

## Rwanda Pledges Nationwide Forest Landscape Restoration

**NEW YORK, New York**, February 4, 2011 (ENS) - The African country of Rwanda, torn by civil war in the 1990s, has vowed to achieve country-wide restoration of its degraded soil, water, land and forest resources during the next 25 years.

Rwanda's announcement was a highlight of the 9th UN Forum on Forests, a two week meeting that concluded today at United Nations headquarters in New York.

On Wednesday, the forum launched the International Year of Forests 2011, as designated by the UN General Assembly.

Rwandan Minister of Land and Environment Stanislas Kamanzi announced Rwanda's Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative at the launch ceremony with reference to the war that tore the small central African country apart and devastated the environment.

"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," Kamanzi said.



Trees were cut to supply shelter and fuel for refugees and internally displaced people in Rwanda's Butare Prefecture, 1994. (Photo by A. Hollman courtesy [UNHCR](#))



**Stanislas Kamanzi**  
**Minister of Land and Environment, Rwanda**  
(Photo by Paulo Filgueiras courtesy UN)

Since then, Rwanda has made "significant strides in the protection of the environment," including forest and wetlands restoration, said Kamazi, but much work remains to be done.

"We want to make sure that our environment can sustain all the economic activities identified as main drivers of the national economy," he said.

"By the year 2015," Kamanzi told forum participants, "the government and its partners will develop a comprehensive action plan of the initiative and prompt forest landscape restoration activities, in line with national development priorities."

The plan will be designed to achieve sustainable agricultural production, low carbon economic development, adequate water and energy supplies, and new opportunities for rural livelihoods in the small country, about the size of the U.S. state of Maryland.

Safeguarding the nation's rich wildlife, such as the Critically Endangered mountain gorilla, is also part of Rwanda's commitment and will benefit the country's economy as visitors come from around the world, seeking a glimpse of the rare animals.

"We need expert advice, which, strengthened by local knowledge, will enable the development of landscape strategies and will translate existing political commitment into real and rapid action on the ground," said Kamanzi.

Rwanda has turned for advice to the nonprofit International Union for Conservation of Nature, IUCN, the world's oldest and largest global environmental network - with more than 1,000 government and NGO member organizations, and some 11,000 volunteer scientists in more than 160 countries.

"What Rwanda announced is the biggest commitment a country can make to giving nature a helping hand and reversing deforestation and forest degradation," said IUCN Director General Julia Marton-Lefèvre.

"If other countries are inspired by Rwanda and follow suit," she said, "then what we could be witnessing is the beginning of the largest restoration initiative the world has ever seen."



**Mountain gorilla mother and baby in Rwanda's Volcano National Park, August 2005** (Photo by [Sarel Kromer](#))



**Rwanda's Nyungwe National Forest** (Photo by [Klingeit70](#))

The Rwandan government, IUCN, the Secretariat of the UN Forum on Forests and others will work together towards delivering forest restoration at the landscape level. At the Forum on Forests, the government of Canada and the Global Environmental Facility also expressed their support for the Rwandan initiative.

"Past actions can have a profound effect on lives and the environment, as we can witness all over the world," said Jan McAlpine, UN Forum on Forests director. "But what makes Rwanda exceptional, is the country's willpower to rebuild people's lives, restore their land and show the world

that restoring damaged ecosystems is possible."

The Forum on Forests Secretariat estimates there are approximately 1.5 billion hectares (5.8 million square miles) worldwide that offer opportunities for forest landscape restoration. Asia and Africa each have about 500 million hectares (1.93 million square miles) available for restoration without impacting agricultural activities.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimates 13 million hectares (50,000 square miles) of the world's forests are lost every year, mainly as a result of converting forested lands to other uses.

At least 1.6 billion people directly depend on forests for their livelihoods, the majority of them poor inhabitants of areas next to forests; while an estimated 60 million people live in forests, many of them members of indigenous communities.

"A highlight of UNFF9 was the announcement of the Rwandan government's plans to restore the country's degraded landscapes border-to-border," said Stewart Maginnis, IUCN's director of environment and development. "These plans are bold and much needed and we urge other countries to recognize the potential of healthy forests and to commit to restoring their lands."