, we have actively participated in discussions on revising the directive on environmental protection through criminal law. The revised European directive was officially adopted in 2024 and includes:

- An extension and refinement of the list of criminal offenses
- Strengthening provisions related to criminal sanctions
- Enhanced enforcement
- Protection of environmental defenders and the procedural rights of the public concerned
- An obligation to develop a strategy for combating environmental crime.

The revised directive is currently being transposed into the national jurisdictions of EU member states. We will ensure to remain exemplary and pioneering in this framework.

Particular Relevance for African, Caribbean, and Pacific States

Allow me now to address more broadly the importance of this fight against the crime of ecocide.

The urgency of criminalizing ecocide is also evident in the Global South, where local populations and communities suffer from the destruction of their environment, often driven by the pursuit of profit. Extractive industries are sources of deforestation, toxic waste, and soil degradation. Climate change is causing extreme weather conditions and rising sea levels, leading to loss of livelihoods and displacement of communities.

In this alarming context, **Belgium will continue to support efforts to establish a clear legal framework to hold perpetrators of these acts accountable, while**

continuing its efforts towards sustainable development, respectful of human rights and the environment.

Ecocide, Conflict, and Migration

We know that the crime of ecocide also has impacts beyond the environment, as it fuels conflicts and forced migration.

As Secretary-General António Guterres has pointed out, environmental destruction exacerbates resource scarcity, increases tensions, and displaces populations. In many regions, ecocide directly contributes to instability, forcing communities to flee in search of safety and livelihoods.

Criminalizing ecocide is therefore not only an environmental necessity, but also a crucial step in preventing conflicts. A global legal framework against ecocide will help protect ecosystems and the communities that depend on them.

A Broad Call to Action

The Minister is pleased that the movement for ecological justice continues to gain momentum. Several countries, including Chile, France, and Mexico, have followed Belgium's lead and have also integrated ecocide into their legal frameworks, while discussions are underway in Scotland, Peru, Argentina, and the Netherlands.

One of the main challenges will be ensuring that ecocide laws lead to genuine enforcement of legal responsibilities. International cooperation will be essential, as ecocide often transcends borders and is linked to other forms of organized crime.

For this, we must continue to work together, across borders and disciplines, to establish a legal system that protects the rights of nature and holds accountable those who do not respect them.

The future of our planet depends on the choices we make today. Let those choices be bold, just, and visionary.

Thank you for your attention.