

COALITION OF ENVIRONMENTAL, LAND AND HUMAN RIGHTS CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN THE VIRUNGA LANDSCAPE.

PRESS RELEASE N°004/COALITION/2022 ON THE ALERT AGAINST HOSTILITIES IN THE GREAT APES AREA OF THE VIRUNGA LANDSCAPE

The coalition of environmental, land and human rights civil society organisations of the Virunga Landscape calls on the Presidents of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Rwanda to exercise greater caution in the face of hostilities in the great ape area of the Virunga Landscape.

Indeed, as you know, in their respective countries, namely the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Rwanda, their two countries share a common and exceptional natural heritage represented by a flagship and endemic species of Great Apes, namely the "**Mountain Gorilla**". There is no need to recall that it is a great pride for our two countries at the international level to be the only ones to host this species which attracts tourists from all over the world. Thus, in the recent past, thanks to the combined efforts of our two governments supported by both national and international partners, the Mountain Gorilla population has grown from 70 to at least 700, and even 1000 individuals, which we warmly congratulate.

Their Excellencies the Presidents, Unfortunately, since the last quarter of 2021, we have observed a resumption of hostilities between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo, FARDC, and the M23 rebel group in this area, which is the natural habitat of the Mountain Gorilla, with all the related environmental consequences, namely

- The exposure of gorillas to crossfire and other explosive devices;
- The psychological trauma of these animals linked to the detonations, especially of heavy weapons;
- A disorderly migration of these animals fleeing in all directions and exposing them to poaching.

Furthermore, in this period of major pandemics such as COVID19, Ebola fever, monkey pox, etc., the installation of positions and camps of the belligerents in this fragile ecosystem exposes these primates to possible epizootics that could decimate these animals.

This dramatic situation that these animals are currently experiencing concerns our two countries indiscriminately because these animals have no nationality; they are a common heritage that we must absolutely safeguard for the benefit of our two countries.

Therefore, Your Excellencies, Presidents, here are some recommendations we would like to make to you in this regard:

- Jointly secure this strategic ecological area for this flagship and endemic species, by demilitarising it and leaving its protection to the eco-guards of our two respective countries;
- Strengthen the joint and permanent monitoring mechanism for this species.

Their Excellencies, this is how our three countries will not only be able to protect this endangered species but also to strengthen their credibility in the nature conservation sector both nationally and internationally.

Our highest consideration.
For the coalition's focal point

Mr BANTU LUKAMBO

Contact address: Q. Mabanga-Sud, N° 158, AV. Mutongo, Ville de Goma, Province of North Kivu, DRC,
Grace to Glory station building on the Goma-Sake road, Tel: +243(0)997704042
E-mail: bantulukambo@gmail.com; idpe_kc@yahoo.fr; BP: 48 Goma.