

Brazzaville energy conservation

Brazzaville, 23 March 2018 - In an unprecedented move to protect the Cuvette Centrale region in the Congo Basin, the world's largest tropical peatlands, from unregulated land use and prevent its drainage and degradation, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Republic of Congo and Indonesia jointly signed the Brazzaville declaration that promotes better management and conservation of this globally important carbon store

There is a lot at stake in the protection of these peatlands: the equivalent of three years of global greenhouse gas emissions are stored in the Congo Basin, emissions that could be released if the peatlands are degraded or the natural wetlands drained.

To preserve the future of these valuable natural peatlands - which are about the size of England, and were only mapped scientifically in their entirety for the first time last year - the DRC and the Republic of Congo established a transboundary collaboration agreement. The agreement noted the importance of good land use and infrastructure planning that takes the nature of peatlands into account.

"Conservation and development can go hand in hand," said Erik Solheim, Head of UN Environment. "We will manage to conserve the peatlands if we put people's needs first. We can help countries to better understand the unique nature of the peatlands, and plan very carefully for any potential use."

Peatlands are wetlands that contain a mixture of decomposed organic material, partially submerged in a layer of water, lacking oxygen. The complex biodiversity of the peatlands means they are home to a variety of species, but their high carbon content makes them uniquely vulnerable to incineration if they are drained. The declaration recognizes the importance of the scientific breakthrough of mapping the world's largest tropical peatland area.

Both the Republic of the Congo and the DRC are in the process of planning economic concessions for agriculture, oil and gas mining, and logging. Unregulated exploitation of the peatlands could potentially be detrimental to the environment and to the climate, as it could release the carbon emissions that have been locked in for millennia.

"Peatlands have grown over the course of 10,000 years, and they can be destroyed in a matter of days if the land use is not sensitive to the nature of the peatlands," said Tim Christophersen, Head of Freshwater, Land and Climate Branch at UN Environment.

The declaration was signed on the sidelines of the Third Partners Meeting of the Global Peatlands Initiative, taking place in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, on 21-23 March 2018. The meeting was opened by Clément Mouamba, Prime Minister of the Republic of Congo, together with Erik Solheim.

The meeting also fostered a deep collaboration between Indonesia and the countries of the Congo Basin. Indonesia, the nation in the world with the most experience on peat management issues, stepped up as a valuable partner in South-South development cooperation.

"Indonesia has extensive experience in managing tropical peatlands, both in positive and negative terms. We are keen to share our experience with the Congo Basin and other countries through South-South Cooperation" said Siti Nurbaya, Minister of Environment of Forests of the Republic of Indonesia. "The main peatland management principle is to keep the peatlands wet."

"Destroying the peatlands would be a grave assault on the Paris Agreement and the climate. We need to find sustainable alternatives, and traditional management practices are important," said Arlette Soudan-Nonault, Minister of Environment and Tourism of the Republic of the Congo. "We are taking action with the Brazzaville Declaration signed today".

About the Smoke on Water Report: Smoke on Water is a Rapid Response Assessment that looks at peatland location, extent, threats and the policies to manage and protect them. The goal of this rapid response assessment, carried out on behalf of UN Environment and based on the efforts of more than 30 contributors, is to raise awareness about the importance of the world's peatlands and to encourage immediate action to preserve them.

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