Democratic Republic of Congo: New logging thrust into rainforests

Among other direct and underlying causes of deforestation, Africa's rainforest ecosystems are threatened by logging, as are virtually all of the world's remaining large, contiguous rainforests. These biodiversity rich rainforests provide critical habitat not only to local indigenous but all of the Earth's peoples and species.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo the threat has become a reality. Despite efforts and demands from local groups such as the Alliance of environment, development and indigenous human rights organisations to stop re-zoning plans supported by the World Bank that could open up rainforest areas to logging companies, official information reveals that nearly 150,000 square kilometres of forest has been allocated to timber companies within the last three years, mostly during 2005.

The information was published on November 8th as a list of all logging concession areas in a “Communique de Presse” issued by the Congolese Ministries of the Environment and Finance. The list shows that 103 “concessions” have been handed to logging companies since the May 2002 logging moratorium, covering 147,526 square kilometers.

The opening up of new areas of rainforest for timber felling has been illegal in the Congo since May 2002 established through a “Ministerial Arrêté No CAB/MIN/AF.F-E.T/194/MAS/02 portant suspension de l'octroi des allocations forestières” passed on 14th May 2002.

In December, the World Bank will consider approving a new credit of $90 million to the Congolese government, some of it to finance new forestry activities.

Last July, the well-known singer Sting had declared in a televised programme “G8 Debate: Making Poverty History”: “There's a plan on the table, supported by the World Bank, to go into the Congo. Now the Congo has a population of 50 million people, 35 million of those people live in and depend on the resources of the forest. The plan is to go in there and an area the size of France, 600,000 square kilometres, is going to be opened to international logging companies who will go in there and completely clear cut it --rape it-- and leave the people who live there with absolutely nothing.” “This is not making poverty history, this is poverty in the making. And I'm concerned that no one... no one knows about this, it's just happening under the table,” he said as a member of the panel.

Simon Counsell, Director of the Rainforest Foundation, a world-wide organization which works in tropical rainforest areas with local indigenous peoples and non-governmental organization addressing the underlying causes of the destruction of tropical rainforests, said: “The Rainforest Foundation has been warning for several years that the timber industry in Congo is about to spiral out of control, and that international pressure should be brought to bear on the Congolese authorities to stop the handing out of vast concessions to logging companies. The Congolese government has acted in defiance of its own laws, and is set on a course that could have disastrous consequences for the many millions of people, as well as the wildlife, that are dependent on the country's forests. The World Bank should make it a strict condition of any new funding for forestry in DRC that all the illegally allocated concessions are immediately cancelled.”

Article based on information from: “Africa's Rainforests For The Chop In World's Biggest Illegal Giveaway”, 9th November 2005, Rainforest Foundation, sent by Simon Counsell, E-mail: simonc@rainforestuk.com, “Africa's Massive Illegal Rainforest Giveaway”, Forest Conservation Blog, http://forests.org/blog/2005/11/africas_massive_illegal_rainfo.html; “Sting sounds alarm on carve-up of Congo rainforests during TV debate”, 07/07/2005, The Rainforest Foundation, http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/s-Campaign%20News