

First Secretary and Chargé d'Affaires Dreli Solomon, Embassy of the Republic of Vanuatu in Brussels

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

Excellencies, colleagues and friends,

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

As you know, Vanuatu, along with many states represented in this room today, exists on the frontline of climate change and severe ecological challenges. Our people suffer the consequences of damage that is not of our making, and we have therefore, both of necessity and choice, been at the forefront of legal initiatives to address these issues.

You will of course be familiar with the request to the ICJ for an Advisory Opinion on climate change, and with the recent hearings on that subject. Today's topic may be less well-known to you; however we can assure you that it is rapidly gaining international attention.

Vanuatu has long recognised the relevance of International Criminal Law to the environment. At the International Criminal Court's 2019 Assembly, Vanuatu called upon States Parties to seriously consider the criminalisation of ecocide under the Rome Statute. Since this statement, the concept of ecocide law has gained considerable traction around the world. The law is now supported by many sectors and stakeholders, including national proposals in multiple

jurisdictions and the recent criminalisation of offences “comparable to ecocide” within the EU.

In light of these developments, in September last year, Vanuatu, with co-sponsorship from the nations of Fiji and Samoa, proposed inclusion of an independent crime of ecocide to the Court’s Working Group on Amendments in order to fully address the worst cases of environmental harm, both in times of conflict and of peace. Soon after this, at the UN Biodiversity COP16, the Democratic Republic of Congo strongly expressed its support for this proposal.

To adequately protect the environment, upon which all human rights ultimately depend, enforceable standards are required, as well as meaningful international cooperation through domestic, regional and international spheres. The Rome Statute and the International Criminal Court offer legitimate tools for ensuring effective collective action in this regard.

And while Vanuatu appreciates that this discussion is not one to approach lightly, we have nonetheless warmly invited **all** States Parties to engage positively with our proposal, in the understanding that new tools may be required to face new challenges.

We also warmly encourage all States to examine the possibilities for incorporating ecocide into their own domestic penal codes, as a number of countries are already doing.

You will be hearing more about the relevance, rationale for, and progress on ecocide law from expert speakers this evening and we hope you will come to the same conclusion that Vanuatu has reached: that putting in place a preventative law across the globe, to protect the vital ecosystems upon which all our lives and economies depend, will ensure a more responsible and safer future for all nations, and all peoples.

Thank you for your attention.