

**State of play in multilateral environmental forums ahead of the 79<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly, the COP to the Convention on Biological Diversity, UNFCCC and UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the G20 Rio Summit and the INC-5 on plastic pollution with a focus on Gabon's priorities of action against environmental crime, recent initiatives in the context of the One Forest Summit in Libreville last year, the Gabonese co-facilitation of the Partnership for the Congo Basin Forests, as well as discussions within the UN Group of Friends on Wildlife Trafficking in New York, co-chaired by Gabon and Germany (with a potential new UNGA resolution on wildlife trafficking in 2025?)**

First of all, I want to thank you for your invitation to participate at this roundtable organized in the framework of this first virtual dialogue hosted by Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime.

In the run-up to the 79<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly and to the Conferences of Parties of the 3 Rio Conventions, multilateral environmental forums are currently marked by an increasing urgency in the context of global climate and ecological challenges. Gabon, as a regional leader in conservation, will deliver on its side in these discussions.

Environmental crime is one of the critical issues that needs to be addressed, given its significant impact on the 3 level of the biological diversity as defined by the Convention on Biological Diversity. By environmental crime, we mean any activity that contravenes environmental legislation, such as wildlife trafficking of fauna and flora, and illegal exploitation of natural resources or spills of waste and toxic substances. These criminal activities not only threaten our ecosystems but also undermine sustainable development efforts and often serve to fuel other forms of organized crime. We have to be aware that environmental crime is the third most lucrative illegal activity in the world, with profits estimated at an average of 250 billion US dollars a year.

Environmental criminal activities contribute to the loss of biodiversity and environmental degradation on a global scale. These activities focus on certain lucrative species: *the rarer and more endangered a species is, the higher its price will be on the black market*. These activities also target specific ecosystems, in particular forests. In this respect, the countries of the Congo Basin are directly concerned by this threat. Due to their rich soils and biodiversity, they are home to the majority of environmental crime activities (particularly timber and wildlife trafficking, and illegal mining). Therefore, it is easy to understand why, with forest cover of 88% of its national territory, my country has taken on the responsibility of leading by actively participating in various initiatives that allow to conciliate conservation and sustainable development.

**At the national level**, Gabon has developed and adopted stricter legislation and regulations on environmental crime, with longer prison sentences and heavier financial penalties.

**As environmental criminal activities have no borders**, Gabon is one of the countries which advocates for the adoption of a fourth specific protocol to United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). This legally binding international instrument would be specifically dedicated to combating illicit wildlife trafficking. Gabon is also involved in initiatives such as Nature Crime Alliance that aim to strengthen operational capacity to fight crimes against nature or End Wildlife whose objective is to address legal gaps to protect wildlife.

The One Forest Summit, co-organized by Gabon and France in Libreville in 2023, was a further opportunity to launch initiatives to strengthen regional cooperation in forest sustainable management and anti-poaching measures. At the recent 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Parties of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, which Gabon had the honor to co-chair with France, we put forward concrete recommendations for strengthening regional cooperation in this fight. This includes enhancing legal cooperation, developing stricter legislation, improving information sharing, and leveraging technology for better monitoring. These recommendations provide a solid basis for concrete and coordinated actions, while emphasizing the urgency of a global response to this growing threat to biodiversity and international security.

In addition, discussions within the UN Group of Friends on wildlife trafficking, co-chaired by Gabon and Germany, reflect the international commitment to tackle this issue, with the perspective of a new UN General Assembly resolution on wildlife trafficking in 2025.

In the upcoming international forums, including UNGA, COPs on biodiversity climate change and desertification, Gabon will advocate for coordinated international action against environmental crime, highlighting its impact on biodiversity and forest carbon sinks.

In this context, I look forward to our discussion today on how we can collectively address this pressing issue and safeguard our planet's biodiversity for future generations