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### Strengthening environmental preservation capacity in “the land of a thousand hills”

#### Initial steps

In June 2017, under the auspices of a formal agreement with the Italian *Arma dei Carabinieri* (AdC), FAO committed to joint activities in support of several Sustainable Development Goal targets, principally those on food security and nutrition and supporting local people’s livelihoods. A key component of this Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) focuses on training in forestry and environmental conservation and preservation and in the management and planning of critical events also induced by climate change.



©FAO. Signature of the Memorandum of Understanding, 14 June 2017, with Tullio Del Sette, Comandante Generale, Arma dei Carabinieri, and José Graziano da Silva, Director-General, FAO.

A first, key MoU activity was the organization of a one-week event held in Rome in December 2017, hosted by the AdC, to prepare the ground for an exchange of information on training, with the aim

of streamlining common FAO-AdC activities. This includes future work in areas such as illegal logging, the European Union (EU) Forest Law, Enforcement, Governance and Trade Programme and timber regulation, wildlife protection and biodiversity conservation, bioenergy, forest fires, remote sensing, forest inventory and ecosystem monitoring.



©FAO.Training course FAO–Carabinieri, December 2017.

An additional activity to be developed within the framework of the MoU covers the development of a project to train national park rangers in various regions of the world, through strengthening of capacity in environmental conservation and preservation, and supporting the livelihoods of people living in protected areas. In early 2017, and related to this MoU provision, a separate and similar agreement was signed by the AdC and the Government of Rwanda. Subsequently, the request from H.E. Francine Tumushime, Minister of Lands and Forestry, Rwanda, for multi-area technical support resulted, in January 2018, in the fielding of a joint AdC-FAO mission to Bugesera district in the Eastern province of Rwanda. Of the priority areas identified by the Minister – enforcing and establishing a land-use monitoring and evaluation information system, capacity building and development, and supporting the elaboration and implementation of the District forest management plans – the January mission was tasked with organizing training. Specifically, given the government’s prioritization of environmental conservation and preservation, it asked for support in improving the training of police officers and national park rangers.



©Rwanda National Police. Opening ceremony of the training course for police officers and national park rangers, Rwanda National Police Counter Terrorism Training Center, Nyamata.

### **The “land of a thousand hills”**

Famed for the magnificence of its landscapes and wildlife, Rwanda is known as **the “land of a thousand hills”**, a relatively small tropical country in Eastern Africa, it is also the land of mountain gorillas, which live in one of the country’s numerous national parks and reserves. These include the Volcanoes national park, the park of the gorillas, in the north-west, the Akagera national park on the eastern board with the United Republic of Tanzania, and the Nyungwe national park on the south-western border with Congo.

### **Government action on environmental conservation and preservation**

In Rwanda, ensuring the integrity of the gorilla populations, of other wildlife and of their habitats is a national priority, and this in part fuels the government’s drive to take stronger measures on environmental conservation and preservation. Adopting a holistic approach, it recognizes that improving sustainable agriculture and forestry and addressing people’s livelihoods requires the integration of policies and actions. Moreover, it recognizes the increasing importance of preventive action, given the mounting pressures on the country’s natural resources to accommodate a growing population that now stands at 11 million. This pressure extends to the national parks, which, given their prevalence throughout the country, are one of the country’s main sources of income, principally through income from tourism and the host of non-wood forest products they provide. Integration of the national parks in national planning through sustainable environmental conservation and preservation is thus fundamental, for the people and communities living both inside the parks and at their edge.

At ground and operational level, responsibility for environmental conservation and preservation is vested in teams of national park rangers, who work inside the national parks, and in police forces in the rest of the country. The police are also called upon to advise the local and national authorities on the crucially important task of deterring environmental crimes, such as poaching, deforestation, forest fires, waste disposal. Thus together police and national park rangers exercise a strong role in the population, and are expected to engage regularly with local stakeholders, including farmers, villagers and people living in and outside the parks.

### **AdC-FAO national park ranger training course**

Fifty students comprising Rwandan police officers and national park rangers took part in the week-long course. Two FAO experts were engaged to provide the technical content, while the AdC focused on the prevention and management of forest fires, police enforcement and regulations, anti-poaching and instruction in international conventions such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). In its core lectures, FAO addressed the inter-related issues of soil management and conservation, forestry, sustainable forest management, deforestation and the causes of illegal logging.



©FAO/Del Lungo. Class session led by FAO during the training course for national park rangers.

Training sessions were also held on the Google modules of Collect Earth and Earth Map, free, online resource tools jointly developed by FAO that allow users to analyze high and very high resolution satellite imagery for a wide variety of purposes. In Rwanda, their applications can be used to assess deforestation and at ground level soil erosion and soil protection.





©FAO/Del Lungo. Joint FAO–Arma dei Carabinieri field training in Bugesera, Rwanda.

### Course assessments and next steps

A test held at the end of the week had a high success rate with almost the entire class passing with good marks. The national park rangers were also asked to evaluate the course content, at both the beginning and the end of their training. The results are still being evaluated but eventually they will provide useful indicators of the trainees' interest in and receptiveness to the subjects learned, as well as of the need to scale up joint courses between technical experts and environmental police officers on environmental conservation and preservation in the country.

The initial feedback from the Government of Rwanda to the joint FAO–Arma dei Carabinieri initiative has been appreciative and positive, and it has already requested further support for training of Rwandan forestry officers as well as an additional course for intermediate-level police officers and national park rangers to strengthen their background in forestry, agriculture and the environment. This will help ensure deepening of related capacity in the country as well as the continuous transfer of knowledge and experience. One manifestation of the success of their training is that police and national park rangers will be in a position to advise senior government and park management on actions to be taken on environmental conservation and preservation.

In FAO, the MoU's implementation is being undertaken by the Forestry and the Climate Change, Biodiversity, Land and Water Departments. For the Italian Government, the joint activities are being overseen by the Permanent Representation of Italy to FAO in Rome and the Italian Embassy in Rwanda. If deemed a success, the Rwanda mission will also be used to gauge the potential for scaling up similar AdC-FAO-led training in environmental conservation and preservation in other countries of Africa and in other regions of the world.

#### Read more:

- For further details of the FAO-*Arma dei Carabinieri* Rwanda mission, please contact FAO Senior Forestry Expert, Alberto Del Lungo, at [Alberto.DelLungo@fao.org](mailto:Alberto.DelLungo@fao.org).