

Bugnaux (Switzerland), February 29, 2016

Honourable Mr. Muhammadu Buhari, President of Nigeria (hand delivery to office)

Honourable Ms. Amina Mohammed, Federal Minister of Environment of Nigeria

(amina.mohammed@environment.gov.ng, aminajmoffice@gmail.com, bechu63@yahoo.co.uk)

Honourable Dr. Bukola Saraki, President of the Senate of Nigeria (hand delivery to office)

Honourable Mr. Yakubu Dogara Speaker of the House of Representatives of Nigeria (hand delivery to office)

Honourable Senator Prof. Ben Ayade, Governor of Cross River State, Nigeria (ayadeleon@gmail.com)

cc: Embassy of Switzerland in Nigeria (abu.vertretung@eda.admin.ch)

Ambassador James F. Entwistle - United States Ambassador to Nigeria (consularabuja@state.gov)

Delegation of the European Union to Nigeria and ECOWAS (delegation-nigeria@eeas.europa.eu)

Ref: Concerns regarding impacts of a proposed “super highway” on the Ekuri Community Forest and other forested environments and communities in Cross River State, Nigeria

Excellencies,

The ICCA Consortium is an international association under Swiss law uniting federations and organizations of indigenous peoples, local communities and NGOs concerned with the appropriate recognition of the **territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities (ICCAs)** throughout the world. We are a partner organization of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP GEF SGP) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Our Members and Honorary members span over seventy-five countries.

The ICCA Consortium’s worldwide engagement is part of the global recognition of the importance of community conservation practices, including by those who define themselves as discrete indigenous peoples and those who do not, to achieve global conservation goals and targets. This recognition is enshrined in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which recommends Parties to “*recognize the role of indigenous and local community conserved areas in biodiversity conservation and diversification of governance types*” (CBD COP 10, Decision X 31), a role considered fundamental to reach Aichi Biodiversity Targets 11 and 18, among others.

We are writing at this time to express our serious concerns regarding a seemingly impending so called “super-highway” expected to be built across the Ekuri community forest in Cross River State— one of Nigeria’s last and most precious surviving rainforests. We are told that work to begin clearing the forest for the “super-highway” is imminent in Ekuri’s land and has already begun in neighbouring land **engendering the desperation of local communities**. This initiative, which is proceeding in **absence of any environmental and social impact analysis** and certainly **without the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of the relevant communities— violates international obligations**

in terms of human rights and indigenous peoples' rights and is squarely in contradiction with CBD and UNFCCC obligations to which Nigeria has freely adhered.

Along with other remaining rainforests in Cross River State, the Ekuri community forest is of global significance. We understand that the Ekuri and Okokori communities have already written to the Governor of Cross River State to oppose the "super-highway" project and we would like to join our voice to their voices on the basis of a number of concerns:

Irremediable ecological impact

The "super-highway" would have irremediably negative consequences for the Ekuri forest, destroying irreplaceable biodiversity. It is very well known that road building through rainforest areas leads to the destruction of the biological and cultural diversity of these areas as they are opened up to uncontrollable logging, farming and hunting. The "super-highway" project actually calls for a most unusual and destructive clearance of 10 kilometres on each side of the road. In addition, as the Ekuri forest is on hilly terrain, the "super-highway" would inevitably engender erosion and landslides.

Irremediable socio-cultural and human impact

The "super-highway" would have irremediably negative consequences for the Ekuri communities' livelihoods and well-being. The Ekuri forest has been governed, managed and conserved by the local people and communities for thousands of years. It is a rare example of sustainable traditional livelihoods and cultural lifestyle with unique spiritual and material features. The Ekuri communities would be displaced, disrupted and victimised by undesired social change and man-made disasters.

Economic, financial and reputational impact for Cross River State and Nigeria a whole

The "super-highway" runs the high risk of being a colossal economic failure— as its public economic purpose is highly dubious and its allocated budget opaque. It is sure, however, that it would demoralise conservation practices in the country and convinces the world public opinion that Nigeria is not concerned about conserving biodiversity and mitigating global warming. In this sense, the "super-highway" would bring about a reputational and financial set-back for all partners interested in REDD + initiatives in Cross River state and Nigeria in general. Alarmingly, it would raise justified suspicions about the motives of an initiative that "requires" the harvesting of precious timber for hundreds of square kilometres in one of the hilliest terrain in the country... while viable, less expensive and less ecologically and socio-culturally damaging alternatives for the highway route are well known to exist.

Appeal for action

Excellencies, we join our voice to the ones of the Ekuri communities to urge you to:

- **Suspend immediately all field activities for the so-called "super-highway" project** across the Ekuri community forest and other forested parts of Cross River State.
- **Suspend immediately all forest logging and clearance already commenced without EIA permit from the Ministry of Environment of Nigeria and rescind the related land acquisition along the route through forested areas.**
- Carry out a thoroughly **participatory and transparent review of the ecological, socio-cultural, economic, financial and reputational impacts of the so-called "super-highway"** before it engenders a man-made disaster for Cross River State and Nigeria.

- **Examine all alternatives routes** for the so-called “super-highway” that avoid the destruction of the Ekuri community forests and other forested parts of Cross River State.
- **Enhance awareness of the value of governance, management and conservation capacities of the local traditional institutions of forest communities** in Cross River state and Nigeria as a whole.

Excellencies,

if the mentioned measures can be taken, the Ekuri community forest and the forests of other peoples in Cross River State will be preserved for generations to come and will soon be recognised as **some of the most precious assets of Nigeria to face climate and other challenging changes impending upon your country and our planet**. We urge you to fully recognise, protect, support and uphold as examples for the world the unique community conserved areas that exist as **seeds of humanity** in your magnificent country.

We thank you very much for your kind consideration and we look forward to hearing from you.



Dr. M. Taghi Farvar
President, The ICCA Consortium



Dr. Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend
Global Coordinator, The ICCA Consortium