

# INTERNATIONAL TROPICAL TIMBER ORGANIZATION



## NEWS RELEASE

### International Tropical Timber Council back in Gabon after 15 years

LIBREVILLE, GABON 25 November 2013: The International Tropical Timber Council (ITTC) opened its 49<sup>th</sup> session here today, its first meeting outside the headquarters since the new international treaty to govern its work came into force in December 2011.

The session was officially opened by His Excellency, Mr. Raymond NDONG SIMA, Prime Minister and Head of State of the Government of Gabon, who in his opening speech stated that the vision of the Gabonese Government for the year 2025 is to become a world leader in certified tropical timber (*currently Gabon has around 2 million hectares of FSC certified forest*), with an innovative forest industry, and a forest under sustainable forests management (SFM) which is fully valorized. Mr. NDONG SIMA, also recognized the support of ITTO in establishing the first community forest in Gabon.

Other dignitaries who participated at the opening ceremony included Mr. Gabriel TCHANGO, Minister of Forests and Water of Gabon, who also acknowledged the support of ITTO through several projects, including the promotion of SFM in African forests and the harmonization of norms on SFM, capacity building for auditing forest concessions, and capacity building on forest statistics for further processing of logs. His Excellency Henri DJOMBO, Minister of the Forest Economy and Sustainable Development of the Republic of Congo, highlighted the importance of promoting a 'green economy' as a means for sustainable development, and expressed his support for revising and updating the ITTO Principles and Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Tropical Forests.

In his opening remarks the Chair of the Council, Mr. Josue Trinidad Suazo Bulnes, highlighted the ratification of the ITTA, 2006 by Colombia and Brazil, as well as the accession of Costa Rica as a new member, thus increasing the membership of ITTO to 67, the largest it has ever been.

Mr. Jorge Viana, Senator of the Federal Senate of Brazil, noted that the ITTA, 2006 explicitly recognizes in its objectives important emerging issues such as forest certification, legality, environmental services, and community forestry, all elements that could take the Organization to a new level. He also recognized the valuable assistance of ITTO in Brazil in fighting and controlling illegal logging through the use of satellite images, experience that is being expanded to neighboring countries thanks to the support of 'Fondo Amazonia' and ITTO.

In his opening speech to the Council, Mr. Emmanuel Ze Meka, Executive Director of ITTO stressed the work that is being carried out by the Organization in order to promote intra-African trade of tropical timber and timber products, the sustainable management of the protected forest areas of the Congo Basin, and on the reporting capabilities of the Congo Basin countries on forest-related indicators. Mr. Ze Meka also highlighted the financing of a project in Cote d'Ivoire with the aim of involving refugees and displaced local populations in the restoration of degraded forest lands, thanks to the generosity of the government of Japan.

On the first day of the Session, major items on the agenda included the work carried out by the ITTO-CITES Programme, where the Secretary General of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Mr. John Scanlon, noted the commitment of Gabon towards the protection of wildlife, and reported on the efforts made by member countries in listing timber species in the CITES appendixes with the aim of regulating trade that can ensure sustainability of the species. He commended the ITTO-CITES Programme as an excellent example of inter-agency collaboration. After his interventions a video on the work of African cherry *Prunus Africana* was released.

Major items to be covered during the 49th ITTC session include matters related to article 14 of the ITTA, 2006 (*election of the next Executive Director*), revised and updated Principles and Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forest, the establishment of a regional office for Africa, the strategy on resource mobilization for the Organization, and a knowledge management strategy

The Council is the governing body of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO). It meets at least once a year to discuss a wide-ranging agenda aimed at promoting sustainable tropical forest management (SFM) and the trade of sustainably produced tropical timber.

The International Tropical Timber Council (ITTC) met for the first time in Gabon in May 1998.

For more information on ITTO and/or the 49th Council session go to [www.itto.int](http://www.itto.int).