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**Opening Address at the 6th Forum
of Africa-Belgium Business Week 2019 (ABBW 2019)**

March 3, 2019

Translated from French

Your Excellency, President of the Central African Republic,
Prime Minister Charles Michel,
Madam Provincial MP, Kibassa Maliba,
Ministers,
The Consul General of the CAR, Dimitri Mozer,
The President of Africa Rise,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bonjour!

I am honored to be greeting you today, for the second consecutive year as President of Africa-Belgium Business Week, in the prestigious and beautiful setting of the Château du Lac Hotel, here in Genval.

This sixth edition is special because we have the honor of welcoming representatives of a country that has experienced political, communal and security-related turmoil. These are now in the process of being resolved, but not long ago they were problems that seemed insoluble. The pages of history of this beautiful country are being rewritten.

I repeat the words of President Faustin Archange Touadera, who said: "My ambition is to use all possible strategies to make the CAR a country without weapons, and one that turns resolutely towards its development."

These two days of the forum are witnesses to that process.

First of all, allow me to fulfill a good duty, and that is to thank, especially, the representatives of Africa Rise, the organizers of this forum. Their perseverance and professionalism make this event so special and unique, year after year.

Your Excellency Mr. President, Prime Minister, ladies and gentlemen, the Central African Republic is a country I know well, from having stayed there many times, many years ago, when I worked for De Beers, a large mining group and a member of the World Diamond Council, which was running exploration operations in the country. I have fond memories of the CAR, and have very good friends there.

For more than two years I have been Executive Director of the World Diamond Council, which is an organization working very closely with the Central African Republic within the framework of the Kimberley Process, which itself is an organization in which your country is a very active member.

Allow me to briefly introduce you to the World Diamond Council (WDC) and the Kimberley Process (KP).

The WDC is an organization that represents the diamond industry, from the mine to the retail jewelry store. It is also the only body representing the industry in the Kimberley Process.

The KP was created in 2000 with the goal of eradicating conflict diamonds by preventing them from accessing the legitimate rough diamond market. Countries affected by conflict diamonds in the late 1990s were Sierra Leone, Liberia and Angola.

The KP is composed of the representatives of governments of 81 member countries, and observers, which include the World Diamond Council, the Civil Society Coalition and other independent bodies, which are the Association of African Diamond Producers (ADPA) and the Diamond Development Initiative (DDI).

The KP launched the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme in 2003, which was co-created with the World Diamond Council, with the support of the United Nations. It led to the eradication of the conflict diamonds then afflicting the market.

Specifically, the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme guarantees the shipment of rough diamonds and certifies them as conflict-free.

Sierra Leone, Liberia and Angola successfully eradicated conflict diamonds through the Kimberley Process, becoming compliant producers and exporters.

Your Excellency Mr. President, the World Diamond Council in the Kimberley Process attaches great importance to your country and welcomes the signing of your peace agreement with joy.

We believe that through the implementation of the peace process, the CAR will be able to resume the unrestricted export of rough diamonds, supported by the Kimberley Process Certification System, and, paraphrasing the President, help turn the CAR resolutely towards its development.

It is true that the CAR is a diamond producer, but it is also blessed other resource-based industries, such as the forestry and agriculture, which employ more than 70% of the population's workforce, as well as many other riches.

As is the case in many sub-Saharan African countries, whether it is in mining, agriculture, forestry or other sectors, work is usually done in a traditional and informal way, with many of the typical negative consequences in terms of child labor, women's rights, the environment and other related problems.

Improving the conditions of workers in these sectors will have a positive impact on the communities that they support, as well as other sectors of the economy and the country in general. This will generate an increase in state revenues, through the payment of taxes and exports, and it is true for both the mining sector and the agricultural sector, as well as for the forest industry.

Someone wrote, "When Africa awakens, the world will flourish." Indeed, Africa needs to awaken, especially sub-Saharan Africa. When we talk about this great and beautiful continent, we still talk too often about violence, lack of democracy, poverty and corruption. These are evils and words that we would like to feel or hear no longer.

When we talk about Africa we still refer too often to developmental aid. Yet we all know that real development comes through education, work and direct investment.

It is time for Sub-Saharan Africa to rise up and develop all its human, mining, agricultural and energy potential, to escape from its state of under-development and enter a new era.

But let's not forget another key condition that both is a requisite and means of promoting development and investment, and that is legal certainty. The texts that regulate agreements must be fair and equitable so that the benefits are secured and distributed among all participants. Every community needs to experience the economic return.

This 6th edition of the ABBW once again provides an opportunity for economic and political forces from different continents to meet and contribute to the transformation of countries through agreements that provides benefit to all parties.

What is particularly interesting today is that we are seeing this meeting of the minds from north to south, south to north, and south to south as well.

I could not be able to complete remarks without thanking the Province of Brabant Wallon for its warm hospitality and its support, year after year, of the ABBW Forum.

Let me propose that during these two days of the forum we take the opportunity of wakening Africa, so that next year we will hopefully confirm that an emerging force is flourishing on the world stage.

Let me declare the 6th Edition of the Africa-Belgium Business Week, the 2019 Forum, now open.

May we all enjoy a fruitful forum.