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Subject: France Presses Cameroon to Create a "Vision" for Managing its Forests

1. (SBU) **Summary:** France's special envoy for environmental protection pressed the Government of the Republic of Cameroon (GRC) and, to a lesser extent, civil society to create a badly needed strategic "vision" for managing its forests and balancing environmental protection with agricultural and other investment. He also suggested that France is hoping to follow up and complement Secretary Clinton's November 2012 anti-poaching event in Washington with a similar event -- perhaps in Central Africa, with Secretary Kerry's participation -- as a means of highlighting broad international concern about wildlife poaching in this region. **End Summary.**

2. (SBU) As part of a regional trip, Nicolas Hulot, the Special Envoy of President of the French Republic for Protection of the Planet, visited Cameroon June 13-16. A leading environmental NGO activist, author and television personality in France prior to entering government in December 2012, Hulot met with a range of environmental activists and ministry officials during his three day visit. According to French diplomats, Hulot pressed the GRC to create some sort of strategic vision for managing its important forest reserves, while also creating the space and the legal framework for agricultural and other investments that are crucial to Cameroon's economic development. He also urged Cameroon to continue and expand its efforts to protect Central Africa's elephants and other animal species and to take a greater leadership role in the region on that front. On June 14, Hulot led a lively discussion of these issues over a lunch hosted by French Ambassador to Cameroon Bruno Gain, that included GRC Cabinet officials, NGO activists, and resident diplomats whose missions are active in the environmental sector.

No Strategic Vision

3. (SBU) At the lunch, environmental activists and diplomats, including the Executive Secretary of the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC), highlighted the GRC's lack of a coherent, interagency strategy for balancing the protection of Cameroon's vast forest resources with the urgent need for investment in agro-industry and with the economic development needs of local populations. They pointed to the fact that Cameroon's highly

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centralized decision-making process frequently produces paralysis, citing the numerous initiatives such as REDD+ that have sparked interest here but are still awaiting the green light to move forward. That over-centralization also prevents Yaounde-based officials from consulting adequately with the local communities that are directly impacted by poachers, the attribution of forestry and farming concessions, or other projects, the activists argued. These communities have become increasingly vocal, and there is a morale imperative to include them in decision-making and to share with them the revenues that forests can generate. Diplomats joined the activists in criticizing the fact that, with 66 cabinet members and 36 ministries, several claim jurisdiction or the bureaucratic lead on any given investment or conservation initiative, but then find themselves hamstrung when other ministries also seek to exert influence. This has prevented several forest protection initiatives from going forward, they argued, and also has made it nearly impossible to de-conflict efforts to permit agricultural and mining investments in many areas. They cited numerous aborted or yet-to-begin hydro-electric and mining projects, as well as the proposed American Herakles Farms palm oil investment, which has turned into a international debacle.

4. (SBU) Hulot admitted that, earlier in his career, he had been highly critical of industrial-scale agricultural projects in developing countries with important forest resources. He now acknowledges the important role such projects can play in the development of a country like Cameroon, but pleaded with GRC Minister of Environment Pierre Hele and Secretary of State for Forests and Wildlife Alhaji Koulsoumi Boukar to only authorize such projects in the framework of a coordinated, interagency strategy that provides the space and the legal frameworks for them to exist alongside protected areas and to the benefit of local communities. He cited, for example, countries like Brazil that have sought to encourage massive agro-industry while also working with local communities and environmental activists to protect the environment.



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A French Follow-On to Secretary Clinton's Anti-Poaching Event?

6. (SBU) Separately, Hulot made clear that one of his key priorities was adding the French Government's voice to the widespread international concern about the slaughter of elephants in Central Africa. He praised former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for holding an event in Washington in November and for writing to Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS or CEEAC) Heads of State in December to call international attention to the issue, as well as the similar statements of support that event prompted among Central African heads of state (Reftel). Privately, Hulot told the DCM that his Government was in the initial stages of planning some type of follow-on event, to be held in France or perhaps either in Cameroon or Gabon. He hoped Secretary Kerry and former Secretary Clinton might be able to participate, and said details would soon be forthcoming.

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