
Central African Conference on Forests

As informed in WRM bulletin 11, the second meeting of the Conference on Central African Moist-Forest Ecosystems (CEFDHAC) took place in Bata, Equatorial Guinea from 8 to 10 June 1998. We include here the Indigenous Peoples' and NGO declarations presented at that conference.

Indigenous Peoples' Declaration

Declaration by the Indigenous Peoples of Central Africa to the 2nd Conference on Central African Moist Forest Ecosystems (CEFDHAC, or the 'Brazzaville Process').

We, the indigenous peoples of Central Africa, gathered together under the auspices of our network Coordinating Committee of African Indigenous Peoples, Central African section, have the distinguished honour of putting forward the following recommendations and proposals:

In view of the fact that we are forgotten and marginalised despite being the great trustees and protectors of the equatorial forests of Africa, we ask you to:

1. Involve us in all international and national fora, as well as the major forestry [meetings].
2. Not take premature decisions about the forests without consulting with us and without guaranteeing our right to live there as protectors of the forests, which are for us a paradise.
3. That the Governments recognise the rights of indigenous peoples in financial legislation concerning the inhabitants living in the depths of the forest, without pressurising them or expelling them from their ancestral domain which they consider their paradise.
4. That CEFDHAC in relation to the [proposed] code of conduct [for forestry operations] considers and takes measures guaranteeing the indigenous peoples' right to live in or near the forest so that they can play their role and do not have to exchange their forest way of life for a mundane life without land.
5. That the national and international organisations providing support for protection and conservation of nature are not fooled by non-indigenous peoples who oppose the development and integration of indigenous forest peoples who have been expelled from their ancestral domains without compensation or restitution of other lands.
6. That the Governments create buffer zones for indigenous peoples living in protected areas to enable them to lead their customary lives (hunting, fishing...).
7. That the proceeds of all activities (tourism, industrial exploitation) carried out in the territories of indigenous peoples are shared equitably with the original owners of the land.

Signed at Bata, 9 June 1998

On behalf of the representatives of indigenous peoples of Central Africa

Kapupu Diwa M.
President of ONGS A.A.

Kalimba Zephyrin
President of CAURWA

NGO Declaration

Declaration of NGOs at the 2nd CEFDHAC Conference (Conference on Moist Forest Ecosystems of Central Africa), Bata, June 1998

Your Excellency, the Prime Minister, Head of Government, Representative of the Head of State of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea;
Your Excellency, the Congolese Minister for Forest Economy, current chairman of CEFDHAC;
Your Excellencies, Ministers responsible for the forest ecosystems of Central Africa;
Honourable Members of Parliament;
Distinguished Delegates;
Esteemed Colleagues;
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have the honour to speak to this illustrious assembly, to convey our thanks to the Secretariat of CEFDHAC for having recognised our role in giving us the opportunity to express our point of view on the Brazzaville process.

Nevertheless, we wish to express our disappointment about the provisional programme, which could not take our intervention into account, despite the fact that this process claims to be participative, open and democratic.

Please allow us to present the quintessential elements of our Declaration:

We, the NGOs of the Congo Basin,

- considering that the Brazzaville Process is an important platform for collaboration between the different players: states, NGOs, local communities, private sector, working towards sustainable management of forest resources,
- Considering that the Brazzaville Declaration constitutes the political will affirmed by the State of the sub-region to harmonise policies for sustainable management of forest resources,
- Considering the political instability in the sub-region,
- Considering that large-scale development projects are sources of conflict and grave threats to biodiversity,
- Noting the inefficiencies in the current functioning of CEFDHAC due to
 1. the instability of national correspondents arising unexpectedly after the change in Ministers responsible for forest ecosystems
 2. the laxness of certain national correspondents in setting up contact groups,
- Noting that, despite their participation at different meetings, the NGOs' positions are rarely taken into account,
- Noting that there is still confusion about the role of NGOs in the process,
- Noting that efforts to establish peace are currently inadequate in the Central African sub-region,

- Noting that hasty political decisions are taken to set up large-scale development projects in defiance of the serious and real threats to populations and to biodiversity:

We recommend:

1.- Amendments to certain tasks of the organs and principles of functioning of CEFDHAC, notably the principles: 7, concerning conditions of membership; 10, concerning the method of designating national correspondents; 11, concerning the collaboration between the national correspondent and NGOs, and 15, concerning the method of designating the contact groups, as defined in the workshop on programming the activities of CEFDHAC at Kinshasa.

2.- Effective involvement of NGOs in decision-making (meetings and steering committee) and in carrying out the action plan

3.- Establishment of real mechanisms to promote peace in the Central African sub-region.

4.- Completion of genuine and transparent environmental impact studies before carrying out any development project.

Signed at Bata, 07/06/1998

NGOs of Central Africa

Source: Forest Peoples Programme