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PRESS RELEASE

United Nations Goodwill Ambassador for Biodiversity finds inspiring commitment and action for the environment in visit to Rwanda

Montreal, 21 February 2011. United Nations Goodwill Ambassador for Biodiversity, Edward Norton, completed a three-day visit to Rwanda on Sunday, 20 February 2011. This was his first official country-visit since being appointed by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2010. He was accompanied on the visit by the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Mr. Ahmed Djoghlaf.

During his visit, Mr. Norton met with Prime Minister Bernard Makuza and officials of the Government and the United Nations to learn about work being undertaken in Rwanda to ensure sustainable management of its biodiversity and land resources as a contribution to Rwanda's sustainable development.

Mr. Norton has long admired efforts being made by the Government and people of Rwanda to safeguard the environment so to enable the sustainable development of the country.

During his visit, Mr. Norton was briefed by the Minister of the Environment and Lands, Ambassador Stanislas Kamanzi, and Government officials on the status of biodiversity in Rwanda.

Mr. Norton also met with the Head of the United Nations in Rwanda, United Nations Resident Coordinator Mr. Aurélien Agbénonci, and the staff of the UN agencies that are supporting Rwanda in its development. In welcoming Mr. Norton at UN premises for a dialogue with UN staff in Rwanda, Mr. Agbénonci stated that the visit of the UN Goodwill Ambassador in Rwanda has highlighted the need to mainstream biodiversity within the United Nations Delivering as One initiative.

Since 2008, at the request of its Government, Rwanda has been one of only eight countries piloting UN reform through a process where all UN agencies in-country "Deliver as One". As an important part of this approach, in partnership with the Government, the United Nations is contributing to the development of sound environmental management capacities at the national and decentralized levels, improving the sustainability of natural resources and expanded biodiversity.

Mr. Norton visited the Eastern and Northern Provinces. Among the areas covered were Akagera National Park, the Nyabarongo River catchment, where he witnessed high levels of siltation, the shores of Lakes Cyohoha, Sake and Mugesera, which are stabilized by a protection buffer of agro-forestry species, extensions of radical terraces for erosion control and crop intensification.

Rwanda is currently undertaking two major biodiversity conservation projects implemented by the Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA) with support of the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The projects are strengthening the national protected area system in the montane forest ecosystem and working to secure the conservation and sustainable use of critical watershed and wetland ecosystems.

GEF, which marks its twentieth anniversary this year, serves as the financial mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity, helping to translate policy into action. Recently, its Chief Executive Officer, Mrs. Monique Barbut, announced that GEF would also support Rwanda in its ambitious Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative announced by the Government earlier this month."

Commenting on the visit, Ambassador Kamanzi said that the Government of Rwanda commended Mr. Norton for his outstanding advocacy work for the preservation of the biodiversity as an important factor of the global sustainable development agenda, and looked forward to strengthened partnership in that endeavour. The Government of Rwanda also expressed its appreciation to the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Mr. Ahmed Djoghlaif, for facilitating the visit.

In concluding his visit, Mr. Norton said: "As UN Goodwill Ambassador I aim to help people realize and better understand the fundamental importance of biodiversity to economic prosperity, environmental health and our future. The commitment and actions of Rwanda for biodiversity and the environment set inspiring examples to draw on in my advocacy work."

Notes to editors

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and entering into force in December 1993, the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources. With 193 Parties, the Convention has near universal participation among countries. The Convention seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats from climate change, through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of technologies and good practices and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety is a subsidiary agreement to the Convention. It seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology. To date, 159 countries plus the European Union have ratified the Cartagena Protocol. The Secretariat of the Convention and its Cartagena Protocol is located in Montreal, Canada. For more information visit www.cbd.int

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