

CLOSING REMARKS AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE NICHE PROJECT, 29TH MARCH 2017

Edgar Buhanga Araali.

The representatives of the CEO RDB,

The representative of the Director General ICCN

The Executive Secretary GVTC,

Members of the Project Consortium

All representatives of various Universities here present

All partners in your various capacities

Experts from the three countries and Amsterdam

Invited Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It gives me much pleasure and honour to have been chosen among the many to perform this humble task of closing this workshop where we have all witnessed the birth of yet another project within the Greater Virunga Landscape.
2. It is gratifying to me to note that this project has been anchored within the GVTC ó it is gratifying because this is partly the reason why GVTC was formed to ensure coordination of initiatives of regional nature within the GVL.
3. Therefore for some us who have been at the forefront of ensuring the birth and growth of GVTC, we take pride whenever such initiatives are launched within the landscape and more so when GVTC has a role to play in such initiatives.
4. The NICHE project comes at a time when the region is still grappling with a number of challenges with respect to Natural Resources management and conflicts; conflicts of varying dimensions and magnitudes; ranging from those conflicts that relate directly to the use of natural resources management to those that involve armed groups.
5. These challenges therefore require specialised skills and knowledge to be able to address such challenges and I am happy that the project we have launched today will go a long way in addressing these knowledge gaps.

6. To the Consortium, the marriage you have entered today is a marriage within an existing marriage ó a marriage between three countries of the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda. The positive element in all this is the fact that this project finds a well-founded entry point. However the second dimension is that the project needs to take into account political and country parities without compromising the regional approach fundamentals.
7. At a strategic level, I wish to reiterate UWA's commitment to the ratification process of the Treaty that was signed in 2015 ó a process that will conclude the 25 years of informal collaboration but more importantly a process that will ensure further commitments by the Partner States especially in as far as funding of GVTC and ensuring its sustainability is concerned.
8. For the Participating Universities in the region, I wish to implore you to work towards the common good of our peoples by imparting skills and knowledge that will leverage and address challenges of NRM and conflict management and resolution within the landscape. I have no doubt in my mind therefore that at the end of the four years, you will have delivered to the expectations of not only the people in this room but also the wider society that we serve.
9. I wish pledge on behalf of UWA and the entire GVTC Board all the support to ensure the success of this project as we continue to promote prudent management of our natural heritage within the GVL in order to work towards the socio-economic transformation and the livelihoods of our people across our political borders.
10. I acknowledge the efforts of all those who have worked tirelessly in the past to foster collaboration mechanisms and efforts that have brought us this far.
11. I thank the organisers of this workshop and those who have prepared papers that have been informative but have also been a basis for our discussions.
12. I acknowledge and thank all the development partners that have financially supported the transboundary collaboration efforts both in the past and today.

13. I wish in a special way to thank the Royal Kingdom of the Netherlands for the invaluable financial support ever since GVTC was founded. We have truly walked together in a genuine partnership. As a GVTC Board we don't take your support for granted

14. Dear participants we all now understand the different roles we are expected to play in this new project. I request all of us either individually or collectively to effectively play our different roles for the success of this project.

15. I look forward the successful to implementation of this project with great enthusiasm and hope over the next four years.

16. I wish all of you journey mercies back to your various places of aboard

17. It is now my humble pleasure and honour to declare this workshop on the official launch of the NICHE project in the Greater Virunga Landscape officially closed.

I Thank you all

Conserving for Generations