

Sierra Leone's President tells BirdLife World Congress that global challenges require local and national actions

Title

The President of Sierra Leone, His Excellency Ernest Bai Koroma, sent a video message directly to the BirdLife World Congress in Ottawa.

He has pledged to continue to work with the BirdLife Partnership, especially the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (BirdLife in Sierra Leone) and the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK), to protect the Gola Forest in perpetuity, to conserve its biodiversity and ecosystem services and the livelihoods of its people, and as an important contribution to the fight against global climate change.

The Gola Forest is part of BirdLife's Forests of Hope Programme, which aims to prevent deforestation or restore natural forest covering at least 5 million hectares by 2020.

Via a video message, the President reaffirmed his commitment to the establishment of a transboundary Peace Park, shared with neighbouring Liberia, to demonstrate the unity of the people of the Gola Forest and of the greater Mano River basin, which encompasses both countries.

Speaking by video link to the delegates of the BirdLife World Congress, the President stressed the importance of national and local contributions to solving global problems.

“You are all gathered here today, from more than 100 countries, because of the common and global challenges facing the world and its people. The common threats, such as climate change and the depletion of natural resources, warrant global strategies. Most importantly however, they also require local and national actions.”

Sierra Leone shares with other West African countries one of the world's richest tropical

forests, the Upper Guinea Forest.

“My government takes great pride in having recently declared over 70,000 hectares of the Gola Rainforest as a National Park”, he said.

“From studies by the BirdLife Partners in Sierra Leone and the UK (the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone and the RSPB), we know that through the sale of carbon credits and other innovative schemes, we may be able to secure the finances necessary to continue the protection of the Gola forest and sustaining local livelihoods.”

He explained that his Government has opted to develop a REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries) carbon project in the National Park, the first of its kind not only for Sierra Leone, but for the whole of West Africa.

The President recalled his pledge to establish the transboundary Peace Park, made jointly with Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the President of Liberia, in May 2009. In the four years since, the project, funded by the European Union, and implemented by the BirdLife Partnership in collaboration with the Forest Departments of both countries, and with the support and participation of forest communities, has moved much closer to the goal of creating a 200,000 hectare Protected Area.

The President said that the Greater Gola Transboundary Peace Park is of great significance to both Liberia and Sierra Leone. “It demonstrates the oneness of the Gola people who live on both sides of the border, promotes our common vision of unity, peace and development in the Mano River basin, and asserts our collective aspirations for a peaceful future where our people and forests prosper.

“I am confident that our continued collaboration with the BirdLife Partnership will ensure that this initiative protects our environmental inheritance, promotes biodiversity in the Mano River basin, and enhances sustainable development for the citizens of both Liberia and Sierra Leone”, the President concluded.

[Read the transcript of the speech](#)

The BirdLife Partnership’s work to conserve Gola Forest dates to 1989. A partnership agreement between the Forestry Division of the Government of Sierra Leone, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (BirdLife in Sierra Leone) and the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) was reached in 1990 to develop a new management plan, maintain the forest boundaries and to run an environmental education programme. These partners have worked under the banner of the Gola Forest Programme since then, and the work at Gola is an important component of the RSPB’s wide tropical forests programme, which includes work in six other African and Asian countries.

In the Liberia part of the forest the Society for the Conservation of Nature in Liberia (SCNL - BirdLife in Liberia) and the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) with the BirdLife International Secretariat secured a two year grant in Spring 2013 from the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation under the title “*The Gola National Park: realising its vast potential*”. This

project builds on “*Across the River – Trans-boundary Peace Park Project for Sierra Leone and Liberia*”, which is a four-year European Union (EuropeAid fund) grant to Vogelbescherming Nederland (VBN; BirdLife in the Netherlands) aimed at securing long term conservation benefits, improved natural resources and biodiversity conservation and global carbon storage of the most critical habitats of the Upper Guinea Forest ecosystem.