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## Press release

**7th March 2018: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Democratic Republic of Congo government must halt plans to open up the world's second largest rainforest to loggers - say international environmental charities**

Over 50 environmental, conservation and human rights organisations are calling on the international community urgently to intervene to help protect the vast rainforests of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), following announcements by the country's Environment Ministry that they intend to lift a legal moratorium on the allocation of new areas of forest for large-scale logging [1].

DRC's Environment Ministry stated last week that plans were underway for lifting the 16-year long moratorium on the allocation of new industrial logging concessions in the world's second largest tropical rainforest. Simultaneously, a revision of the country's Forest Code, understood to now be at an advanced stage, has been secretly underway without the involvement of key stakeholders including NGOs, and is likely to see weakening of the controls over future logging activities. Up to 75 million hectares of pristine rainforest could be at risk, an area larger than the size of France. This is the latest in a series of threats by DRC's government to open its forests to large-scale logging.

The organisations have told key donor governments and agencies such as Norway, UK, France, the US, Germany and the World Bank that their respective programmes aimed at protecting DRC's forests would be threatened by the lifting of the moratorium, which "*will have catastrophic environmental, social and climatic impacts*" and will likely promote corruption and conflict [2].

Jo Blackman, Campaign Leader at Global Witness, said: "Any moves to lift the moratorium could see forests become the next victim of a scramble to make a quick profit from DRC's natural resources. Impunity is rife in the forest sector and DRC is facing increasing insecurity and political instability. Any expansion of industrial logging would have irreversible damage on the forest, its communities and the global climate."

The organisations have called on donor countries to immediately suspend their funding to the DRC government for forestry and forest conservation until the current non-transparent and non-inclusive process of revision of the Forest Code is halted and a clear commitment is made not to consider the lifting of the moratorium until the government can credibly guarantee the legality and proper governance of logging sector.

Simon Counsell, Executive Director the Rainforest Foundation UK said: "The lifting of the logging moratorium in DRC would drive a coach and horses through the country's apparent commitments to reducing its carbon emissions from deforestation and degradation. Carbon emissions from forests are likely to soar, and the international community must look closely at whether funding REDD programmes is now viable".

Victorine Che Thoener, Project Leader Congo Basin Forests at Greenpeace added: “Awarding large-scale industrial logging concessions now means selling off among the world's most environmentally rich areas for short-sighted economic interests of a few individuals. Before the government can credibly demonstrate that they have the well-being of the Congolese people and the forest in mind, lifting this moratorium is both morally and economically unjustifiable.”

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Notes to Editors

[1] <http://www.environews-rdc.org/2018/02/28/foret-15-ans-apres-la-rdc-lance-le-processus-de-la-levee-du-moratoire-sur-ses-forets/>

[2] A copy of the letter is attached