

LOGGING OFF: PLANS TO LIFT THE DRC LOGGING MORATORIUM THREATEN FOREST PROTECTION EFFORTS IN THE CONGO BASIN

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July 2026

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has announced plans to lift the national moratorium on the allocation of new forestry concessions, which has been in place since 2002. This briefing outlines how opening potentially tens of millions of hectares of forest to the logging industry would have severe environmental, social and political impacts. It risks legitimising widespread illegal practices and triggering an uncontrolled expansion of forestry concessions. This could accelerate deforestation and biodiversity loss, undermine the rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples and bring limited economic benefit. It would also conflict with the existing legal framework and damage the DRC's international credibility at a time when the country has embraced several positive reforms aimed at slowing deforestation and improving forest governance.

As such, the government should maintain the moratorium until key legal conditions have been met and broader forest and land sector reforms have been completed. In the meantime, it should prioritise alternative approaches, including scaling up its leading community forest model and advancing initiatives such as the Kivu-Kinshasa Green Corridor.

1. BACKGROUND

The DRC is home to around 60% of the Congo Basin forest, the world's second-largest tropical forest, which supports thousands of local and Indigenous communities, harbours globally significant biodiversity and is likely the last remaining major tropical forest that still functions as a net carbon sink. Amid severe disorganisation in the DRC's forestry industry, the logging moratorium was first introduced in 2002 through AF.F-E.T./194/MAS/02 decree of 14 May 2002 and then reinforced by presidential decree No. 05/2005 in 2005¹ subject to legal conditions which remain unfulfilled today. The moratorium has endured despite repeated violations and several attempts to lift it over the years², all of which have faltered due to persistent concerns: weak governance, failure to meet legal conditions, lack of transparency and inadequate protection of the rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples.

In June 2026, however, it emerged that plans to lift the ban are at an advanced stage. These include its inclusion in the first draft of the new Forest Code, as well as two documents: (i) a geographical programming map, constituting the final condition required to lift the moratorium; and (ii) a draft ministerial decree repealing the 2002 Order and lifting the moratorium.

2. LEGAL AND PROCEDURAL INCONSISTENCY

These initiatives, however, appear fragmented and inconsistent. On the one hand, lifting the moratorium has been envisaged as part of the revision of the Forest Code; on the other hand, parallel efforts are underway to adopt a decree repealing the 2002 order. From a legal perspective and in accordance with the principle of parallelism of forms, lifting the moratorium — which was established by presidential decree — does not fall within the remit of the Forest Code. Furthermore, the hasty drafting of a new decree is taking place whilst key frameworks remain incomplete: the National Forestry Policy has not yet been adopted and the new Forestry Code is still under review.

Proceeding now with the lifting of the moratorium would therefore pre-empt the guidelines that should precisely be defined by these instruments, which should first establish a coherent vision for the sector, along with the necessary legal, environmental and social safeguards, before any decision regarding the moratorium is taken.

3. THE LEGAL CONDITIONS FOR LIFTING THE MORATORIUM HAVE NOT BEEN MET

In accordance with Decree No. 05/116 of 24 October 2005, which governs the conversion of old forest titles and extends the moratorium introduced in 2002, the lifting of the moratorium is subject to the fulfilment of two cumulative requirements: (i) the publication of the final results of the conversion process, including the effective termination of unconverted titles and (ii) the adoption, following a consultative process, of a geographical plan for future allocations over a

¹ Decree /AF.F-E.T./194/MAS/02 of 14 May 2002 suspending the granting of forestry allocations, extended by Presidential Decree No. 05/116 of 24 October 2005 setting out the procedures for converting former forestry titles into forestry concession contracts and extending the moratorium on the granting of forestry exploitation titles.

² [After decades of challenges, the DRC must deliver on sustainable forest governance](#), Global Witness, 19 December 2024.

three year period. This moratorium covers all acquisitions of exploitation rights, including through exchange, relocation or rehabilitation of old titles³.

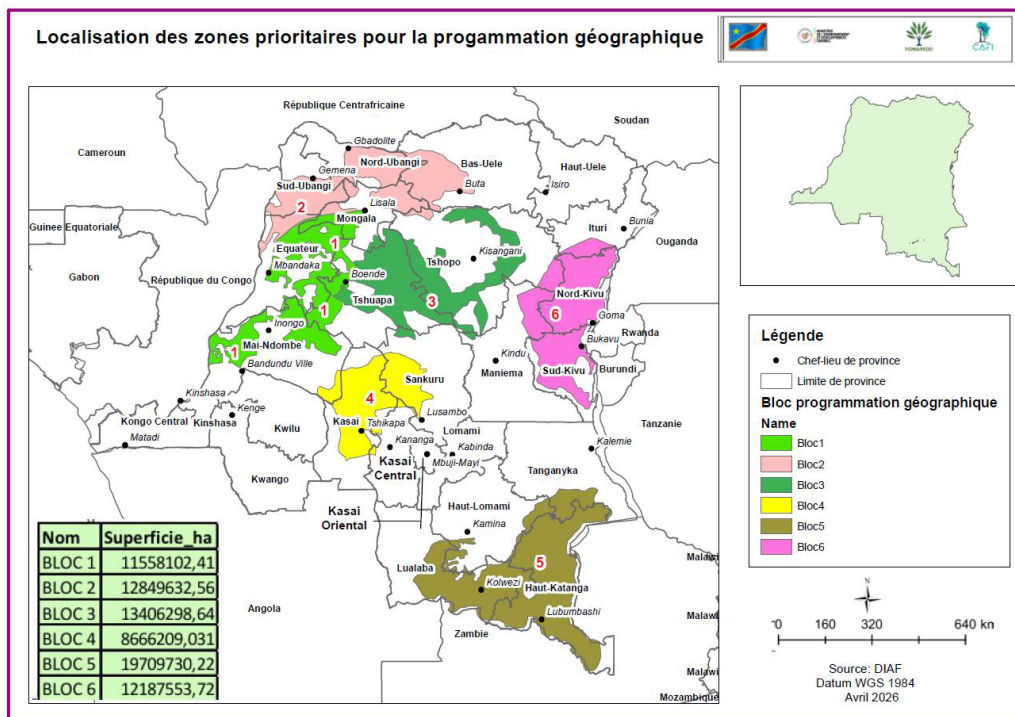
To date, these conditions have not been fully met. In particular, the proposed geographical plan cannot be considered to comply with legal requirements unless it is aligned with the ongoing land-use planning reforms in the country. This condition requires participatory, transparent and multi-sectoral planning, ensuring consistency in land use and preventing conflicts. Instead, the proposed approach more closely resembles a high-level macro-zoning exercise, lacking specific detail on the location of future logging concessions (**see following page**).

This lack of clarity is especially problematic because the maps presented do not show overlaps with existing land uses, including protected areas, community forests, undocumented community and Indigenous lands, carbon-rich peatlands, parts of the Kivu-Kinshasa Green Corridor and large areas of the Kivu region, which is not currently under the government's effective control.



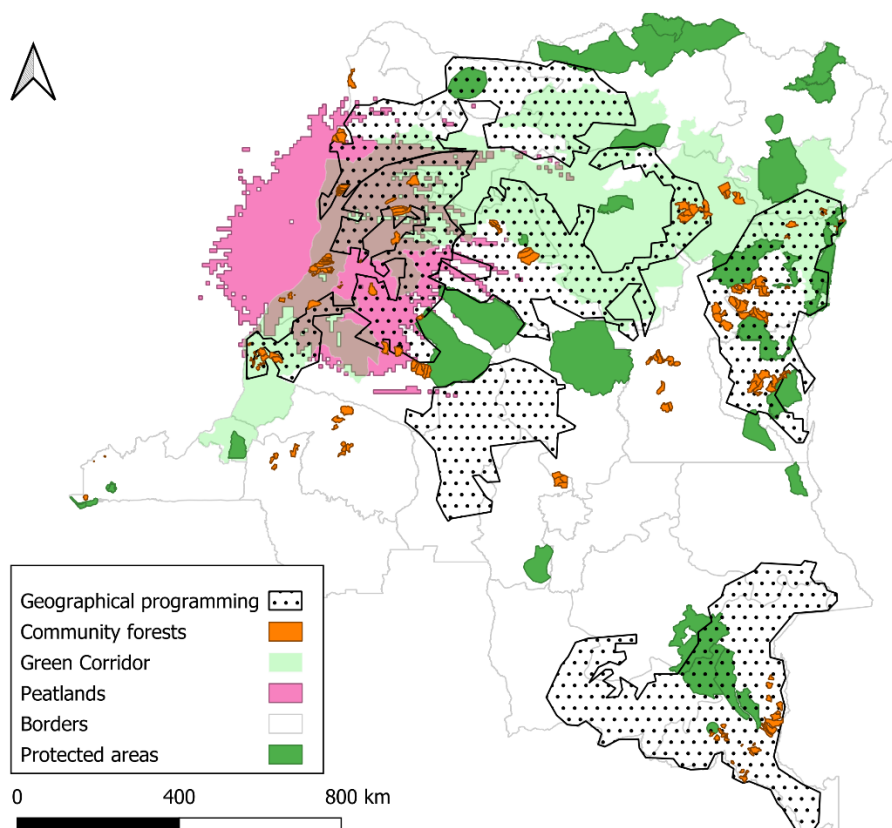
³ These conditions are also set out in the Letter of Intent concerning the renewal and expansion of a Partnership for Green Development within the framework of CAFI (2021–2031), p. 17: “The decree formalising the lifting of the moratorium will be adopted only after a geographical programme for future allocations has been drawn up, following a consultative process, in accordance with Presidential Decree No. 05/116 of 24 October 2005, and fully funded by CAFI by the end of 2022.”

MAP 1: PROPOSED GEOGRAPHICAL PROGRAMMING ZONES FOR INDUSTRIAL LOGGING



Official Department of Forestry Inventories and Management (DIAF) map.

MAP 2: OVERLAP WITH OTHER LAND USES AND PEATLANDS



Note: this map does not include existing forest concessions, unsecured community lands and other land uses.

4. INCOMPATIBILITY WITH ONGOING REFORMS AND THE DRC'S INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS

The Congolese government has played an increasingly prominent role in international climate and biodiversity negotiations, positioning itself as a 'solutions country' to these crises and championing a pro-community conservation approach. In recent years, it has taken several positive steps to implement this vision, which risks being undermined by a lifting of the moratorium. These include:

3.1. **Legal and policy reforms** including region-leading legislation on community forestry (2016), Indigenous Peoples rights (2022) and land-use planning (2025), which among measures contain special provisions regarding collective tenure recognition, Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and participatory governance.

3.2. The **Kivu-Kinshasa Green Corridor**, established in January 2025, is described by the government as the world's largest tropical and community reserve, stretching more than 540,000 km² from Beni in the east of the country to the capital Kinshasa in the south-west. Inter alia, it aims to protect more than 100,000 km² of primary forests, invest in local development and contains FPIC provisions for local communities impacted by development and conservation projects.

3.3. At COP30 in Belém, the DRC became a signatory to the FCLP **Intergovernmental Land Tenure Commitment (ILTC)**, committing to secure and conserve 540,000 km² of land for the benefit of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPs and LCs) by 2030.

3.4. As a signatory to the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**, the DRC has published a national biodiversity strategy and action which includes a commitment to protect 30% of its territory by 2030 (the '30x30' target), a near doubling of the current area under legal protection that requires rigorous planning of land allocation in areas of high conservation value.

Opening vast forests to industrial use would conflict with these commitments, as industrial exploitation cannot be reconciled with conservation and land tenure security in the same areas. It would place local communities at a disadvantage and overall could reverse recent progress on climate, biodiversity and governance.

As the President of the Republic himself reiterated during the Council of Ministers meeting on 22 May 2026, *"Our country's international credibility is also at stake [...] The Democratic Republic of the Congo's natural leadership in these forums must be underpinned by coherent national policies, credible governance mechanisms and a clearly affirmed political will"*⁴.

5. ENTRENCHING A FAILING MODEL

Any expansion of industrial logging should not be considered until persistent and structural shortcomings in the transparency, oversight and accountability of the existing concession system are addressed. A recent legal analysis⁵ by RFUK and APEM of 82 forest and conservation concessions, covering 14 million hectares and managed by 29 companies, found widespread

⁴ [Minutes of the Ninetieth Ordinary Meeting of the Council of Ministers](#), Friday 22 May 2026, The DRC Ministry of Communication and Media.

⁵ [New research finds that most industrial logging in the DRC is illegal](#), Rainforest Foundation UK, July 2025.

breaches of the Forest Code and associated legal obligations, particularly in relation to tax, social and contractual matters. Only 5% of the concessions were fully compliant with the legal framework; barely 14% of companies fulfil their socio-economic obligations towards local communities; and up to 42% do not pay the area-based tax correctly⁶.

Beyond issues of legality, industrial logging has major social impacts, including frequent reports of violations of local communities' and workers' rights, persistent conflicts and restrictions on community⁷, which are likely to intensify with the opening of new concessions. They also highlight the need to strengthen oversight, accountability and redress mechanisms, so that the exploitation of forest resources effectively contributes to local development and the well-being of the communities concerned.

6. A FADING ECONOMIC CASE

Arguments for a lifting of the ban are often made on economic grounds and bold projections over potential contribution of industrial logging to local development and the national budget. However, the available data and latest trends do not reflect this. A recent study found that the forestry sector makes only a marginal contribution to the national economy: around 0.6% of GDP and less than 1% of public revenue⁸. While information on tax revenues is patchy it appears to be minimal, especially considering the large forest area under concessions. Job creation tends to be temporary, low-paid and often dangerous, while most logs are exported unprocessed, limiting in-country value addition.

Meanwhile, challenging economic and governance conditions have led to an exodus of companies from the logging industry in recent years, with many converting their titles into conservation concessions to access voluntary carbon markets⁹. For example, SODEFOR, the largest private forestry concessionaire in the DRC, has converted all but four of the eighteen concessions it holds. Hence, any lifting of the moratorium against this backdrop is unlikely to yield significant economic benefits for the country.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS

The environmental case for lifting the moratorium is similarly flawed. Deforestation has increased in the DRC in recent years: according to Global Forest Watch, between 2020 and 2025 the country lost around 1.1 million hectares of forest cover¹⁰. Shifting agriculture and energy demand are often cited as the main drivers of deforestation (though this varies by region and is typically concentrated around villages and urban centres), while demographic pressures, as well as semi-industrial and illegal logging and mining, must also be addressed.

However, allocating large, bounded areas as industrial concessions is not an effective response to these challenges. Many existing concessions still lack government-approved management

⁶ The Fédération Industrielle du Bois (FIB), the national timber industry body, has contested these findings but has provided no evidence to the contrary.

⁷ See, for example, [Until the Last Log](#), Environmental Investigation Agency, October 2024; [Tshopo : un député provincial exige la suspension des activités de Booming Green à Yahuma](#), Agence congolaise de presse, April 2026; [Chinese companies linked to illegal logging and mining in northern DRC](#), Mongabay, May 2022.

⁸ [Programme de Gestion Durable des Forêts \(PGDF\) PGDF Report](#), 2024.

⁹ [The Great Green Rush: The exponential rise and social impacts of forest carbon offset projects in the DRC](#), Rainforest Foundation UK, October 2025.

¹⁰ [Global Forest Watch forest atlas](#).

plans, and a growing body of research highlights the risks associated with the industrial logging concession system. Between 2021 and 2025, Global Forest Watch estimates that nearly 170,000 hectares of temporary disturbances to forest cover in the DRC are attributable to logging activities¹¹. The road infrastructure required to access and transport logs is of particular concern, as it opens previously intact forest landscapes to a “cascade of deforestation” as illegal loggers, farmers and settlers move in, playing a pivotal role in driving forest degradation and fragmentation¹².

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This briefing shows that opening some of the world’s last remaining intact tropical forests to industrial logging at this time would exacerbate already deeply entrenched problems and pose significant risks to the climate, biodiversity, the rule of law and the rights of forest communities. It remains to be seen whether the unproven benefits of expanding industrial logging in the DRC outweigh the substantial political, environmental and social costs it entails. As such, the DRC government should maintain the national moratorium on the allocation of new logging concessions until the legal requirements are fully met and the industry is demonstrably brought under control. Specifically, it should:

8.1. Suspend ongoing efforts to lift the moratorium, including by removing references to it from the draft forest code and withdrawing the draft ministerial decree.

8.2. Finalise ongoing reforms related to forests, land and Indigenous Peoples in line with international standards and await the adoption of a consolidated legal framework, including strong safeguards for community rights, particularly the effective recognition of FPIC, before any reassessment of the moratorium.

8.3. Ensure full compliance with legal requirements for spatial planning by establishing a multi-sectoral, participatory and legally robust process that incorporates national priorities such as community forests, climate commitments (e.g. 30x30) and other land uses.

8.4. Strengthen enforcement of the existing legal framework by investigating non-compliant operators, prosecuting violations and revoking irregular permits. Additional measures could include instituting a log export ban to promote in-country value creation and expanding independent and community-led monitoring of existing concessions.

8.5. Ban all new concessions in the Kivu-Kinshasa Green Corridor that do not contribute to the green economy, including, but not limited to industrial logging — the clear incompatibility of such activities with the corridor’s conservation, local development and land tenure security objectives.

8.6. Increase support for community forests through a new national strategy, with a view to making them a central pillar of forest management and land use in the DRC, as well as a key vehicle for implementing the intergovernmental land tenure commitment.

8.7. Mobilise international climate and other sources of finance to support these efforts.

¹¹ Idem.

¹² [Use It AND Lose It – Industrial Logging and its Role in Deforestation in the Democratic Republic of Congo](#), Rainforest Foundation UK, May 2021.