



Open letter to:

Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Germany, France, UK, Norway, US, Canada, Belgium, Sweden and the European Commission (DG INTPA, EEAS) and their respective embassies or delegations in Cameroon

CC: CAFI secretariat, Presidency Cameroon

25 April 2024

Subject: Cameroon is a high risk country for deforestation and forest degradation

Dear Decision Makers,

We are writing you to express our concerns about the large-scale deforestation for agri-business plantations and degradation of forest due to illegal industrial logging in Cameroon. These issues are intertwined with violation of human rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples in Cameroon, stemming from poor governance within Cameroon and internationally.

It contravenes your engagements under international and national commitments to halt deforestation and forest degradation, fight poverty and support local livelihoods. These are set out in the EU's strategy to protect the world's forests and its [Deforestation Regulation](#) (EUDR), the objectives of the Central African Forest Initiative ([CAFI](#)), commitments from [UNFCCC COP26](#) to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030, the Global Forest Finance Pledge and the [Global Biodiversity Framework adopted in 2022](#) and international human rights law.

In the Campo Ma'an Key Biodiversity Area, large-scale [deforestation for industrial palm oil plantations](#) is ongoing. This is one of the single largest deforestation cases currently in the Congo Basin. Every day, dozens of timber trucks are observed on the roads. Rows of newly planted oil palms are replacing High Conservation Value and High Carbon Stock forests. [Around 60,000 hectares \(ha\) are](#) under threat, of which around 40,000 are currently attributed to a company called Cameroun Vert (Camvert). This forest serves as a crucial wildlife corridor and is customary owned and utilised by the Indigenous Bagyeli as well as Mvae and Iyasa community groups. The implementation of this project has proceeded without free prior and informed consent or just and equitable compensation.

Beyond the immediate impact on livelihoods, affected communities have spoken about an increase in human - wildlife conflicts. Detailed GIS mapping results show that the area of the concession cleared by September 2022 was 2,876 ha, but by November 2022 the area of clearance had nearly doubled to [4,978 ha](#). [Civil society organisations estimate](#) that close to 6,000 ha of forest were destroyed by early 2023.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) suggests that [Cameroon may be in breach of its duty to protect Indigenous Peoples' rights](#) after a complaint was filed on the request of seven Bagyeli Indigenous communities affected by the Camvert plantations. In August 2023, [the Committee requested](#) Cameroon to suspend or revoke the concession.

The permit process allowing the forest to be harvested for the establishment of the Camvert plantation is [riddled with illegalities](#). The permit for the sale of standing timber ('ventes de coupe') was issued before the grant of the concession for the plantation. These permits extend beyond the plantation's borders and have irregular duration and renewal options. Additionally, the degazettement of the former logging concession into agricultural land is also [alleged to be illegal](#), and is currently being contested in the national courts.

Experts and scientists have declared [the industrial logging system in Cameroon a fiasco](#). They find over-exploitation and corruption have led the private sector to enrich themselves by ravaging Cameroon's forests before starting somewhere new. Camvert is a case in point for this analysis, where abandoned industrial logging concessions are now being turned into palm oil plantations.

Ebo forest is another [well documented case](#) of illegal logging. The attribution of two logging concessions by Decree in April 2023 in the Ebo forest area - Forest Management Unit (FMU) 07 006 of 68,385 ha to Sextransbois and FMU 07 005 of just over 65,000 ha to logging company SCIEB - [are in flagrant violation of the laws of Cameroon](#). The FMU 07 006 has been awarded to Sextransbois in blatant non-compliance with legal procedures: without a public call for tender, without the meeting of the inter-ministerial award commission, without an award to the best financial and technical bidder and other irregularities. [Tree felling has started](#) and degradation is ongoing.

Local communities of [the Banen people with insecure customary land rights, are tricked](#) into accepting the industrial logging with false promises that they will be allowed to return to their ancestral villages and receive large amounts of forestry taxes. The 'consultations' undertaken are in no way compliant with the requirements of international human rights law for consultations and free, prior and informed consent. It is of great concern that their customary land has been made State property with the aim of exploiting it and with no right of return for the Banen. [The Banen took legal steps](#) to demand the withdrawal of the industrial logging permit on their territory. More than 40 communities, principally Banen, live on the outskirts of Ebo forest and depend on the forest for their livelihoods and to maintain their culture.

The Ebo forest hosts part of the last remaining [intact forest landscapes](#) in Cameroon. In terms of biodiversity, Ebo Forest is a critical ecosystem. It is home to a number of threatened species on IUCN Red List and Class A of Cameroon's wildlife regime, including a new subspecies of gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla*); the largest population of chimpanzees in Nigeria-Cameroon (*Pan troglodytes ellioti*), known worldwide for their use of tools to extract termites and crack nuts; and forest elephants (*Loxodonta africana cyclotis*). This forest is also vital in terms of Cameroon's climate commitments; its considerable carbon stock is estimated at 35 million tonnes.

Despite its importance for Cameroon, Ebo forest does not have a legal protection status and the government has a presumption in favour of logging. In 2020 the government had to withdraw the decree classifying the area as a forestry concession (under FMU 07 005) after protest from Banen communities, scientists and civil society globally. Nevertheless illegal road building started soon after to open up the forest for logging. In reaction to international outrage and various requests and publications, including from the EU Head of Delegation and Ambassadors of a range of European countries, Civil Society and [an independent forest monitoring mission from FODER](#) highlighting various illegal logging actions, the road was halted after it penetrated the forest for 26 kilometres.

These two cases are emblematic of more widespread patterns and show the utmost neglect of national legislation and international commitments for forests, climate, biodiversity and human rights by the Government of Cameroon. This could undermine trade with the EU, the UK and other markets that are taking measures to prevent deforestation and human rights violations related to timber, rubber, palm oil and cacao. Currently [the large majority of cacao produced in Cameroon is shipped to Europe](#). If that market is undermined because of illegal logging and deforestation, efforts from the Cameroon government to support smallholders and improve traceability and the quality of cacao production from the past years might be undone.

Poor governance in Cameroon's agriculture and forestry sectors is marked by illegalities, lack of transparency and is anti-development. Precious natural resources are over-exploited and destroyed, communities' rights are violated and poverty increased, while benefits are captured by an (often corrupt) elite. Illegal operations in industrial logging and oil palm plantations also puts trade in other agriculture sectors at risk. We urge decision makers of your respective institutions and national governments to ensure finance and trade are not contributing to and facilitating the illegal operations and urge you to continue to work with the Government of Cameroon to tackle the root causes of deforestation and human rights violations.

CAFI currently has no relevance for tropical forests in Cameroon, because the projects are situated outside the tropical forest biome. CAFI should ensure it directs finance to halting destruction of key tropical forest areas in Cameroon, including the Ebo forest and Camvert concession, and put community rights at the center of all CAFI deals and investments in order to have meaningful impact.

We are looking forward to your response and analysis and would appreciate a meeting to discuss the content of this letter in more detail.

Best wishes,

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