

REPUBLIC OF RWANDA



Statement delivered
by Honorable Ambassador Stanislas Kamanzi,
Minister of Environment and Lands,
Republic of Rwanda
at the Global Launch
of the International Year of Forests (Forests 2011)
General Assembly Hall, New York 2 February 2011

Excellency the President of the United Nations General Assembly,

Excellency the Under Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs,

The Director of the United Nations Forum for Forests,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honored to address the 9th Session of the United Nations Forum for Forests on behalf of the President of the Republic of Rwanda, His Excellency Paul Kagame, who would have wished to be here in person on this day but was not able owing to prior State commitments.

Allow me, Your Excellency, to extend to you my sincere congratulations for presiding over our present deliberations.

Rwanda is very much delighted to take part to the 9th United Nations Forum Forest, which we value as an opportunity for our Nations to consolidate further our combined global action to tackle issues of sustainable development by way of fostering appropriate management of our ecosystems, where forests remain a vital component. The theme chosen for this session cannot be more befitting with regards to the aims we are called to pursue.

Starting from the Earth Summit in Rio, our Governments agreed to act synergistically to ensure that environment and development are integrated for the utmost fulfillment of our peoples' basic needs including better living standards, and for adequately managed and functional ecosystems, towards a more prosperous future.

The important turnout from all parts of the World, to this 9th UNFF session, as we inaugurate the International Year of Forests is testament to our commitment to live up to that challenge we set for ourselves.

This is an opportune occasion to take stock of our respective achievements, to capitalize on best practices from our success stories, but also to underscore where we have been consistently failing, so we can redefine our objectives in the short, medium and longer terms.

As far as Rwanda is concerned, we have been for long decades, held up by ill-informed policies governance wise, which involved significant negative bearings on the environment. Relative to that, the 1994 genocide and its daunting aftermath came with a host of destructions including those that affected our natural ecosystems and weakened the livelihoods connected with them.

Resolute undertakings were initiated to redress those negative impacts, based on appropriate forward looking policies and commensurate legislation, but most importantly, on the involvement of the citizenry at all levels, by way of crystallizing their ownership in this connection.

We have made significant strides in the protection of the environment, including the rehabilitation of degraded natural forests and their conservation and the functional restoration of marshlands that support critical hydrological systems, and host important biodiversity habitats, concomitantly with the plantation of new forests.

While there is legitimate satisfaction with those good achievements, we are still remained with significant challenges relevant to the long prevailing pressures on land, due to overdependence on land resources to sustain intensified subsistence agriculture driven by inadequate farming patterns. This requires integrated restoration approaches so to efficiently support human activities while providing for sustainable and functional ecosystems.

To effectively change that trend, adequate land use planning and management was appraised as a critical prerequisite to enable realization of synergetic gains from land - based economic activities and the sustainable management of the environment.

On those premises, we have just completed our National Land Use and Development Master Plan, as we are also satisfactorily progressing towards completing systematic land registration and titling.

Having accomplished that provides us with a sound framework for realizing a profound change of our landscapes through systematic restoration country-wide.

Rwanda is immensely privileged to use this moment to make an announcement regarding the Rwanda Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative of which the implementation is set to start during this International Year of Forests. The initiative is a collaborative endeavor with the United Nations Forum for Forests and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and other members of the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape restoration.

I am therefore pleased to announce the following: “ **By Year 2035, Rwanda will have achieved a country-wide reversal of the current degradation of soil; land; water and forest resources in such a way that demonstrably improves the quality and resilience and provides new opportunities for rural livelihoods; underpins sustainable agricultural production and food security, secures adequate water and energy supplies; safeguards the Nation’s biological diversity and supports low carbon economic development**” .

In the short-term by year 2015, the Government its Partners will develop a comprehensive action plan of the initiative and prompt forest landscape restoration activities, in line with national development priorities.

Let me hereby, on behalf of my Government and my President, extend our most sincere gratitude to our development partners that have already expressed support to that initiative in its early stages, and to others that are willing to join in, in this very exciting venture.

I should like, as I conclude, to reemphasize Rwanda’s strong commitment to this initiative, and to the global sustainable development agenda that will benefit all our peoples, within the Country and beyond.

I thank you, Excellencies, for your kind attention.