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**\*\*Zoom Press Briefing in Advance of One Forest Summit in Libreville, Gabon\*\***

**Thursday, 23 February 2023**

**7:00 a.m. New York//12:00 p.m. London//1:00 p.m. Paris//1:00 p.m. Libreville**

**Experts: Congo Basin Rainforests Critical for Climate and Biodiversity but Major Science Gaps Remain as Threats Rapidly Expand**

*On eve of global forest gathering, experts push for action plan to fill massive gaps in knowledge about the Congo Basin rainforests — one of the least-explored corners of the Earth*

*Plan replicates successful effort in Brazil that unleashed groundswell of new research, funding and regional science capacity*

The Congo Basin in Central Africa contains the planet's second-largest expanse of tropical forest (after the Amazon Basin), and the largest tropical peatland on earth. The Congo remains a critical net sink for the excess carbon-dioxide that humanity spews into the atmosphere each year, whereas the Amazon switched from net sink to net source of CO<sub>2</sub> over the past decade.

Fortunately, the recent election in Brazil offers hope for the Amazon's future. For the Congo Basin, the upcoming One Forest Summit -- co-hosted in Libreville March 1-2 by the governments of Gabon and France -- promises new opportunities for regional development that would avoid unsustainable forest loss. The One Forest Summit will be preceded by two days of science meetings to lay the groundwork for a synthesis of Congo Basin Science and a massive new research program to build regional knowledge and capacity, modeled on the successful Large-Scale Biosphere Atmosphere Experiment in Amazonia (LBA) collaboration between Brazil, the US, and Europe.

According to [research](#), the tropical forests of the Congo Basin are more carbon-dense, more efficient at slowing climate change and more resistant to our changing climate than are Amazon tropical forests. Like the Amazon, they are home to diverse indigenous cultures. They are also habitat for our closest primate relatives, and additional extraordinary biodiversity.

**WHO:**

- **Bila-Isia Inogwabini**, a biodiversity specialist from Catholic University of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo
- **Bonaventure Sonké**, a plant taxonomist and forest ecologist from the University Yaounde, Cameroon, who has discovered many new species, including new species of coffee
- **Simon Lewis**, an expert on Congo Basin peatlands from the University of Leeds and University College London
- **Emma Torres**, a strategic coordinator with the Science Panel for the Amazon (SPA) and Vice-President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network

- **Daniel Zarin**, a forest and climate scientist who is executive director, forests and climate change, Wildlife Conservation Society

**WHAT:** Experts on the briefing will outline the importance of Congo Basin forests and call for a Congo Basin Climate Science Initiative to deploy the scientific underpinning of a forest protection plan. Many of the speakers co-authored [this comment piece in Nature](#).

**WHEN:** 23 February 2023 at 7:00 a.m. New York//12:00 p.m. London//1:00 p.m. Paris//1:00 p.m. Libreville

**RSVP:** To receive the link and submit questions in advance, please write to Florence Wood, [fwood@burness.com](mailto:fwood@burness.com)

**WHY:** Despite their critical role in storing carbon and sheltering threatened species like gorillas, chimpanzees and elephants, the Congo River Basin is shrouded in mystery. Many believe these forests are more dangerous and impenetrable than their Latin American and Southeast Asian counterparts. As a result, data on the forests of Brazil and Southeast Asia is abundant, while equivalent information is missing for the Congo Basin. This lack of data clouds our understanding of the role these forests can play in addressing global and local climate and biodiversity crises. Only with more research can governments in the region devise the best action plans for how to manage their forests in a way that serves communities and livelihoods and promotes climate and biodiversity goals.

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**More Information:**

- The Congo Basin supports the livelihoods of 80 million people.
- The forests generate rainfall that reaches the Sahel and, therefore, supports an additional set of rural Africans — as many as 300 million.
- These ecosystems shelter forest elephants, gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos.
- Between 2008 and 2017, the Congo Basin received just 11.5% of international financial flows for forest protection and sustainable management in tropical areas, compared with 55% for Southeast Asia and 34% for the Amazon region, according to [Nature](#).

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