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## Congo (DRC): Alliance against World Bank's support to industrial logging

A broad alliance of environment, development and indigenous human rights organisations organized a "Forest Forum" in Kinshasa on November 13th, 2004, with the aim of strengthening the struggle against the increase in industrial logging in DRC's rainforests and for the respect of local peoples' rights (see WRM Bulletin 80).

In face of the imminent threat of new laws and re-zoning plans supported by the World Bank that could result in up to 60 million hectares of rainforest (an area the size of France) being opened up to logging companies, a group of international NGOs made a joint declaration addressed to the Congolese government and the international financial agencies. They demanded that a moratorium on the issuing of any new logging concessions should be maintained until the Congolese authorities comply with strict conditions. These would also imply the existence of conditions that guarantee –among other:

- \* State transparency towards civil society, including public information that should comprise two stages: initial publication of proposed legislation enabling civil society to be informed and its reactions to be gathered; a second publication presenting the State's decisions, taken on the basis of the public's reactions in particular.
- \* An independent monitoring system accessible to all, including, in particular the local populations, who could play a role in providing relevant information. Monitoring must also be followed up with dissuasive sanctions when offences are noted, up to and including termination of the concession contract.
- \* Respect for the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples which would imply their active involvement in preparing the anticipated zoning plan, according to the principle of prior, free and informed consent; their active involvement in the allocation and planning of concessions according to the principle of prior, free and informed consent; and the delineation, testing and identification of community forests.

In their declaration, the alliance encouraged the Bretton Woods Institutions to ensure greater transparency in their actions.

Simon Counsell, Director of the Rainforest Foundation UK, one of the members of the alliance, said: "Industrial logging has been environmentally and socially disastrous in many parts of Africa, and there is now wide agreement that the World Bank's plans for a massive expansion of the timber industry in the Congo are likely to have similar consequences. Alternatives to industrial logging must be found that benefit the people of Congo whilst protecting the environment. Hopefully, the demand for respect of local peoples' rights represents a major shift in thinking by conservation organisations as to how best to protect the world's remaining tropical rainforests".

Article based on information from: "World's leading conservation organisations call for halt to expansion of logging in Congo rainforest, and for respect of local peoples' rights", Rainforest

