



April 25, 2018

S.E.M Anne OULOTO
Ministre de la Salubrité, de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable
Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Madam Minister,

We write to you about the conduct of the Ivorian Office of Parks and Reserves (OIPR), the agency responsible for the management and preservation of the national parks of Côte d'Ivoire, which is under the jurisdiction of your ministry .

Our organizations, as part of our human rights protection activities, including the right to a healthy environment, are fighting for a sustainable and respectful human rights solution to the devastating deforestation that Côte d'Ivoire has undergone in recent decades. .

It is with this purpose that we write to share with you the results of a research mission that one of our organizations, the Group of Ivorian Actors of Human Rights (RAIDH), had done the 04 to 07 January 2018 at the Marahoué National Park. The purpose of this mission was to document forced evacuation operations conducted by the OIPR within Marahoué Park, and specifically in the village of Zamanamankro, in August 2017. The results of the research are discussed in an appendix to this letter.

Although the evacuation operation at Zamanamankro took place last year, sharing RAIDH's research with your ministry gives us another opportunity to recall that any forest conservation operation of any kind must respect the international human rights standards of which the State of Côte d'Ivoire is a signatory.

International law protects in principle any person occupying a dwelling or land against forced evictions that are not preceded by a sufficient warning, or that do not respect the dignity and rights of the affected persons, that they occupy the land legally or not. Targeted evacuations under constraint, without consultation or community participation, can make homeless people without means of subsistence and without health care with serious psychological and sociological consequences. Our organizations note that the Government of Côte d'Ivoire is committed, as part of its policy of preservation and rehabilitation of forests, to respect the rights of people living in classified forests, a commitment that should also apply to national parks.

It is clear that if nothing is done for the protection of forests in Côte d'Ivoire, the country runs a high environmental risk of deforestation, desertification, and loss of biodiversity. But the presence of hundreds of thousands of farmers in the forests is also a vital issue. We can not save forests by sacrificing human rights - we must respect people and the planet in symbiosis.

In this regard, we urge the government, and the OIPR in particular, to avoid conduct that is not consistent with the government's commitments.

To the Prime Minister, Head of Government: By coordinating the actions of the different ministries, ensure that any Ivorian forest conservation plan is implemented in compliance with national and international human rights regulations and without causing humanitarian crises .

To the Ivorian Office of Parks and Reserve (OIPR): Immediately investigate the evacuations of Marahoué and discipline any officer who allegedly committed human rights abuses and / or violations of Ivorian law in this case. In the future, and if there is no other option besides an evacuation, proceed to the evacuation of the populations of the parks and reserves in the respect of the human rights and the international rights with a transparency guaranteed by the active participation of independent observers of civil society. Ensure that evacuations are not subject to settlement between administrative authorities and village, non-native and non-indigenous communities.

To the Minister of the Environment and Sustainable Development: To ensure that OIPR officers, in the fulfillment of their preservation mandate and the reconstitution of national parks and reserves, comply with applicable regulations and human rights .

To the Minister of Women, Child Protection and Solidarity: Organize the medical and psychological care of the deeds of Marahoué, with a specific focus on the needs of women in children.

To the Minister of National Education: Adopt a school relocation program for children targeted by the eviction of Marahoué / other national parks and reserves.

To the Minister of Health and Public Hygiene: Grant / reimburse medical care to the victims of the violent eviction of Marahoué. Assist the populations targeted by the evacuation operations of national parks and reserves.

We thank you for your interest in our analysis and recommendations on the proposed actions and policies.

With our best regards,



Bamba Sindou
Coordonnator
Regroupement des Acteurs Ivoiriens des Droits de l'Homme en Côte d'Ivoire (RAIDH)



Etelle Higonnet
Campaign Director
Mighty Earth



Jim Wormington
Researcher, Africa Division
Human Rights Watch



Julia Christian
Forest Campaigner
Fern

Summary - RAIDH Research Mission to Marahoué National Park

The Group of Ivorian Actors of Human Rights (RAIDH), made a mission from 04 to 07 January 2018 in the National Park Marahoué. The purpose of this mission was to document forced evacuation operations conducted by the OIPR within Marahoué Park, and specifically in the village of Zamanamankro, in August 2017. This operation would have led to the almost complete destruction of the village, which had thousands of inhabitants.

RAIDH's investigations have collected evidence accusing OIPR agents of committing human rights violations during the evacuation of Zamanamankro, including extortion, use of firearms, destruction of cars and homes, and theft of personal effects. According to RAIDH investigations, OIPR agents, with the assistance of heavy machinery, reportedly destroyed almost all of the village's infrastructure, including a health center, a primary school, and places of worship (churches and mosques), and housing. "The whole village was destroyed by the OIPR agents with the help of a big machine" told RAIDH an ex-inhabitant moved to another village located in the Marahoué National Park. "As you have seen, there is no one left in Zamanamankro. RAIDH researchers have taken several pictures of destroyed homes and infrastructure, as well as a burnt truck that residents of Zamanamankro say were destroyed with several motorcycles during the operation, leaving the neighboring cocoa fields largely intact.

The former Zamanamankro residents complained to RAIDH about the conduct of the OIPR agents during this operation. Some evaders testify that the OIPR agents did not give them the necessary time to win their personal property during the operation. "We did not have time to take our business in haste," said an ex-Zamanamankro resident. "When they shot in the air everyone fled. Some personal property was allegedly taken away by OIPR agents. "They [the OIPR agents] took away our personal belongings that they loaded into a big truck," said a Zamanamankro deputy interviewed by RAIDH in a nearby village. "They did not treat us like men. They were very mean, without mercy," added another witness.

The eviction of Zamanamankro came shortly after a survey in 2017 by the NGO Mighty Earth and The Guardian, on the massive prevalence of illicit cocoa cultivation destroying Ivorian national forests and national parks, and the involvement of some local authorities in this problem. Residents of Zamanamankro were contacted for this Guardian investigation, which reported examples of corruption and racketeering by OIPR officials in Marahoué.

According to the research done by RAIDH, since their expulsion thousands of Zamanamankro ex-inhabitants live until now in 2018 in very precarious conditions in the neighboring villages, some within the park and others outside. "Our compatriots currently have no means to feed themselves as was the case before our evacuation," said a displaced Zamanamankro living in Gnamankougbe, a nearby village. "Our very children who were going to school there (Zamanamankro) are no longer going to school, they are at home with us now. The income-generating activities that villagers depended on before the evacuation have almost disappeared. "Before our trip, I was with my husband in his fields where I was growing beans, okra and peanuts, which brought me at least 75,000 FCFA to 100,000 CFA francs," said an ex-habitant of Zamanamankro. "Right now, I'm not doing anything, I'm moved here with my three (03) children. "

The problem of abusive evacuation by OIPR or SODEFOR is not new. Already in 2016 the RAIDH had documented the harmful humanitarian impact of a massive forced evacuation operation at the Mont Péko National Park in July 2016. Following this operation, the tens of thousands of evacuees ran out of food and medical services, basic essentials. An August 2011 report by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) found that: "The massive influx of [displaced] populations into villages and encampments around the park is putting enormous pressure on host communities. Existing infrastructure in these areas, including water and sanitation is largely inadequate and social services, health and education in particular, are overwhelmed. This situation led to an intervention by the United Nations to support the immediate humanitarian needs of more than 15,000 people.