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PRESS RELEASE

Latest initiative under joint ITTO/CBD programme—a new project to support sustainable forest management (SFM) and biodiversity conservation in Africa

Yokohama/Montreal, 25 January 2012 –The International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and the Government of Japan today signed a letter of understanding for funding of 278 million Japanese yen (US\$ 3.6 million) to implement a large capacity-building project to support five Congo Basin countries to provide training on sustainable forest management (SFM) and biodiversity. The contribution from the Government of Japan makes up 82 per cent of the total project budget of US\$ 4.4 million at current exchange rates. Implementation will commence within the next few months.

The project, to be implemented by the Network of Central African Forestry and Environmental Training Institutions (RIFFEAC), focuses on improved training in SFM and biodiversity conservation in Central Africa. It will be implemented through seven RIFFEAC training institutions, in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon and the Republic of Congo. In addition to the development of training materials and training of trainers, the project will provide much needed support for the construction of required training infrastructure. The project will strengthen capacity for the implementation of the ITTO/IUCN guidelines for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in tropical timber production forests, which were elaborated in 2009.

In 2016, at the end of the five-year project, it is expected that more than 250 SFM trainers in the region will be skilled in teaching and demonstrating biodiversity-friendly SFM planning and techniques. This will relieve the estimated annual shortage of 620 qualified forestry executives in the region. The project will also improve communication flows between the five countries, and within other member countries of the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC), which has endorsed the important role of RIFFEAC in promoting the conservation and sustainable use of forest resources in the region.

The project forms part of a collaborative initiative on sustainable management and conservation of tropical forest biodiversity between ITTO and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This initiative, which is also supporting a project on transboundary conservation in the Emerald Triangle area between Thailand and Cambodia, grew out of a memorandum of understanding signed between these organizations in 2010 to foster collaborative work and fund-raising towards their common objectives.

Emmanuel Ze Meka, ITTO Executive Director, stated after the signing of the letter of understanding that: “We cannot over-emphasize the importance of human resource development in achieving SFM and conserving biodiversity. This project, made possible as a result of the generous support of Japan, Switzerland and Belgium will ensure that countries of the Congo Basin are well equipped to sustain into the future their precious forests and the incredible biodiversity they contain.”

Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, concurred, noting that: “This is the first time that the Convention on Biological Diversity is actively supporting capacity-building for sustainable Forest Management, and we are confident that the project will support two of our main objectives: the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. This will benefit present and future generations across Central Africa. I applaud the donor Governments for their vision and leadership to support the collaboration between ITTO and the Convention on Biological Diversity.”

Notes for editors

The International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)

The International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) is an intergovernmental organization promoting the conservation and sustainable management, use and trade of tropical forest resources. It was established in 1986 under the auspices of the United Nations, and has its headquarters in Yokohama, Japan. Its members are signatories of the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA) – the only legally binding, UN-based instrument on tropical forests. They represent a majority of the world's tropical forests and nearly all of the global tropical timber trade. In its work, ITTO facilitates discussion, consultation, field projects and international cooperation on issues relating to the international trade and utilization of tropical timber and the sustainable management of its resource base. ITTO develops internationally agreed policy documents to promote sustainable forest management and forest conservation and assists tropical member countries to adapt such policies to local circumstances and to implement them in the field through projects. In addition, ITTO collects, analyses and disseminates data on the production and trade of tropical timber and funds a range of projects and other action aimed at developing sustainable forest management practices and forest industries at both community and industrial scales. For more information on ITTO's projects and programs visit: www.itto.int. For additional information on this press release, please contact: Eduardo Mansur on +81 45 223 1110 or at rfm@itto.int.

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, 161 countries plus the European Union have ratified the Cartagena Protocol. The Secretariat of the Convention and its Cartagena Protocol is located in Montreal. For more information visit: www.cbd.int. For additional information on this press release, please contact: David Ainsworth on +1 514 287 7025 or at david.ainsworth@cbd.int; or Johan Hedlund on +1 514 287 6670 or at johan.hedlund@cbd.int.
