HRH Princess Esmeralda of Belgium
Speech on the occasion of a diplomatic reception at the Radisson, Brussels:
"Advancing Ecocide Recognition: A Diplomatic Initiative for OACPS and COP30"
Thursday 13th March 2025

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests,

It is a great honour to be here with you today at this crucial diplomatic gathering, where we unite in our shared commitment to protect our planet and uphold justice for present and future generations. I extend my sincere gratitude to the Republic of Vanuatu and the Democratic Republic of Congo for convening this important initiative, alongside the dedicated efforts of Stop Ecocide International.

We meet at a time when the urgency of environmental action cannot be overstated. From the rising seas threatening island nations to the destruction of biodiversity and ecosystems upon which all life depends, we are witnessing the devastating consequences of unchecked environmental harm. In this moment, leadership, collaboration, and legal recognition of the mass destruction of nature are not merely options—they are imperatives.

For this reason, I salute the Republic of Vanuatu, the Republic of Fiji, and the Independent State of Samoa with the support of the Democratic Republic of Congo for their bold initiative in proposing an amendment to the Rome Statute to include ecocide as an international crime. Their leadership serves as an inspiration to nations worldwide and offers a path forward in ensuring that those who commit severe environmental destruction are held accountable.

At the European level, significant progress has been made. The European Council has formally adopted a revised environmental crime directive, which, for the first time, includes provisions for the criminalisation of conduct 'comparable to ecocide.' This marks a historic moment for environmental law in Europe. Member states now have 24 months to align their national legislation with this directive,

ensuring that severe environmental crimes are met with appropriate legal consequences.

As we heard from the representative of the Ministry of Environment, Belgium, too, has taken groundbreaking steps. The Belgian Federal Parliament has become the first in Europe to recognise ecocide in its penal code. This places Belgium at the forefront of the global effort to criminalise ecocide at the International Criminal Court, reinforcing its commitment to justice for both people and the planet.

The role of multilateral organisations such as the Organisation of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States (OACPS) is indispensable. With its diverse membership spanning continents, the OACPS has the potential to be a powerful advocate for environmental justice. By highlighting and supporting the recognition of ecocide within its official declarations, the OACPS can help galvanise global momentum towards the criminalisation of severe environmental destruction.

Our gathering today serves as a platform to advance these discussions, strengthen alliances, and coordinate diplomatic efforts leading up to COP30. I urge all member states present to consider the moral, legal, and ecological imperative of recognising ecocide as a crime. By doing so, we send a clear message that the destruction of our planet will no longer be tolerated with impunity.

To conclude, let me express my deep appreciation for all those working tirelessly to advance this cause—diplomats, legal experts, activists, and policymakers alike. The road ahead will require perseverance, but with collective determination, we can build a legal framework that upholds environmental integrity and justice for all.

Thank you.