Conseiller en communication David Putu Kabamba (on behalf of His Excellency Ambassador Christian Ndongala), Embassy of the Democratic Republic of Congo in 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

Excellencies, Representatives of the States, Distinguished Delegates,

We thank you for being here today, and we thank the Republic of Vanuatu for co-hosting this event with us; we thank the OACPS for promoting it, and Stop Ecocide International for supporting it.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is honoured to take the floor today to express its firm support for the initiative led by the Republic of Vanuatu, Fiji, and Samoa to recognise ecocide as the fifth international crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Indeed, our ecosystems—home to the world's second-largest rainforest, which is recognised as the planet's primary lung in terms of carbon sequestration—provide us with essential goods and services, including food and medicine supply, pollination, climate regulation, air and water purification, regulation of rainfall through evapotranspiration, as well as cultural services. All of these vital services are gravely threatened by destructive activities that, in many cases, including armed conflicts, constitute genuine crimes against nature.

The definition of ecocide proposed by the island states as "*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*" would establish a crucial legal foundation. By introducing individual criminal responsibility for decision-makers, it would significantly enhance accountability and serve as a powerful deterrent.

This initiative represents a fundamental paradigm shift. Nature is not an inexhaustible reservoir of resources to be exploited without restraint or wisdom. It is time to recognise that we cannot endlessly extract from a planet with finite resources, and that destroying nature ultimately jeopardises the very continuity of life and the survival of humanity. The Biodiversity COP16, which took place in Colombia and culminated in Rome, has reminded us all of the urgency, necessity, and opportunity to establish peace with nature. Furthermore, the 2050 vision aims to bring humanity to live in harmony with nature. Recognising ecocide is therefore a crucial step towards achieving this goal, reversing biodiversity loss, and restoring the natural world.

We welcome this initiative, which we consider an effective solution, as criminal law, with its binding nature, constitutes a powerful tool to address severe environmental harm, both in times of peace and conflict.

This legislation will have a transformative effect on project planning and policy development. It will encourage investors and businesses to fully integrate environmental protection into their decision-making processes, placing nature conservation at the heart of their development strategies. This new legal framework will promote responsible and sustainable resource use, in harmony with ecosystems and local communities.

We acknowledge that the formal presentation of this important amendment is still recent and understand that many States Parties wish to further enrich discussions within the Working Group on Amendments in New York as well as within the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS). We strongly encourage active and constructive engagement in the coming months.

The recognition of ecocide is on the agenda of the **20th session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN)** to be held in Nairobi in July 2025 and at the **seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7)** in December 2025.

In conclusion, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as a **Solution Country** in the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss, reaffirms its determination to support this crucial initiative, which is an essential step in guiding the international community towards harmonious coexistence with our planet. Together, we can defend nature against its shameless predators for the well-being of present and future generations.

Thank you for your attention.