



A RAPID RESPONSE ASSESSMENT

THE LAST STAND OF THE GORILLA

ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME AND CONFLICT IN THE CONGO BASIN



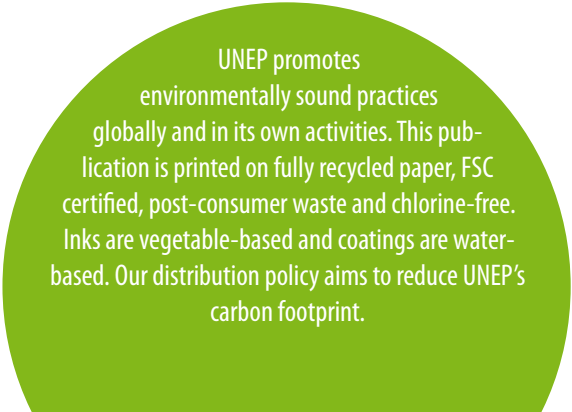
Nellemann, C., I. Redmond, J. Refisch (eds). 2010. *The Last Stand of the Gorilla – Environmental Crime and Conflict in the Congo Basin*. A Rapid Response Assessment. United Nations Environment Programme, GRID-Arendal. www.grida.no

ISBN: 978-82-7701-076-2

Printed by Birkeland Trykkeri AS, Norway

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ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME AND CONFLICT IN THE CONGO BASIN

A RAPID RESPONSE ASSESSMENT

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PREFACE

With the rate of poaching and habitat loss, gorillas in the region may disappear from most of their present range in less than 10–15 years from now.



The fate of the great apes is closely tied to ours as they inhabit some of the last remaining tropical rainforests – ecosystems that not only assist in supplying water, food and medicine but also play a global role in carbon sequestration and thus combating climate change.

This report, based on evidence submitted to the UN Security Council, field investigations, interviews and scientific data indicates that the gorillas in the Greater Congo Basin are at even greater risk than expected less than a decade ago.

Illegal mining, logging, charcoal and a rise in the bushmeat trade are intensifying pressure on great apes including gorillas. In 2002, UNEP assessed that 10% of gorilla habitat would remain by 2032, but this now appears to be too optimistic given the current trends.

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The scale of the extraction of minerals from gorilla habitat in DRC, largely orchestrated by militias, and the smuggling of natural resources from the wider Congo Basin to Asia and Europe may represent several hundred million dollars annually in terms of illegal income.

Tragically 190 park rangers have been killed in one park alone while defending gorillas and their habitat.

Not all the news is bad: New protected areas have been created, international cross boundary collaboration on environmental crime and improved management of some protected areas in the region are scoring some successes: The critically

endangered mountain gorillas in the Virungas are on the rise again.

In order to widen these successes, improve human security and secure the future of the gorilla there is an urgent need to further strengthen this collaboration, including with and between countries and companies who are recipients of these natural resources.

UNEP therefore welcomes the evolving, cross-boundary collaboration between INTERPOL and the UN including the UNEP-linked Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species: Welcomes too the strengthened relationship between UNEP and UN peacekeeping operations in the region.

Securing the necessary funds to support law enforcement and trans-boundary collaboration on environmental crime is a responsibility for all countries in the Greater Congo basin and beyond including in Asia, Europe and North America.

The opportunities are many: Tackling poverty by minimizing the theft of natural resources and maintaining the multi-billion ecosystem services of the tropical forests while reversing loss of economically and culturally-important wildlife in this, the UN International Year of Biodiversity.

Achim Steiner

UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gorillas, the largest of the great apes, are under renewed threat across the Congo Basin from Nigeria to the Albertine Rift: poaching for bushmeat, loss of habitat due to agricultural expansion, degradation of habitat from logging, mining and charcoal production are amongst these threats, in addition to natural epidemics such as ebola and the new risk of diseases passed from humans to gorillas.

Alarming, parts of the region are experiencing intensified exploitation and logging of its forest, in some cases even within protected areas. In the DRC, many of these activities are controlled by militias illegally extracting natural resources such as gold, tin and coltan as well as producing charcoal for local communities, urban areas, camps for people displaced by fighting and sometimes even to communities across the border. These militias are located, motivated, armed and financed directly by this illegal extraction of minerals, timber and charcoal. A network of intermediaries including multinational companies or their subsidiaries, neighboring countries and corrupt officials, are involved in the transportation and procurement of resources which stem from areas controlled by militia, or for which no legal exploitation permission exists.

As part of the extraction process, militias in North and South Kivu of the DRC are estimated to make approximately 4 million USD annually from taxes on charcoal. Combined with road taxes on minerals, timber and other goods in addition to controlling border control posts, the militias are making 14–50 million USD annually on road taxes alone. Companies working with or buying indirectly from fronts for the militias are buying minerals, charcoal and timber amounting to 2–10 times the official exports. These are valued at several hundred million USD from the direct sale to companies operating through Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, among others, and imported to the EU, the Middle East, China and other countries in Asia, with financiers also in the United States. Several peace agreements have included the removal of vehicle check points previously enforced by park rangers to reduce

this trade; this has facilitated the transport, illegal taxing and smuggling of resources across the borders. And this, in turn, has ensured continued financing of militias to obtain arms and encouraged them in securing resource hotspots and driving populations into IDP (internally displaced people) camps. Many people are forced by militias to work in the mines and charcoal kilns.

As many of these camps and militia groups rely heavily on bushmeat, many of the national parks in the region have lost up to 80% of their larger mammals. The illegal provisioning of these miners, rebels and forced workers with bushmeat includes meat from gorillas, chimpanzees, elephants and other endangered species. Surveys across the region indicate that great apes, including eastern and western lowland gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos comprise 0.5 to 2 per cent of the cadavers found in bushmeat markets. This has a disproportionately large impact on ape populations because of their slow rate of reproduction. Gorillas have also been shot in Virunga in retaliation for attempts by park rangers to stop the charcoal trade and its resulting habitat destruction.

Previous projections in 2002 by UNEP suggested that gorilla habitat free of human impact would be reduced to only 10% of their original range by 2032 as a result of continued infrastructure development, associated agricultural expansion and logging. However, these estimates did not factor in the current extent of illegal logging, production of charcoal in protected areas, the extent of the bushmeat trade, the rapidly rising human population density, and the spread of the deadly contagious dis-

eases such as Ebola. These previous estimates were therefore too optimistic. Despite some success stories in certain sites, the combination of threats indicates that most of the remaining gorilla populations could become locally extinct by as early as 2020–2025 – in little over a decade, unless more substantial action is taken now.

Many of the region's national parks are situated in areas of insecurity restricting the access of park rangers. Militias are exploiting the natural resources ranging from gold, minerals, firewood to poaching of hippos and elephants. Park rangers are prepared to stop illegal hunting and other forms of illegal use, but they are not present in sufficient numbers and do not have the training or equipment to actually expel armed groups from protected areas. In the Virunga National Park alone, 190 park rangers have been killed over the past 15 years.

In comparison, the near 20,000 strong UN force, MONUC, has lost 150 staff across a much larger region. MONUC has played and continues to play an important role in bringing stability to the region. The success of this UN peacekeeping operation could however be strengthened further if it could be linked to halting the underlying illegal extraction of resources that finance the rebel militias. This might be achieved by expanding its mandate to take full control of border crossings in close trans-boundary collaboration with neighboring countries and appropriate international law enforcement and investigative bodies.

Sustained trans-boundary collaboration in law enforcement has proven effective in reversing the decline of the critically endangered mountain gorillas and other species in the parks, in spite of the major challenges involved. Particularly around the Virunga National Park, trans-boundary law enforcement collaboration has proven effective in limiting illegal extraction of resources and reducing the transportation across borders of resources crucial for the continued financing of the militias. The loss of both rainforest and gorillas has been reversed in these areas and populations of the critically endangered mountain

gorilla are on the rise as a direct result. Substantially upgrading and expanding such support, training and trans-boundary coordination, drawing on the local knowledge of the park rangers within the off road networks and where required, involving UN forces in controlling trans-boundary movement of resources outside the protected areas, provides a real option for success for the entire region. Control of the road system and particularly all border crossings is vital, however, for reducing the pressure on the parks – as well reducing the extraction and export of resources through the multinational companies present in the region, directly financing the militias and the continued warfare.

In order to halt this destructive cycle, it is essential that resources and training for law enforcement personnel and rangers are substantially increased. This includes direct support to international bodies with mandates for international law enforcement such as INTERPOL and the Lusaka Agreement Task Force (LATF) and expanding the mandate of MONUC to tackle illegal trans-boundary transport of resources across the borders. Only by halting the profits – the primary motivation of the militias and companies involved – is there any hope that the conflict, destruction of rainforests and loss of the last eastern lowland gorillas come to an end.

Western lowland and Cross River Gorillas also face a similar fate – though without the involvement of militias in most cases – unless wildlife law enforcement can be increased. Bushmeat hunters, traders and consumers must be encouraged to operate within the law and overall consumption must be brought down to a sustainable level. But ape meat is only a tiny proportion of the million tonnes of Bushmeat consumed each year in the Congo Basin, and so removing it from the diet of consumers would not greatly affect their protein intake – but it would halt the current decline in gorilla populations being subjected to hunting. It is clear from the fragile recovery of mountain gorilla populations that success is possible, but equally clear that the resources being directed at other gorilla populations are not equal to the task.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Strengthen MONUC by expanding its mandate to secure full control of border crossings, by any means necessary, with regard to the export of illegally exploited natural resources, that are financing the conflict, in full collaboration with and assisting the national customs authority to intervene and halt trans-national environmental crime, in close coordination with appropriate national and international bodies.

2 Enhance support for close coordination and trans-boundary collaboration among parks in DRC, Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya, including coordination with MONUC, the Lusaka Agreement Task Force and relevant law enforcement agencies.

3 Mobilize resources for trans-boundary collaboration and coordination, including all aspects of transnational environmental crime and investigation, from source to end user.

5 Strengthen long term training programmes in law enforcement for park rangers and wildlife managers across the region including those working outside of parks, for example in community reserves, with particular reference to anti-poaching, monitoring, scene of crime investigation and intelligence gathering.

6 Promote the essential role that local, national and international law enforcement and anti-corruption plays in ensuring the success of rainforest protection and climate mitigation efforts under REDD+ and source specific finance for these measures through UNEP, UNODC, LATF and INTERPOL.

7 Establish a fund for supporting trans-boundary investigation and collaboration on trans-national environmental crime.

8 Strengthen the collaboration of UNEP, UN Office for Drugs

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