



**PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Government of Norway gives green light to continuing massive illegalities in Congo's rainforests**

The government of Norway is today accused by RFUK of encouraging impunity for serious wrongdoing, by failing to insist that illegal logging concessions in the Democratic Republic of Congo are immediately terminated.

Responding to recent requests from Rainforest Foundation UK that it should refuse funding to a huge expansion of logging in the DRC, and should instead help Congo to shut down illegal logging concessions, the Government of Norway this week instead indicated that it is content for at least five million hectares of illegal concessions to remain in existence until the end of 2018.

Last week, RFUK wrote to the Prime Minister of Norway, Erna Solberg, asking her urgently to intervene to stop her government from funding a project through Norway's 'Central Africa Forest Initiative' (CAFI), which could increase by 20 million hectares the area of Congo's rainforest handed out to timber companies [1]. In a special briefing [2], RFUK informed the Norwegian government that half of Congo's logging concessions are already illegal, and should be shut down.

Congo's forestry laws require that logging concessions should have a forest management within five years of being issued, or they must be cancelled immediately and returned to the state [3].

According to RFUK's investigations, published in the new briefing, 29 of Congo's 57 known logging concessions – covering at least five million hectares – currently fail this requirement, yet have not been cancelled by the Congolese authorities.

In the last year, the Congolese government has also issued at least five and possibly ten new illegal logging concessions, five of which were cancelled by the Congolese authorities this week, but the rest of which remain in place.

In a response to a journalist seen by RFUK, the Head of Norway's International Climate and Forests Initiative (NICFI), Per Frederick Pharo, notes that "*several existing logging concessions will be cancelled if they do not have validated management plan by the end of 2018 (a condition laid down in the [agreement] between CAFI and DRC)*" [4]. International NGOs including RFUK warned the Norwegian government in June 2016 that its agreement with Congo needed to be consistent with

Congolese law and that it should require the immediate cancellation of non-compliant concessions, rather than allowing them to remain in existence until the end of 2018 [5].

Ironically, also last week, Norway's Minister for Climate and the Environment, Vidar Helgesen, in a letter to the Brazilian President, Michel Temer, threatened to cut Norwegian funding due to his country's weakening of forest protection laws and worsening deforestation, noting that *"Law enforcement has been – and remains – the cornerstone of the battle against deforestation"* [6].

Simon Counsell, Executive Director of the Rainforest Foundation UK said; *"Norway is guilty of stunning inconsistency in its approach to saving the world's tropical forests, making the appearance of leaning hard on Brazil, whilst simultaneously encouraging impunity for serious breaches of the forestry laws in the Congo, even whilst it is lining up tens of millions of dollars in new 'forest aid'. By refusing to insist that Congo's illegal concessions are shut down, it is encouraging impunity for law-breaking and bad forest governance. Norway should now state that its funding for DRC's forestry projects will be halted until all illegal logging concessions have been cancelled."*

A [petition](#) opposing Norway's funding of logging in Congo's rainforests has so far gained over 100,000 signatures.

**/ENDS**

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### Notes to editors

[1] The Letter is available [here](#).

[2] The briefing is available [here](#)

[3] Government of DRC law, 05/116, October 2005 states that *"The forest concession contract is signed by the Minister in charge of forests and the concessionaire for a period of twenty-five years renewable. It will be automatically terminated if, within 4 years of its signature, the concession does not have a management plan duly approved by the Administration in charge of Forests"*. A subsequent additional 2015 regulation allowed for an additional 'grace period' of a year to submit a management plan, on request to the government, failure of which would result in suspension of cutting permits.

[4] See full statement [here](#).

[5] A letter from RFUK, Rainforest Foundation Norway, Greenpeace, Global Witness and EIA to the Board of the Central African Forest Initiative, Tuesday 14th June 2016, stated: *“We consider it essential that the [agreement between Norway and DRC] be fully compliant with the Forest Code, which means observing the Code’s requirement that concessions have an approved management plan in place...[...]. We would like assurances that the LOI will uphold the letter of the Forest Code with respect to requiring the immediate cancellation of non-compliant concessions if within five years of the contract signature the management plans for those concessions have not been approved”*. Full letter available [here](#).

[6] See [http://www.development-today.com/magazine/Frontpage/brazils\\_president\\_visits\\_oslo\\_norway\\_pushes\\_for\\_better\\_forest\\_policies\\_but\\_has\\_little\\_leverage](http://www.development-today.com/magazine/Frontpage/brazils_president_visits_oslo_norway_pushes_for_better_forest_policies_but_has_little_leverage)

### About the Rainforest Foundation UK

The Rainforest Foundation UK was founded in 1989 by Sting and Trudie Styler, after they saw first-hand the impact the destruction of the Amazon rainforests had on the Kayapo peoples' way of life. This sparked the Foundation’s first campaign which, in 1993, resulted in the protection of 27,359 km<sup>2</sup> of indigenous peoples’ land. The Foundation has expanded and diversified since, and has worked in more than 20 countries to date towards the mission of “supporting indigenous peoples and traditional populations of the world's rainforest to protect their rainforest homes and fulfill their rights to land, life and livelihood”.

Deforestation and the destruction of rainforests are major contributing factors in the build-up of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and the warming of our planet. The main focus of the Rainforest Foundation UK is to protect and save the natural resources of the rainforests by working with those who know the forest best – indigenous peoples and traditional forest dwellers. Instead of purchasing land or conserving forests purely for their biodiversity-value, the Rainforest Foundation puts people at the centre of its programmes, and promotes the establishment of community rights over rainforest lands, tackling the root of problems related to deforestation and paving the way for local people to benefit fairly from the use and protection of forest resources.

For more information, please visit our website: [www.rainforestfoundationuk.org](http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org)