

Genolier (Switzerland), 21 December 2021

To: the Minister of Water, Forests, Oceans, Environment, Climate Change and Land-use
Planning, Gabonese Republic (lwhitemfsepc@gmail.com)

**Ref: Request to stop logging in the sacred forest of the community of Massaha and legally
recognise it as a protected area in hunting domain**

Dear Minister,

We are writing to you on behalf of the ICCA Consortium, a global membership-based association dedicated to supporting Indigenous Peoples and local communities who are protecting, conserving, and defending their collective lands and territories of life. We have organisational Members and individual Honorary members in more than 80 countries around the world and have observer status with the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Economic and Social Council.

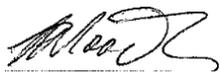
We are writing to you with deep concerns about the logging taking place in the community conserved and sacred forest of Massaha village, 56 kilometers from Makoko on the national road to Mekambo. Through our membership in Central Africa, we have come to learn about the noble roles by the community coming from both sides of Liboumba River in conserving the forest. The community's efforts to conserve and protect their forest have been inspired by the cultural, ecological, and economic importance they attach to the forest as rural people. However, their lifetime efforts and benefits are being threatened by the logging concession issued by the government to the Transport Bois Négoce International (TBNI), a Chinese logging company, whose forestry management unit FMU-2 (in French, Unité Forestière de Gestion 2 within l'Unité Forestières d'Aménagement 1) covers 11,300 ha of Massaha's forest south of the community.

Ongoing studies have indicated in a preliminary manner the immense biocultural diversity of the forest. These include and are not limited to: presence of more than 42 species, 15 of which are IUCN Red Listed, such as African Forest Elephant (CR), Gorilla (CR), Chimpanzee (EN) and Giant Pangolin (EN); an abundance of Gabon's protected tree species such as the Kevzingo, Moabi, and Andok; fish in the Liboumba River providing food for hundreds of people; 14 ancestral villages north and south of the Liboumba (Ngozo, Ekombo Ya Nkola, Balou, Bandétsé, Ibenga, Zokoualouboua, Mepindji, Katamekodji, Mazala, Mabadji, Malembé, Zazo 1, Zazo 2, and Itoukoué); and 6 sacred sites south of the Liboumba (Aboye, Ikozo, Mehambi, Ponga, Ekoukoua Sombet, et Mabadji Mambokou Bangando). All this richness is threatened by the logging in FMU-2. The community has had their efforts to stop the logging recognized by the [global](#) and [national](#) press who have documented their struggle. Community members have shared on the awful changes happening in small rivers which have affected their fishing activities. Their fishing nets being trapped by logs, and waterways having been obstructed by waste from the logging activities. Others, elders, stress the risk of their village's history and cultural origins. All 9 villages north of the Liboumba have been severely impacted, with some being entirely destroyed by timber yards.

In the decade of the climate crisis, any government would be careful to respect community efforts like those of the population of Massaha village to protect their forest from destruction. They have even applied, to the government, for their territory to be formerly classified as a protected area in the form of a hunting domain, *Ibola Dja Bana Ba Massaha* (the reserve of all Massaha's children). However, we are deeply concerned to hear that after two visits from the General Director of the General Direction of Wildlife and Protected Areas, logging has not stopped, and the government has not been responsive to the community concerns expressed through several letters (to the Provincial Director, General Director of Wildlife and Protected Areas, and your Excellency the Minister of Water and Forests) and the application for the reclassification of the land, supported by Gabonese law. It is disheartening to learn that TBNI is continuing its activities in the territories south of the Liboumba, which have never been logged and [which RADD alerts show have highly intact forests in comparison to surrounding areas](#). Such concessions to the Chinese company only exposes the forests and its valuable resources to those who care the least about the resources and deprives communities of their intimate and long-term cultural relationship with its resources. The uncontrolled degradation of the forest goes against the government of Gabon's commitments under several international instruments, notably the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. Gabon has equally proclaimed its intention to be a leader in the global vision of 30x30 as a member of the "High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People", to which the community protected area proposed by Massaha would contribute.

We implore you to respect the immense and immeasurable values of these forests, not only locally but also globally, as a contribution to biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation in these times of great uncertainty. As we stand in solidarity with the population of Massaha village and their supporters within Gabon, Central Africa, and around the world, we urge you to order the withdrawal of the area in question of the logging concession now and for posterity. We also urge you to consider the community's application to reclassify the area as a protected area and their proposed simple management plan signed by the ensemble of the community submitted to the General Direction of Wildlife and Protected Areas. This protected area must be governed and managed by the community, in a self-determined manner that supports the rights, livelihoods, and culture of the people of Massaha. We look forward to your positive response and bold action for current and future generations.

Please accept, sir, the assurances of our highest consideration,



Mr. Pooven Moodley
Chair, Defending territories of life
ICCA Consortium Council



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