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CONFERENCES OF AFRICA  
AND MADAGASCAR

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**SECAM POSITION PAPER ON THE CREATION OF AN AFRICAN ECCLESIAL  
NETWORK FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE CONGO BASIN FOREST**

1. As the SECAM Standing Committee, we acknowledge that the Congo Basin Forest is the second largest tropical rainforest on earth after the Amazon Forest of Latin America. The two forests together, represent "richly biodiverse lungs of our planet because these are for the entire earth and the future of humanity"<sup>1</sup>.
2. We recognize that a Consultative Workshop was organized by our SECAM Justice, Peace and Development Commission (JPDC) with a view of creating an African Church network on the management of the Equatorial Forest. We are also aware that this was done in collaboration with the Jesuit Social Apostolate in Africa and Caritas Africa. We note that the participants of the workshop were representatives drawn from the National and Regional Episcopal Conferences from the neighbouring countries of the Congo Basin Forest. The holding of the workshop was to fulfil a recommendation from the Congress of National and Regional Justice and Peace Commissions, held in Namibia in 2015. This was a recommendation which stated that:  
*"Africa Justice and Peace Commissions are committed to create an African Church Network regrouping, in particular, the neighboring countries of the Equatorial Forest for transparent and responsible management for this common legacy which is meant for the entire humanity"*.
3. We note with gratitude, the consultative nature of the process so far and we urge that it must continue in respect of the principle of subsidiarity. The JPDC must continue to closely collaborate with their counterparts from the National and Regional Conferences around the Congo Basin, who ought to be the primary actor for this initiative.
4. Key Issues to take into account are:
  - a) That the creation of this initiative must have clear endorsement and support by the two Regional Episcopal Conferences of ACEAC<sup>2</sup> and ACERAC<sup>3</sup> before this initiative becomes an Africa wide activity;

<sup>1</sup> Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'*, No. 33

<sup>2</sup> Association des Conférences Episcopales de l'Afrique Centrale


<sup>3</sup> Association des Conférences Episcopales de la Régionales de l'Afrique Centrale

- b) That SECAM will fully embrace the development of appropriate policies and planned activities by the Regional and National Episcopal Conferences neighbouring the Congo Basin for its protection and integral community management; and the appointment of suitable Members as their Official Representative to the Coordination Body of this Network.
- c) We mandate the Justice, Peace and Development Commission of SECAM to be the lead agency in coordinating and facilitating this initiative and to promote it at Continental and International levels.

This endorsement is in agreement with the current SECAM Strategic Plan which states that "the respect of the creation" is fulfilled by "employing the wealth of raw materials for the common good not for the profit of the few, and through respect for the ecosystem, protecting such essential resources as land and water."<sup>4</sup>

Signed:

+ *Gabriel Mbilingi*



Most Rev. Gabriel MBILINGI  
Archbishop of Lubango (Angola)  
**President of SECAM**

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<sup>4</sup> Secam Strategic Plan 2013-2018