

WCC-2012-Rec-157-EN

Protection of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve and communities of the Ituri Forest in the Democratic Republic of Congo

RECOGNIZING that conservation of the exceptional biodiversity of the Ituri Forest, including the Okapi (*Okapia johnstoni*), Eastern Chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii*), and Forest Elephants (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) has been carried out for two decades in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve (known by its French acronym RFO) by the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) supported by the Okapi Conservation Project (OCP), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), US Agency for International Development, German Development Bank, and other partners;

UTTERLY DISMAYED by the murderous assault on 24 June 2012 at Epulu, where six local people, including two ICCN rangers, were killed, 14 Okapis slaughtered, and facilities of the RFO destroyed;

AWARE that this assault was conducted by some known elephant poachers in retaliation against enforcement by the ICCN of laws protecting elephants, Okapis and other species, and prohibiting illegal mining and other activities destructive of the ecological integrity of the RFO;

INFORMED that some members of FARDC, the national army of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) responding to this assault, were involved in looting and ransacking facilities in or near Epulu of the ICCN, OCP, WCS and Forest Biodiversity Project, and looting houses and shops in Epulu;

ALSO AWARE that many villagers were forced to carry looted materials by the leader of the poachers, as they moved back into the forest of the RFO; and that ten village women were still being held as hostages by them at the time of submission of this motion;

ENCOURAGED that the Government of DRC and FARDC are currently seeking to apprehend the leader of the poachers and his associates and rescue the hostages; and

RECALLING Resolution 2.37 *Support for environmental defenders* adopted by the 2nd IUCN World Conservation Congress (Amman, 2000) and Recommendation 4.119 *Protection of rangers within and in areas adjacent to protected areas* adopted by the 4th IUCN World Conservation Congress (Barcelona, 2008);

The World Conservation Congress, at its session in Jeju, Republic of Korea, 6–15 September 2012:

1. URGES the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo to apprehend and bring to justice the leader of the poachers and his associates, who conducted the assault in and near Epulu on 24 June 2012;
2. CALLS upon the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo and leading officers of FARDC to identify, indict and bring to justice members of FARDC who participated in ransacking conservation facilities and looting the village of Epulu in the aftermath of the assault by the leader of the poachers and his band on 24 June 2012;
3. APPLAUDS UNESCO for immediately extending financial support for the Emergency Fund of ICCN to help in protecting the RFO, which was designated a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1997;

4. THANKS those who have provided assistance by supplying food, medicines and other supplies to ICCN rangers and families and the people of Epulu in the wake of the assault;
5. CALLS UPON government and non-government Members of IUCN to assist the government of DRC and ICCN with financial and technical help in their efforts to re-establish full protection to the RFO and to restore the community of Epulu;
6. ENCOURAGES other partners to bolster their support to ICCN and the people of Ituri Forest through science, education, agroforestry, community assistance, medical care and immigration control; and
7. RECOMMENDS to the government of DRC the desirability of ensuring that the core no-hunting zone of the RFO receives enhanced conservation and protection.