

STOP ALL ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES IN PROTECTED AREAS OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

ADVOCACY NOTE

**To His Excellency, Mr. President of the Democratic Republic of Congo,
in KINSHASA - GOMBE PALAIS DE LA NATION**

Your Excellency the President of the Republic,

On behalf of the of Civil Society NGOs coalition working for the protection of the environment in the Democratic Republic of Congo (**ROPE 1**), and supported by international civil society organizations alike, we write to the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to adress some of the serious challenges around nature conservation and the protection of community rights.

Indeed, the DRC is currently home to 42 % of primary forests and it is estimated that over 400 species of mammals. More than 1.000 species of birds, more than 400 species of fish and more than 10.000 species of plants are found on the national territory. In addition to being, by these figures, a planetary issue, in a context of climate change and the sixth mass extinction of species, these data must be taken into consideration in a perspective of the political, social and economic trajectory of DRC. It is currently estimated that more than 50 million people in the DRC depend directly for their survival on the good health of ecosystems and the services provided by them. The conservation of the latter is therefore a major stake, at all levels.

However, it is clear that at present, the most important ecosystems of the country, generally included in Protected Areas (PA), and the various ecosystem services delivered by them, are currently under pressure. They are threatened by illegal activities, that are contrary to the development and conservation objectives directly set by the Congolese government but also by many international conventions ratified by the latter². We are thus increasingly witnessing illegal actions aimed at harvesting natural resources within these territories, which conservation services are fighting to protect, under conditions which are generally already particularly difficult. The most glaring example lies in the action of certain mining companies, often foreign. These are unfortunately regularly in collusion with members of the administration or the Congolese army, supposed to guarantee the integrity of this territory and deliverance of public services to Congolese citizens. In addition to directly threatening these areas, these activities regularly fuel, more or less indirectly, mafia activities, including the action of armed groups, thus directly threatening the security and integrity of the areas, and again the protection of vulnerable citizens, local communities and indigenous peoples (IPs) living in direct proximity to these protected areas.

Selfish interests of a few thus depend on the well-being or even the survival of the greatest number and this situation is thus totally contrary to the principles of good, responsible, transparent, and inclusive governance, promoted by the authorities of the DR-Congo.

To illustrate our point, it is possible to cite a few concrete examples:

- The exploitation of gold by armed groups using some members of the indigenous Pygmy peoples as a human shields, within Kahuzi Biega National Park (KBNP), a UNESCO World Heritage site ;
- Acts creating oil blocks within Virunga National Park (VINP) , a UNESCO World Heritage site ;
- The hydroelectric project and dam Sombwe to generate electricity for the mining industry within the boundaries of Upemba National Park (UNP) ;

¹ Group of civil society NGOs working for the protection of the environment in the Democratic Republic of Congo

² Namely, Law No. 14/003 of February 11, 2014 relating to the conservation of nature in the DRC and Law No. 18/001 of March 9, 2018 amending and supplementing Law No. 007/2002 of July 11, 2002 relating to Mining Code, Law No. 11/009 of July 9, 2011 on fundamental principles relating to the protection of the environment, and general rules on investments, the Constitution in the DRC as well as international conventions such as the Convention on the Biological Diversity (CBD), the Paris Agreement, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and its optional protocol and the IUCN Convention etc.

- A seizure of gold by the courts worth about \$ 1.9 million mined by the Chinese company " Kimia Mining " retaining illegal permits within the Okapi Wildlife Reserve (RFO), a UNESCO World Heritage site ;
- Mining by the Chinese supported by the provincial politico-administrative and military authorities, in particular in the territory of Mwenga within the Itombwe Nature Reserve (INR).

These few examples are unfortunately not exhaustive, illustrate the sad observation mentioned above, and today oblige us to raise our voices and send you this letter, in order to ask you to take all the possible arrangements as soon as possible at the legal and institutional to stop these unsustainable developments as quickly as possible, especially the mining and all other activities such as infrastructure that are detrimental to the environment and illegally practiced within protected areas and other areas critical for biodiversity.

In addition to taking all possible measures to stop these practices, we also allow ourselves to formulate some more general recommendations that are essential for us to implement in the future, in order to achieve a more equitable, sustainable and inclusive nature protection process for communities living directly in areas with high conservation challenges :

- Stop all mining operations carried out within PAs, in accordance with Law No. 14/003 of February 11, 2014 on nature conservation in the DRC and the mining law on the revised Mining Code of 2018 and No. 11 / 009 of 09 July 2011 on fundamental principles relating to the protection of the environment in the DRC ;
- Carry out the cancellation / Withdrawal / Radiation of the act of approval of companies of any kind whatsoever operating in violation of the rules under penalty of nullity, especially in the case of protected areas ;
- Set up a national commission within the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN), to coordinate the participatory and final demarcation of PA boundaries , where this is not yet effective, and this again. in accordance with DRC laws and climate emergency needs ;
- Set up an inter-institutional framework between the various ministries in environmental impact for harmonization and monitoring of compliance in decision-making processes, decentralization and the preparation of documents for national sectoral policies with an impact on the environment ;
- Strengthen political and diplomatic support in terms of supporting PA managers in their technical role and in monitoring the application of the law ;
- Ensure that protected area managers – with support of the body for the protection of national parks and reserves -CorPPN- are provided with the necessary technical and financial means to address armed groups etc.;

We, the signatories of this letter, are convinced that the implementation of the actions listed above will help us support the development process of socio-economic, sustainable, and inclusive development benefiting the largest number of Congolese and thus meeting the support from the various technical and international partners.

We ask the government of the RD-Congo to act decisively and strengthen the confidence of Congolese citizens and the international community in the Congolese state and its ability to effectively enforce legal provisions, in a context of the need for rapid action, to save global biodiversity and effectively and quickly combat climate change.

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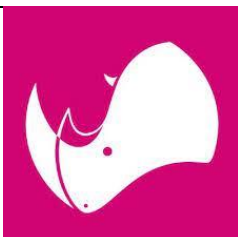
INTERNATIONAL

NO	ORGANIZATION	LOGO	REPRESENTATIVE	COUNTRY
1	350Africa.org		Landry Ninteretse	Nairobi
2	Accion Ecologica		Yvonne Yanez	Ecuador

3	Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO)		Dickens Kamugisha	Uganda
4	African Conservation Foundation		Arend de Haas	Global
5	Association Guinéenne pour la Promotion des Energies Renouvelables AGUIPER		Aissatou Billy SOW	GUINEE
6	Bank Track		Johan Frijns	Netherlands
7	Berggorilla & Regenwald Direkthilfe		Dr. Angela Meder	Germany
8	Both Ends		Danielle Hirsch	The Netherlands
9	Citizens' Concern Africa (CICOA)		Sam Mucunguzi	Uganda

10	COMAID		Christian Jitar Taku	Cameroon
11	COOPERATIVE MENYA		MANIRAKIZA OMAR HAMED	BURUNDI
12	COSPIBU		NDARURINZE Patrice	BURUNDI
13	CRICE for Life		Edonandji. L. Jacques Gbegniho.	Uganda
14	EarthLore Foundation NPC		Method Gundidza	South Africa
15	Elephanatics		Fran Duthie	Canada
16	Elephant Crisis Fund / Save The Elephants		Chris Thouless	Kenya
17	Emoyo Yefwe International		Luke KAPCHANGA	KENYA
18	Environment Governance Institute (EGI).		Samuel Okulony	Uganda
19	Fauna and Flora International		Mark Rose	Global

20	Frankfurt Zoological Society	 FRANKFURT ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY	Dr. Christof Schenck	Germany
21	Friends of The Earth US	 Friends of the Earth	Doug Norlen	USA
22	Ian Redmond OBE, Chairman, Ape Alliance, on behalf of concerned members		Ian Redmond	Global
23	Inclusive Development International		David Pred	USA
24	International Conservation Fund		Mathias Seignette	Netherlands
25	International Fund Animal Welfare (IFAW)		Matthew Morley	USA
26	International Rivers		Siziwe Mota	South Africa
27	IUCN NL		Mark van der Wal	The Netherlands

28	Just Share		Robyn Hugo	South Africa
29	Laudatosi Movement-Africa		Prince Papa	Kenya
30	Les Amis de la Terre France		Juliette Renaud	France
31	Les amis du Bassin du Congo		Christ Eminence Landzi	Congo BRAZZA
32	Lion Recovery Fund - Wildlife Conservation Network		Peter Lindsey	Global Zimbabwe
33	PIAHVI ASBL		MANIRAMBONA Samuel	BURUNDI
34	Rettet den Regenwald		Marianne Klute	Germany
35	Rhino Recovery Fund (WCN)		Markus Hofmeyr	Africa

36	Save Virunga		Bantu Lukambo	Global
37	Sherpa	* 	Sandra Cossart	France
38	Sierra Club British Columbia		Jens Wieting	Canada
39	The Gaia Foundation		Liz Hosken	UK
40	Thin Green Line Foundation		Abi Irving	Global
41	Western Agency for Sustainable Development (WASD)		Ashaba Umar Katainama	Uganda
42	Wild Heritage		Cyril Kormos	USA
43	Youth for Green Communities		Aryampa Brighton	Uganda

Copy for information to:

- Honorable President of the Senate
- Honorable president of the National Assembly
- Honorable president of the Environment Commission of the National Assembly
- His Excellency the Prime Minister Head of Government
- Her Excellency Madam the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister in charge of Environment and Sustainable Development
- His Excellency the Minister of State in charge of Justice and Keeper of the Seals His Excellency the Minister of Energy
- His Excellency the Minister of Land Affairs
- Her Excellency Madam Minister in charge of Mines
- Mr. Director General of ICCN
- Diplomatic Delegations
- CAFI and REDD program partners

TO KINSHASA ALL

Excellencies the Governors of the Provinces of the DRC (ALL)
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