

To their Excellencies:

Mr. Joseph Kabila, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Congolese guarantor of the nation; His Excellency Augustin Matata Ponyo, Prime Minister Head of Government

Copied to

- Honorable President of the National Assembly of the DRC in Kinshasa;
- Honorable, Mr. Bavon N'Sa Mputu Elima the, Minister of Environment and Tourism in Kinshasa;
- Honorable, Mr. Crispin Atama Tabe, Minister of National Hydrocarbons in Kinshasa;
- Head of ICCN, DRC;
- HE Mr. Neil Wigan, UK Ambassador to the DRC
- HE. Mr John Veia, Ambassador of Norway in Angola
- Mr. Jostein Lindland Counsellor Forest and climate change, Norway Embassy
- HE Mr. Robert van Embden Ambassador EKN In DRC
- HE Mr. Frans Makken Ambassador EKN in Rwanda
- HE Mr. Dominique de Swielande Struye, Ambassador of Belgium
- HE Mr. Luc Hallade, French Ambassador to DRC
- Mr. Eustace Ouayoro, Director of Operations, World Bank
- Jean Michel Dumond, Head of Delegation of the European Union in the DRC

London, May 4, 2012

Excellencies,

We recognize the commitments your government has taken in the past to protect the Virunga National Park, UNESCO World Heritage Site, from the negative impacts of oil exploration, including the two decisions by your Environment Ministry, the first in March 2011 to suspend all oil exploration in this area and the second in March 2012 creating a Monitoring Committee in charge of following-up and safeguarding the ecological aspects during the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). We greatly welcome the decision of the Congolese Government to conduct this SEA as a significant signal of the desire of your Government to implement standards of good land use planning and good governance.

In light of the above, we were surprised to learn of the award of permits for the oil company SOCO to conduct exploration activities in the Park in September and October 2011 by the Ministers of Environment and Hydrocarbons. We learned of the intention expressed by SOCO to immediately install an exploration camp in Virunga National Park. Meanwhile, the company has already begun preparatory work to implement its plan of exploration within the administrative boundaries of the Park, beginning with the installation of personnel and equipment.



We wish to inform you of our concern that this approach is in our view not compatible with Congolese law or with international agreements which clearly define the World Heritage areas as unsuitable for extractive activities. In addition, we fear that these acts will inevitably deepen instability in the North Kivu Province. The Park authorities and neighboring communities have already endured many conflicts over misuse of natural resources and the continued presence of militia in the area of the park. These conflicts killed 11 ICCN rangers in 2011 and have brought a return to insecurity in the Kiwanja-Nyamilima area in the Rutshuru locality since early 2012.

In addition, we have received information that SOCO is making promises of employment and benefits derived from oil, even if it is not yet clear whether the company will continue to be involved in operations beyond the exploration phase. In an area that does not yet benefit from social and political stability and in which there are considerable tensions around access to resources amongst the population, we fear that this could lead to a significant increase in conflicts on the ground, by deepening the divisions between communities living or fishing legally in the park, and those who are not legally recognized.

The Congolese government has been active in the pursuit of security and stability in the Great Lakes region at the regional level. Given the exceptional biological value, the special legal status of Virunga National Park, the fragile stability in the region and the interests of the local population, we invite you to continue all efforts to secure peace and to ensure compliance with national legislation and international agreements. We kindly request your Excellencies to review the decisions of your Environment and Hydrocarbons Ministries granting permits for exploration activities in the Park, and to support the SEA process to be conducted by a team of independent experts as well as entering into an open dialogue with all people concerned, with local authorities and park management as well as local civil society.

We encourage you to consider the concerns and reasons expressed during the workshop in Vitshumbi on 23-24 March 2012 (attached) by local communities living in and around the Virunga National Park who are faced with the prospect of oil exploration and exploitation. We remain committed, as members of the international community, to follow and support the actions of the Congolese government and Congolese civil society for the protection of the environment, political and social stability, sustainable development and the safeguarding of world heritage.

Please accept, Excellencies, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Organisation	Logo	Organisation	Logo
Rainforest Foundation UK		FoE Netherlands	
Global Witness		IUCN, National Committee of the Netherlands	
Rainforest Foundation Norway		Broederlijk Delen	

Greenpeace Africa



Chairman of Ape Alliance



Coalition du Mouvement Nord-Sud en Flandre - 11.11.11



African Conservation Foundation



CADTM - Comité pour l'Annulation de la Dette du Tiers Monde



Sawit Watch - Indonesia



Mensen met een Missie



Fastenopfer/Action de Carême



ATM - Alliance Against Mining - Philippines



Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros en América Latina



Haribon Foundation – Philippines



Putumayo vzw



Samata - India

