THE CONGO BASIN AND TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME — GOLD, CRITICAL MINERALS AND THE NETWORKS THREATENING FORESTS AND COMMUNITIES

19 October 2026
14:00–14:50 PM

Venue: M3,
Vienna International
Centre (hybrid)

CLICK HERE
TO JOIN ONLINE

SIDE EVENT AT THE 13TH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UN CONVENTION AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

Event summary

The Congo Basin holds the world's second-largest tropical rainforest – a carbon sink of planetary importance and the basis of life for tens of millions of people. It is also, increasingly, an 'El Dorado' for transnational organized crime.

In recent years, the illicit exploitation of gold and critical minerals has become one of the most acute and fast-rising threats: it tears open the forest, poisons waterways, draws in armed groups and dispossesses local and Indigenous communities – intertwined with wildlife trafficking and illicit logging in a single, interlocking criminal economy. What is too often framed as a conservation problem is, at its core, a problem of transnational organized crime – and a security, human-rights and climate crisis at once. As the parties to UNTOC weigh how the convention can better address crimes that affect the environment, the Congo Basin stands as an urgent case for why a robust, crime-focused and transnational response is indispensable.

This event reframes Congo Basin forest crime as what it has also become: transnational organized crime, driven increasingly by the illicit exploitation of gold and critical minerals, and threatening forests, livelihoods, human rights and the climate alike. It will present new evidence from the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) and its partners on the convergence of mineral exploitation, wildlife trafficking, illegal logging, and criminal violence across the region, showing how these markets interlock rather than operate in isolation.

Speakers

- **Welcome:** Mark Shaw, Executive Director, GI-TOC
- **Opening remarks:** Maurice Miema Miema, Senior Director, Centre of Expertise, Evaluation and Certification of Precious and Semi-Precious Mineral Substances, Ministry of Mines, DRC
- **Opening remarks:** Sophie Kammerer, Head of UN Section – EU Delegation to the International Organisations in Vienna
- Zobel Behalal, Senior Expert, Central Africa Observatory, GI-TOC
- Justin Kamga, Coordinator Forêts et Développement Rural (FODER), Cameroon
- Blaise Mudodosi, Coordinator Actions Pour la Promotion et Protection des Peuples et Espèces Menacées, Democratic Republic of the Congo
- **Moderator:** Nathalia Dukhan, Director of the Central Africa Observatory, GI-TOC