

Declaration of Indigenous Communities and NGOs from the Congo Basin  
On Forests and Climate Change

We, representatives of indigenous communities and civil society organizations in the Congo Basin:

Gathered in Kinshasa from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2008 for a workshop on reduced emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD), climate change and indigenous peoples in the Congo Basin

Seeking to improve our understanding of the mechanisms which are the subject of current global debates about how to improve the contribution of forests to global climate regulation;

Conscious of the urgent threat posed by climate change and the potential role of forests in mitigating it;

Concerned by the profound imbalance between the responsibilities of the North and the South for the global climate crisis;

Declare the following:

- The international community must recognize the important role played by indigenous peoples in the preservation of the forests of the Congo Basin; Indigenous peoples must be fully included in discussions regarding forest management, as well as the implementation of and benefits from REDD.
- The almost singular focus of the REDD debate at present on financing mechanisms gives the false impression that the value of the forest is measured solely by its capacity to sequester carbon. This perception detracts from other priorities, and has meant that to date there have not been clear and precise descriptions of the actions that States should undertake to change the current approach to forest management, and to ensure the long term protection of the multiple functions of the forest.
- Whatever scheme is established for the implementation of REDD, there are several indispensable preconditions that we believe are important to guarantee the effectiveness of the system:
  - The recognition and the protection of the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples to their lands and resources, must be a cornerstone of any REDD system
  - Baseline studies should be undertaken, to provide a foundation for decisions and future monitoring of the effectiveness of the system

- Analysis of the underlying causes of deforestation and degradation must be done, in order to ensure that commercial and industrial uses of the forest are not given priority over local and indigenous populations' use of the forest for survival.
- The effectiveness of efforts to reduce emissions should be part of a global approach and should reflect the necessary solidarity between the South and the North, notably through the significant reduction of emissions in industrialized countries. In effect, efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation and degradation should not, under any circumstances, replace the drastic emissions reductions expected of industrialized countries.
- The extreme vulnerability of the weakest social groups to the consequences of climate change must be recognized, and efforts should be undertaken to avoid potential adverse impacts of REDD mechanisms. In this regard, particular attention must be given to the situation of indigenous communities, and of indigenous women specifically.
- Research should be encouraged into appropriate technologies to enable indigenous communities to adapt to the impacts of climate change
- The improvement of forest governance and the benefits gained from REDD must be effective, so that they really contribute to the reduction of poverty in indigenous communities.

We deplore the fact that the multiple initiatives aimed at assisting the countries of the Congo Basin to get ready for a future REDD mechanism have so far not really been participatory. The process, by which R-Plans are being prepared in Central Africa, without consultation and on a very short timeline, is of great concern.

We recommend :

- The reform of national legislation in the countries of the Congo Basin, in order to ensure the recognition of the particularity and land rights of indigenous communities.
- The principles contained in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples must be integrated into the REDD process.
- An analysis of the reasons for the failure of past efforts and the current forest management paradigm must be undertaken, in order to take these results into account in the implementation of REDD mechanisms

- Recognition of the importance of full participation by all actors in the REDD process and the importance of the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples
- The involvement of indigenous communities in the preparation of the R-Plans in the countries of the Congo Basin.

We urge our respective governments to take greater responsibility in the conduct of negotiations, and we encourage our negotiators involved in discussions regarding climate change, to take into account our concerns, in order to construct a system which guarantees social and environmental justice.

Signed in Kinshasa, November 20, 2008

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