

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 15, 2009

CONTACT: Roberta Synal
772-223-0222
or Amy Clanin
202-332-1014
media@bonobo.org
www.bonobo.org

WORLD'S LARGEST "AVOIDED DEFORESTATION" PROJECT HELPS SAVE ENDANGERED GREAT APE IN CONGO

Bonobo Conservation Initiative Recognized for Community-based Carbon Offset Project

Copenhagen -- The Bonobo Conservation Initiative (BCI) will be recognized on December 16, 2009 during the 15th Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) for its efforts to save a huge rainforest area in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) that harbors the endangered bonobo, a great ape most closely related to humans.

At the gala "Support REDD+" event hosted by the Coalition for Rainforest Nations, Maya Lin, renowned artist and architect and founder of the "What is Missing?" (WIM) Foundation, will award BCI a grant to support its Sankuru "Fair Trade" Community Carbon Initiative. The project will offer certified carbon credits by **Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD)**.

Lin, director of WIM, said, "As the largest REDD project in Africa and one of the largest on earth, we feel it is especially appropriate to support and endorse this precedent-setting model carbon offset project. We congratulate BCI for the remarkable work it's doing to help find solutions to the biodiversity and climate change crises."

Sally Jewell Coxe, president and co-founder of BCI will join fellow honorees Wangari Maathai, Jane Goodall and others whose grassroots efforts have yielded global results.

"We are deeply honored by this acknowledgment of our 10 years of work in the DRC, not only to save the bonobo, but to provide a new, holistic paradigm for conservation and sustainable development," said Coxe. "Our approach delivers globally significant ecosystem services, protects valuable biodiversity, and improves the quality of life of the indigenous people."

The carbon credits will be generated by the Sankuru Nature Reserve, established in 2007 by the DRC government in cooperation with BCI and local partner Community Action for the Primates of Kasai (ACOPRIK). Larger than Belgium and about 3/4 the size of Denmark, the Sankuru Reserve stores up to 660 million tons of carbon, which if released by deforestation would emit up to two billion tons of carbon dioxide, comparable to emissions from 38,000,000 cars per year for 10 years.

- more -

“This is why REDD financing is so critically important at this time,” said Coxe. “REDD makes it possible for the Congolese to protect their rainforest, the second lung of the world, by providing a viable alternative to exploitation that delivers greater benefits on every level. Our project mitigates global climate change by sequestering vast amounts of carbon in an area where the local people are already committed to saving the forest.”

The Sankuru Reserve was the first protected area to be established in the Bonobo Peace Forest (BPF), a planned constellation of community-managed protected areas linked by conservation corridors. The BPF concept was developed by BCI while the Congo war was still raging; it emerged out of consultations with Congolese scientists, local conservationists and people who dwell within the bonobo habitat. The BPF was endorsed by DRC President Joseph Kabila, who appreciates the link between fair and equitable management of natural resources and abiding peace.

According to Michael Hurley, BCI’s executive director, “One cannot solve the climate crisis without halting deforestation; one cannot halt deforestation without tackling the problem in the DR Congo, which contains 70% of the remaining rainforest in Africa, and one cannot address deforestation in the DR Congo without engaging the local people as partners and leaders. We believe we have found a way to do this cost effectively and sustainably.”

#

The **Bonobo Conservation Initiative** (BCI) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to the survival of the highly endangered great ape, the bonobo (*Pan paniscus*) and its rainforest habitat in the Congo Basin. BCI works with the people and the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo through cooperative conservation and community development programs and to establish new protected areas and safeguard bonobos wherever they are found. BCI has been selected as a featured charity in the *Catalogue for Philanthropy* for excellence, innovation and cost-effectiveness.

In danger of extinction, bonobos (*Pan paniscus*) were the last great ape to be discovered and are the least known great ape species. Found only in the DRC, bonobos inhabit the heart of the Congo Basin, Africa’s largest rainforest, which is threatened by the onslaught of industrial logging. They are distinguished by their peaceful, cooperative, matriarchal society, remarkable intelligence, and sexual nature. Other than humans, bonobos are the only primates known to have sex not only for procreation, but also for pleasure and conflict resolution—and with members of either sex. They serve as a powerful flagship both for conservation and for peace.