

## **Global Witness press release**

### **Forest concession cancellations in DR Congo welcome, but widespread reforms still needed**

**27 January 2009**

The results of a government review of logging contracts mark an important step towards greater transparency and legality in the forest sector of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Global Witness said today. However, the test of the government's commitment lies in the implementation of the review's decisions.

On 19 January 2009, an Inter-ministerial Commission in charge of examining logging contracts published its final results following an appeal process. 91 out of 156 logging contracts under review were cancelled, while 65 contracts, equating to over 9 million ha or 43% of the area under consideration, were converted into long-term concessions. Contracts could only be converted into forest concessions if they complied with conditions set out in the country's 2002 Forest Code and in a presidential decree of 2005.

"We recognise the progress made by the DRC government in completing the review and cancelling over half the existing contracts, despite heavy pressure from the logging industry," said Lizzie Parsons, Global Witness Campaigner. "However, given numerous problems in the review process and decades of mismanagement in the forest sector, the government and logging companies must do far more to ensure that Congo's forest wealth benefits the country's population."

More than 40 million people - over half the population - depend on the country's forests. Yet the government's control over the forest sector remains extremely weak. This has enabled illegal logging activities to continue unchecked.

"It is vital that the DRC government continues to make every effort to clean up the logging sector and carry out widespread reforms," said Lizzie Parsons. "The proof of the government's commitment to improved governance will be in the strict implementation of the cancellation of 91 contracts."

Global Witness and other non-governmental organisations, as well as the official Independent Observer of the review, have previously criticised the logging title review process as being flawed and opaque.

Global Witness also highlighted the huge environmental impact of decisions regarding Congo's forests. "The government must ensure that illegal logging operations are halted immediately for the preservation of the Congolese forests that play a significant role in the fight against climate change," said Lizzie Parsons.

Global Witness is urging companies who have had their titles upheld for conversion into concessions to immediately fulfil their social and environmental obligations as specified in the Forest Code, and to deliver on their commitments in active consultation with communities affected by their operations.

Furthermore, the DRC government and donors providing assistance to the forest sector should ensure that:

- the capacity of the forest authorities is strengthened to ensure effective oversight of all forest-related activities;
- the customary rights of local populations and indigenous groups are respected;
- comprehensive and participatory land-use planning is carried out throughout all forested areas, focusing on the needs of local people;
- forest revenue collection and distribution are carried out transparently, including the handling of payments from alternative forest uses such as mitigating climate change through reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD).

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## Notes for editors:

1. Criticisms of the conversion process by Global Witness, other non-governmental organisations and the Independent Observer have included the following:
  - Representatives of forest-dependent communities were not sufficiently involved, particularly during the appeals phase.
  - Important criteria for assessing the legality of companies' operations, such as compliance with national and international laws and regulations on labour rights and the rights of affected populations and indigenous groups, were excluded from the review process.
  - None of the core criteria for the legal review, including respect of the limits of the logging areas and payment of surface taxes since 2003, were verifiable because of problems with data collection and due process.
  - The IMC decided that certain logging titles, totalling more than two and a half million ha, which were previously relocated from their original positions, would be converted into legal concessions - despite a 2002 moratorium on new concessions. Compliance with the moratorium, which remains in force, was one of the criteria for assessing whether logging titles should be cancelled or converted into concessions.
2. For further information on the state of the forest sector in the DRC and on the review of logging operations, see:

Global Witness' Independent Forest Monitoring team scoping study for long-term independent forest monitoring in DRC. The full report and summary version can be found at [www.globalwitness.org/ifm/drc](http://www.globalwitness.org/ifm/drc)

Reports of the Independent Observer to the review: [www.rdc-conversiontitresforestiers.org](http://www.rdc-conversiontitresforestiers.org)
3. A mechanism to provide financial incentives to developing countries such as DRC for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) is currently under negotiation in the UN Convention on Climate Change and expected to be part of the climate deal to be reached in Copenhagen in December 2009.