

Testimony of John F. Turner
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on The Congo Basin Forest Partnership
before the
Subcommittee on African Affairs
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Mr. Chairman and distinguished and honorable Senators, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views about the opportunities and challenges ahead of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership.

The Congo Basin forest is a global treasure, the world's second largest intact tropical forest, spanning 700,000 square miles - equivalent to California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah combined. It catches water from millions of acres of pristine forest, which provide a livelihood to millions of Africans. Within these forests is a wealth of incredible species of plants and animals, many of which were unknown until recently. The Congo Basin forest must be protected and conserved for the economic and environmental good of Africa and for the ecological heritage of humankind.

Secretary Powell launched the Congo Basin Forest Partnership on September 4, 2002, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. This partnership - of governments, international organizations, non-governmental environmental organizations, industry, and civil society - recognizes that creating conditions for sustainable development is much too big a task for governments to tackle alone. Strong public-private partnerships are crucial to mobilizing greater interest and financial support and to moving away from old, inefficient, ineffective ways of doing business. A non-hierarchical relationship among partners is essential to the partnership.

Following the launch in South Africa, Secretary Powell visited Gabon for the inauguration of Gabon's national park system, a historic, first-ever trip highlighting forest conservation by a Secretary of State. The U.S. has sent high-level interagency teams into the Congo Basin region to assess critical needs for capacity-building training. My bureau, along with the Bureau of African Affairs and USAID, has developed a regular interagency

dialogue and has hosted exchanges with multiple Congo Basin Forest Partnership stakeholders. The Department of State held its first-ever symposium on ecotourism to explore ways to develop that industry in the Congo Basin. We hope to build on the knowledge gained from the symposium and work with the region to make wise choices for sustainable development. Secretary Powell underscored critical links between conservation and sustainable management of forest resources at his Open Forum event celebrating Earth Day. One of our Congo Basin Forest Partnership partners, Dr. Jane Goodall, was the keynote speaker.

This September, the Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival will highlight the efforts being made to conserve and sustainably manage Central African forests. The Congo Basin Forest Partnership will receive a conservation action award. President Bongo of Gabon will receive an award for setting aside over 10,000 square miles to create a system of 13 national parks. The Republic of Congo's President, Denis Sassou-Nguesso, has also been invited to receive recognition for his country's leadership role in the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, notably in identifying commercial bush meat sales as a critical conservation problem and in creating laws to address it, as well as in setting aside more than 13 percent of Congo's forests as protected areas.

Mr. Chairman, the United States has promoted the Congo Basin Forest Partnership and is providing a significant contribution to it because these forests and their wildlife are of global significance, because they are a major factor in the social, economic, and environmental health of our Congo Basin country partners, and because this is a wonderful opportunity to build on existing structures of cooperation between governments, NGOs, and the private sector in the region. I note that without the strong support and commitment of African people and governments, as well as civil society and private sector organizations, this partnership could not exist. It is a powerful mechanism for advancing our environmental goals in Central Africa, including the fight against illegal logging and associated trade and corruption. It is in our strategic interest to improve the ability of our African partners to enforce their laws and sustainably manage their resources. By promoting conservation and sustainable development in Central Africa, we strengthen our partnerships in the region and help create viable alternatives to fear, greed, and corruption.

In broad terms, U.S. priorities for the Partnership are to provide people sustainable means of livelihood through well-

managed forestry concessions, sustainable agriculture, and integrated ecotourism programs; to improve forest and natural resource governance through community-based management, combating illegal logging, and enforcing anti-poaching laws; and to help the Congo Basin countries develop a network of effectively managed parks, protected areas, and ecological corridors.

The Congo Basin Forest Partnership is also intended to help people obtain long-term sustainable forest-based employment through the sustainable management of natural resources whether through ecotourism, wildlife law enforcement, reduced impact logging, or park management. This effort will improve the economy of the region, and the economic, political, and environmental benefits will be apparent to all.

The Administration is committed to invest up to \$53 million in the Congo Basin Forest Partnership through the year 2005. The U.S. investment has already leveraged additional support from other donors, and has spurred on collaboration between USAID and the State Department on developing strategic objectives for U.S. priorities in the Congo Basin Forest Partnership. The partnership has sparked shared coordination efforts by USDA, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Park Service, NASA, and others.

Meanwhile, U.S.-based conservation NGOs plan to expand significantly their programs in the eleven Congo Basin forest landscapes identified as critical to biodiversity conservation in the Congo Basin. These Congo Basin Forest Partnership stakeholders' proposals to USAID's Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) are presently under review by a USAID/State team in Kinshasa. We have every confidence, given the NGOs and USAID/CARPE's heroic efforts to get programs up and running quickly, that the obligation of funds for these programs will be achieved by September 30, roughly one year from the launching of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, and nine months since its first organizational meeting. U.S.-based NGOs have committed to matching the United States government's financial contribution for work in these eleven landscapes. I would like to note our particular appreciation for the outstanding commitment of our NGO partners, whose efforts represent an essential element in this developing partnership.

We are especially pleased that the forest industry, including the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA), and professional societies such as the Society of American Foresters

(SAF), are eager to bring their technical expertise and financial resources to bear in the Congo Basin countries.

None of these U.S. accomplishments can stand on their own without a healthy commitment to building the international dimensions of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership. In January we co-hosted, with the French government, an international meeting of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership. At that meeting, partners agreed that the United States would be the facilitator of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership for at least its first two years. We also committed to sponsoring an African co-facilitator, resident in the Congo Basin, to be a Congo Basin Forest Partnership liaison with African partners, in order to ensure that their priorities and interests are addressed.

We note that a number of partners, European and African, have been meeting together this past spring and summer, planning their own contributions to our shared Congo Basin Forest Partnership objectives. The U.S. has been invited to contribute to these meetings in the spirit of cooperation within the Congo Basin Forest Partnership framework. An international meeting is being considered for the region this fall. It would improve coordination and energize cooperation. Our goal is to consolidate these relationships, which merge the interests of governments with agricultural, forestry, and conservation interests, across public and private sectors, into the largest and most successful partnership in Africa, and make it a viable forest conservation model for the world.

We are undertaking a comprehensive inventory of forest and wildlife-related projects and programs in the region, which will help us coordinate our strategy and identify gaps that need to be filled. We are constructing a web page to link the partners and their programs. There is a great deal more we can do with your support. We are confident that we are on the right track, have the right commitments from partners, and are developing the resource base to make the Congo Basin Forest Partnership work.

It is important to bear in mind, though, that we are still learning to build this new partnership. We must reconcile the time it takes to restructure relationships among the stakeholders and the imperative to get real projects under way in support of our objectives. We are learning to innovate, to rearrange public-private relationships, and to build a Congo Basin Forest Partnership that is credible and accountable. Here I would like to express my particular appreciation for the work

the Smithsonian Institution has done to ensure that all the stakeholders have a voice.

We expect to see more progress over the next year, as we develop new political and economic partnerships, and make measurable progress in stopping forest degradation in the Congo Basin - to the economic benefit of the region and to the ecological benefit of the planet.

Thank you very much. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.