
Senegal: Government limits mining as a means to protecting forests

Senegal has announced it will not grant any new permits for quarrying and mining in the country's 233 forest conservation areas. The government of Abdoulaye Wade has said it will encourage companies already operating there to move out as part of efforts to reduce deforestation and protect the environment.

Environment Minister Modou Fada Diagne said that his department would begin talks soon with quarrying companies that already operate in the country's five million hectares of forest reserves and national parks with a view to moving them elsewhere. He added that the granting of all new mining and quarrying permits would be conditional on the approval of social and environmental impact studies and an undertaking by the firms involved to restore the environment to its original state once the extraction of minerals ceased.

The new policy is particularly aimed at reducing deforestation around the capital Dakar and the towns of Tambacounda, Louga, Thies and Kaolack. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Senegal lost over 45,000 hectares of forest between 1990 and 2000. According to environmental experts, the uncontrolled expansion of quarrying in Senegal has led to coastal erosion, a reduction in the area of available farmland and skin and lung problems for people who live nearby. However, President Abdoulaye Wade has not granted any new mining or quarrying permits within Senegal's forest reserves since he was elected three years ago.

It is hoped that the stance of President Abdoulaye Wade and his Environment Minister Modou Fada Diagne encourage other African leaders to follow suit and struggle to not let their countries bleed to death. The so called African "conflicts", who actually are outright wars with hundreds of thousands of people killed, in most cases are triggered and fuelled by mining interests, where in many cases foreign corporations play a leading role.

Excerpted from "Government bans quarrying in conservation areas", 14 July, IRIN , sent by ECOTERRA International, Nairobi Node, e-mail: NATURAL_FORESTS@ecoterra.net