

1ST AFRICA COLLOQUIUM ON ENVIRONMENTAL RULE OF LAW



Over 160 representatives of Africa's judiciary and law enforcement authorities converged in Nairobi for the 1st Africa Colloquium on Environmental Rule of Law that was jointly organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Office of the Chief Justice of Kenya, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Judiciary Training Institute of Kenya (JTI).

The delegates resolved to ensure the enforcement and practical implementation of environmental law, which they described as a pre-condition to achieving inclusive, sustainable development in the region.

Ibrahim Thiaw, Deputy Executive Director of UNEP said, "The success in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 'Africa We Want' agenda hinges on our ability to harness Africa's bountiful natural resources to power peaceful, inclusive and sustainable development. Guaranteeing citizens' participation, access to justice and information in environmental matters, combating the illegal trade in wildlife and other forms of environmental crimes, and harmonizing legal frameworks between countries will create equal opportunities for all, help to eliminate poverty and ensure sound management of Africa's ecosystems."

The Chief Justice of Kenya, Hon. Dr. Willy Mutunga, in his welcoming remarks, challenged participants to come up with viable recommendations on areas and priorities for action and formulate mechanisms for their respective implementation.

Delegates called for the development of a roadmap that would lead to the full regional implementation of Principle 10 of the Rio de Janeiro Declaration and UNEP's 'Bali Guidelines', which - with their pillars of access to information, access to justice and public participation - are essential to promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development.

"A lot of progress has been made in both legislative reforms and judicial interventions in Africa. The way forward is to develop a roadmap for regional instruments on the implementation of Rio +10 and the Bali guidelines," said Prof Muhammed Twafiq Ladan, from Zaria University, Nigeria.

The colloquium offered an opportunity to exchange information and share good practices in advancing environmental rule of law in Africa. These success stories highlighted the crucial role that the judiciary, prosecutors, auditors, government representatives, civil society and the private sector and other related enforcement officials play - individually and collectively - in advancing environmental rule of law in the region.

The colloquium concluded with The Nairobi Statement, which *inter alia* called upon African countries to integrate mechanisms to ensure adequate access to information, public participation and justice in environmental matters through a regional process and framework. The Statement further called for integration of environmental law into the curricula of judicial and other training institutes. It also emphasized the need for the establishment of a regional network on environmental rule of law to facilitate regular and continuous exchange of information, knowledge and experiences in the region.

The colloquium recognized the critical role of mutual legal assistance and urged all countries in the African region to enhance trans-boundary cooperation to combat the illegal wildlife trade and other environmental crimes.