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Seven African Governments Agree to Protect Over 70% of Africa's Tropical Forests from Unsustainable Palm Oil Development

- Seven African countries will today pledge to protect their tropical forests by shifting to sustainable palm oil production
- The Governments of the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Liberia, the Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone are signing a joint declaration at the COP22 climate change talks in Marrakesh today
- The countries represent over 250 million hectares of tropical forest – 13% of the world's total
- Africa is the next growth spot for palm oil producers, and tropical forests are increasingly being cut down to make room for plantations
- The [declaration](#) and more information is available at the Tropical Forest Alliance www.tfa2020.org, which is hosted at the World Economic Forum

Geneva, Switzerland, 16 November 2016 – The governments of seven African palm oil producing countries, representing over 70% of Africa's tropical forest, will today declare a joint pledge to prioritize sustainable palm oil development with support from some of the world's largest producers, buyers and traders of palm oil.

The [TFA 2020 Marrakesh Declaration for the Sustainable Development of the Oil Palm Sector in Africa](#) is expected to be signed by the Governments of the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Liberia, the Republic of Congo, and Sierra Leone at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP22) in Morocco today.

The Ministers of Agriculture and Environment signing the pledge will agree to place sustainability, human rights and collaboration with industry, indigenous peoples and civil society groups at the heart of the expanding palm oil industry in Africa. Large companies, palm oil producers, NGOs and human rights groups who are partners of the [Tropical Forest Alliance 2020](#) (TFA 2020) are welcoming the move [in a joint statement](#). The secretariat of the TFA 2020 [is hosted at the World Economic Forum](#).

Collectively, the countries who signed the declaration represent over 250 million hectares – 13% of the world's tropical forest. However, deforestation from unsustainable palm oil production causes extensive carbon emissions and contributes to global warming.

Palm oil is the most widely used vegetable oil worldwide and about half of all packaged products sold in supermarkets contain palm oil, according to the [World Wildlife Fund](#). It fuels a \$50 billion global industry, which is projected to rise to \$88 billion a year by 2022. As demand grows, Africa is the next growth spot for palm oil production.

Dominic Waughray, Head of Public-Private Partnerships at the World Economic Forum, said that the [declaration](#) shows how the commitments made by global businesses to remove deforestation from palm oil supply chains are changing the global market.

"These governments recognize the significant market signal that global businesses are providing through their desire to source sustainable palm oil at scale. Through this unprecedented agreement, the African Palm Oil Initiative – with support from the private sector and civil society through the platform of the Tropical Forest Alliance – is now well-positioned to build a multi-country market for sustainable palm oil across West and Central Africa that will improve smallholder incomes and drive greater action on tropical deforestation" he said.

Unilever, a major buyer of palm oil, welcomes the move. "Palm oil, if produced sustainably, can play a key role in poverty alleviation by helping farmers thrive economically while adopting sustainable agricultural and business practices. I am pleased that these countries are demonstrating their commitment to sustainable palm oil by signing the Marrakesh Declaration," said **Paul Polman**, Chief Executive Officer, Unilever.

Government and civil society partners and environmental NGOs [are also welcoming](#) the declaration. **Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim**, co-chair of the International Indigenous People's Forum on Climate Change, the indigenous

people's caucus to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), said it would protect the livelihoods of communities. "Deforestation has often been linked to human rights violations. People are losing access to the land they have always lived on and farmed. I hope this declaration will be an example to the rest of the region and encourage other tropical forest African countries to follow in the commitment."

Nick Hurd, UK Minister of State for Climate Change and Industry, said that climate finance provided by the UK had helped nurture the initiative: "The Marrakech Declaration will enable West and Central African countries to work with companies such as Unilever to secure sustainable jobs and livelihoods, support food security in the region, and prevent environmental degradation and greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation," he said.

Fred Kwame, Regional Director of Africa, WWF, said he welcomed the declaration, adding that it "supports the emergence of a palm oil sector that protects biodiversity, community rights and integrates socio-economic development."

The [Marrakesh Declaration](#) is part of an ongoing public-private partnership taking place in Africa under the [Tropical Forest Alliance 2020 Africa Palm Oil Initiative](#). It represents a public acknowledgement that, while investment in Africa's palm oil sector has the potential to deliver economic benefits to the region, it also brings the risk of significant social and environmental problems, including deforestation, land conflicts, human rights abuses and the destruction of high conservation values.

Since 2014, [Proforest](#), a non-profit group, has coordinated the initiative with companies, governments and civil society organizations. They include [the Consumer Goods Forum](#) and its members Unilever and Nestlé; palm oil producing companies, such as Sime Darby and Wilmar, and a wide range of civil society organizations, including the World Wildlife Fund, Solidaridad, Conservation International and the World Resource Institute.

The goal is to support the widespread implementation of responsible palm oil, as adopted in Marrakesh by national governments, to deliver real transformational change. The Africa Palm Oil Initiative (APOI) is a regional programme of the [TFA 2020](#), a global partnership to remove deforestation from the supply chains of soy, beef, palm oil, and paper and pulp.

The work of the APOI to date has been funded by the United Kingdom government's [Department for International Development](#). The TFA 2020 is hosted by the World Economic Forum, funded by the Governments of the Netherlands, Norway and the UK.

The **signing of the [Marrakesh Declaration](#)** will take place today at 10.30 – 12.00 UTC at COP22 at the UK Pavilion, Green Zone, Bab Ighli, Marrakesh. The event is hosted by the Governments of Liberia and the UK. **A press conference** on the APOI will take place today at 19.00 – 19.30 at the Oumar Room, Kenzi Club Agdal Medina, at the Global Landscapes Forum, Marrakesh.

Notes to Editors:

Our hashtag: #TFA2020

Tropical Forest Alliance: www.tfa2020.org.

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All figures come from [Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015](#), a report by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.

The Tropical Forest Alliance 2020 (TFA 2020) is a global public-private partnership in which partners take action individually to reduce the tropical deforestation associated with the sourcing of commodities such as palm oil, soy, beef, and paper and pulp. The Secretariat of TFA 2020 is hosted at the World Economic Forum, Geneva, Switzerland.

Proforest is a non-profit group that helps companies, governments and others to implement their commitments to the responsible production and sourcing of agricultural commodities and forest products. The group works through a combination of programmes and consultancy services to provide the most appropriate and up-to-date support to its partners and clients. www.proforest.net



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