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**INNOVATION POUR LE
DEVELOPPEMENT ET LA PROTECTION DE
L'ENVIRONNEMENT**

« Une Association pour la Promotion et la Défense de Droit des Animaux »

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Subject: Indignation in the face of intimidating behavior on the part of the SOCO-ICCN coalition

His Excellency, the Governor of North Kivu Province in Goma

Your Excellency,

We have the honor of addressing your Excellency through this document to express our gravest concerns with regards to the sustained campaign of intimidation that is being carried out by SOCO International and its partner, ICCN, in their attempt to silence all those who do not support their oil exploration project in the Virunga National Park.

Your Excellency, the Governor of North Kivu Province, there is a growing atmosphere of intimidation today that makes it increasingly difficult for any individual or organization to raise questions about the merits of the oil exploration project. Indeed, the situation is such that any entity that dares to express doubts regarding this venture exposes itself to very real danger.

Your Excellency, the Governor of North Kivu Province, attention must be drawn to the alleged community outreach efforts being carried out by the SOCO-ICCN coalition, with support from some elements of the armed forces, in their attempt to convince the local population of the benefits they will one day derive from this project, even if the reality on the ground proves otherwise, as is the case in Bas-Congo province where the local population has yet to see the benefits from SOCO International's oil exploitation program.

Furthermore, Your Excellency, the Governor of North Kivu Province, it is truly astonishing that Dr. Guy MBAHIMA, a high-level official at ICCN who holds the position of Scientific and Technical Director, should be allowed to use media

outlets to cast aspersions and injurious accusations against independent organization who have questioned the science and wisdom of this oil exploration project in Virunga National Park. (Reference: Cosmos Our World program on 16 September, 2013).

Your Excellency, the Governor of North Kivu Province, it is worth noting that we live in a country where freedom of expression and the protection of natural resources is constitutionally enshrined. Nevertheless, in recent weeks and months, it has become apparent that anyone who dares speak against SOCO is either intimidated or arrested. As examples of such behavior, we wish to present the following cases:

- On July 15, 2013, Mr. Marc KYANGWI MUSAKARA was arrested and intimidated by agents of the SOCO-ICCN coalition for having spoken out about his negative experiences with regards to oil refining activity whilst living in Moanda in Bas-Congo.
- On 12 September 2013, Daniel MACHOZI MUPANZA, a human rights activist working for the NGO CREDDHO in Nyakakoma, was arrested by local FARDC Navy officials for allegedly taking photographs of the SOCO installations.
- On 19 September 2013, Virunga National Park Warden Rodrigue KATEMBO MUGARUKA, was arrested two days after he refused to allow SOCO International employees, working alongside employees of a telecommunications company, to install communication material in Virunga National Park without proper (legal) authorization. Mr. KATEMBO MUGARUKA was carrying out his duties as a law enforcement officer and as mandated by Congolese law and by the existing ICCN statutes.

Your Excellency, the Governor of North Kivu Province, we believe that a development project, such as this one, that is supposed to benefit the local population requires that there be a public and thorough debate with the participation of all stakeholders. The actions listed in this document and attributed to the SOCO-ICCN coalition suggest that such a debate is not welcome or necessary.

We also wonder why SOCO's representative within ICCN continues to repeatedly invoke the endorsement of the President of the Republic for the project in his effort to influence public opinion and intimidate the local population? Why is it necessary to threaten with imprisonment all those who question the oil development project?

Your Excellency, the Governor of North Kivu Province, in this post-conflict and traumatized region, we don't think this type of psychological torture and ideological coercion is welcome. As the leader of this long-suffering province, you are in the best position to understand the value of peace.

Your Excellency, the Governor of North Kivu Province, it is our conviction that threats and coercion will lead to the opposite of the desired results. We think everyone's interests will be better served by choosing a path that leads through harmony and dialogue with the local population.

We are convinced that the current intimidation campaign employed by the representatives of the SOCO–ICCN coalition have not been approved by the office of the Presidency of the Republic, which, by its nature, embodies respect for the rule of law and is committed to achieving peace and stability across the land. In fact, we believe that the coalition should follow the Principles of Free, Informed, and Prior Consent [***Principe Consentement, Libre, Informé et Préalable (CLIP)***] in order to ensure the sustainability of all projects across every sector.

This is why, Your Excellency, we respectfully request your personal attention to this matter so that traumatized and long-suffering people of North Kivu may enjoy their constitutional rights, without intimidation, thus allowing them to build a prosperous and radiant future for themselves and their communities.

Your Excellence, the Governor of North Kivu Province, we humbly request that you please accept the heartfelt expression of our deepest and most patriotic sentiments.

On behalf of IDPE

The Director General

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