



TO: Mr. Jan Peter Balkenende,
Prime Minister of the
Kingdom of the Netherlands,
President of the European Council

CC: Mr. Louis Michel, Commissioner
Designate for Development
Mr. Stefano Manservigi, Director-
General for Development
Mr. Aart Jan Verdegaal, Ambassador
to Nigeria of the Netherlands
Mr. Leonidas Tezapsidis, Head of the
EC Delegation to Nigeria
Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, President of
the Republic of Nigeria
Mr. Donald Duke, Governor of Cross
River State, Nigeria

Subject: Last remaining Rainforests in Cross River State, Nigeria

Amsterdam, November 17th, 2004

Dear Mr. Balkenende,

In the light of the October 2004 visit by the EU "troika" mission, led by Mr. Aart Jan Verdegaal, to the Niger Delta and the upcoming meetings between the EU Presidency and the Nigerian government, we would like to draw your attention to the situation in Cross River State, home to the last remaining rainforests in Nigeria.

These rainforest remnants are located, amongst others, in the Cross River National Park and the Obudu Plateau, regions internationally famous for their unique biodiversity. In the past, the European Community planned to support two major programmes in the area: the Okwangwo and Oban Hills initiatives, which aimed at protecting the tropical forest and improving the livelihood of forest-dependent communities. However, these two initiatives were never implemented due to the worsening political situation during the dictatorship of General Abacha.

It is worrying to notice that during the past years unsustainable logging has decimated the rainforests of Cross River State. It is expected that if this situation continues, the last remnants of Nigerian rainforest in this area, will be eliminated within ten years time. Responsible for this destruction is a subsidiary of the Chinese multinational corporation WEMPCO.

The Cross River State government accused WEMPCO of several irregularities, including: logging outside its concession area; exportation of unprocessed wood out of the State; and total failure to adopt environmentally sustainable forest conservation techniques. Specific mention must be made of widespread tax evasion by WEMPCO. Because of these breaches of Nigerian law, the Governor of Cross River State, Mr. Donald Duke, has approved the closure of the WEMCO subsidiary (based at the village of Ikom) on July 7th

2004. However, this closure has not been implemented yet, leading to ongoing destruction of the rainforest remnants.

The unsustainable logging also hampers the economic development of Cross River State. It threatens the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities and the development of sustainable economic development through eco-tourism. Among others, it causes the disappearance of rare species and the drying up of rivers, with the subsequent elimination of waterfalls (Agbokim). This does not only foster the general desertification of the area, but also hampers promising forest-related types of local economic development. An example is the proposed initiative on fair trade harvesting of the oil bearing fruit tree called *Allan Blackia*. This project is initiated by the Dutch multinational corporation Unilever, Novib (Oxfam Netherlands) and the Nigerian NGO Rainforest Resource and Development Centre (RRDC).

We believe that the above mentioned practice of unsustainable logging contradicts several of the European Commission co-operation guidelines with Nigeria (stated in the Country Strategy Paper 2001-2007), such as support to State reforms and strengthening of good governance, including compliance with national laws, administrative reform plus payment of taxes and local economic development.

Therefore, we would like to ask you to bring this issue, in particular the outstanding implementation of the closure of the WEMPCO subsidiary, to the attention of the Nigerian authorities during upcoming meetings.

Yours sincerely,

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On behalf of

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Development Policy Officer, FERN -
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