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## PRESS RELEASE

### **African leaders call for action on massive tree planting in Africa.**

*Private sector is ready for scaling up initiatives, but access to finance is still a bottleneck.*

The initiative 'Forests for the Future, New Forests for Africa' completed its first conference on African soil in the Ghanaian capital Accra on March 16 and 17, 2016. 150 participants were gathered to discuss, share and agree on steps to translate the Paris COP21 commitments on greening the African landscape (the AFR100 initiative) into concrete actions. It was concluded that the private sector is the major force that will make large-scale reforestation possible.

Amongst the participants were former UN Secretary-General H.E. **Kofi Annan**, H.E. **John Agyekum Kufuor**, former president of Ghana and UN Special Envoy on Climate Change, H.E. **Mahama Ayariga**, Minister of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation, Ghana, H.E. **Nii Osah Mills**, Minister of Lands and Natural Resources, Ghana and H.E. **January Makamba**, Minister of State in the Vice-President's Office for Union Affairs and Environment of Tanzania (video message) and **Nana Dasebere Dr. Amankona Diawuo II**, Omanhene of Berekum Traditional Area.

#### **Role of private sector**

At the conference, many forestry plantation companies were present (Green Resources, Form Ghana, Miro, Kilombero, New Forest, Common Lands, Komaza, Eco Planet Bamboo and International Woodland company). Nearly all presented their business cases and track records, some of them together with their financiers. The World Resources Institute put the conference into context by explaining the commitments African countries made under the AFR100 (the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative), the country-led effort to bring 100 million hectares of land in Africa into restoration by 2030. Various development banks such as the Entrepreneurial Development Bank of the Netherlands (FMO), Finnfund, the German development bank DEG, the African Development Bank, the European Investment Bank, and several forestry funds, including Global Environment Fund, Quantum Global, Moringa and Althelia actively participated in the conference and shared their concerns and suggestions.

The above-mentioned forestry plantation companies have set up (or are working on) sustainable forestry projects based on a long-term approach and multi-stakeholder benefit, often under the strong environmental, social and governance requirements of certification schemes like FSC. They involve forestry experts and R&D institutions, engage with local communities and authorities and have benefit sharing programs. They also set aside productive area for conservation and reforestation takes place on degraded land. As these companies build their business on a sound and sustainable business footing, they create employment. Through innovation and efficiency, and they have the ability to deliver vast areas of restored forest landscape.



There is a tendency among international organisations involved in sustainable development, climate change, reforestation and natural resources management to rely on governments alone. This is evidently not sufficient as governments cannot do this alone. This is changing. "I notice that they are now more open to private sector involvement. This will make the difference," stated former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, keynote contributor to this conference.

"The task of greening 100 million hectares of (degraded) land in Africa by 2030 is a task of mammoth proportion," says Minister Nii Osah Mills during his speech when addressing the audience.

### **Joining hands**

Over 40 speakers from all stakeholder groups and many African and western countries addressed the participants on the importance of reforestation and restoring degraded landscape. They shared the vision on the need for beautiful forests and the impact forests have on the livelihoods of people, biodiversity and climate mitigation. It was impressive to see that private sector companies – plantation and financial sector – as well as governments have this overall vision as their guiding principle for reforestation.

Instead of narrowing their contributions to their own stakeholder needs, organisations opened up by reaching out to each other, by requesting help and by working together. They all expressed this commitment by publicly signing up ready to offer help to each other in paving the way for a better enabling environment for commercial forest landscape restoration, like access to finance and liberal sharing of R&D and information.

### **Communication and education**

Although the need for reforestation and the way forward to realise this was well understood amongst the participants, the overall impression was that the general public at large as well as the lion's share of the financial sector in general remains still unaware of the challenge at hand and their stake in it. Therefore, much more needs to be done to intensify the communication about the need to scale up the efforts of commercial reforestation companies and the impact this has beyond simply planting trees. This is key for achieving successes in the future.

At the same time, educational initiatives will need to induce a change of attitude towards the role of trees and forests for human welfare. At the opening of the conference, school children expressed their pleas for forest conservation. Their message was heard: "I will set up a program to have all children of primary schools plant a tree every year. This will result in hundreds of thousands of trees every year and even more important: the children will learn the importance of planting trees and the importance of maintaining them," emphasised H.E. Minister **Mahama Ayariga**. "I will set up a similar program for the Ghanaian farmers," he added.

### **Initiative firmly established**

The movement 'Forests for the Future, New Forests for Africa!' was initiated by Form international and Nyenrode Business University. The conference, which was held in Accra is seen as a first step in this movement. Participants endorsed the value of movement and pledged their commitment to collaborate in order to realise the enormous task laid down in the AFR100 ambition.



The enthusiasm for this movement was shown by Tanzanian Minister of State H.E. **January Makamba**. He indicated that he was impressed by the design and set-up of the movement and hence invited all participants to come to Tanzania in a similar setting in November 2016, to show progress, share best practices and take next steps.

**Website:** [www.newforestsforafrica.org](http://www.newforestsforafrica.org)

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*Partners who made the conference possible:*



**End of press release**

*Note to the editors (not for publication):*

**Photos of the conference on request.**

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