



PRESS RELEASE N ° 004/SC-ONG/ENV/NK/2014
SOCO International decision to withdraw from Virunga
National Park: Viewpoints!

On the 10th of June 2014, British Oil Company SOCO International and WWF released a joint statement that SOCO will stop any oil operation in the Virunga National Park in eastern DRC. SOCO International is coordinating and undertaking seismic activities in Virunga since the beginning of this year.

While welcoming the initiative to withdraw from the Virunga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, we express the following concerns:

1. When SOCO says it will withdraw from Virunga AFTER completing its current operational activities which include seismic surveys on Lake Edward, does this not mean that the company will shift its strategies by focusing on downgrading Virunga for exploitation in a later stage?
2. The Presidential Order, production sharing contract and exploration permits have been found to violate national laws and international conventions and, paradoxically, remain valid. This constitutes a threat to Virunga National Park (a protected area) where they were valued at another company profit?
3. Although WWF has committed to withdraw its complaint at the OECD, we remain concerned over violations of human rights committed against communities and local stakeholders before and during seismic activities conducted by SOCO in Virunga. Ces victimes vont-elles recouvré leurs droits violés sur lesquels la plainte de WWF était fondée ?
4. We are also concerned about the possible repercussions and the safety of local actors on the ground because of expectations created and the approach used by the oil company and its allies.

From the foregoing, we recommend:

The Congolese Government:

1. To take note of SOCO's withdrawal and reassure that it will take effect in the promised time period

2. To cancel the foregoing acts and permissions which gives SOCO the right to conduct oil exploration and exploitation in Virunga National Park, a key protected area and World Heritage Site;

3. To reject the idea of removing Virunga National Park from the list of World Heritage Sites of UNESCO and declassification of part or all of the park, a dangerous initiative for the future of biodiversity and local communities;

4. Promote the tourism industry, sustainable fishing and survival activities of local communities living in and around Virunga National Park, considered the engine of sustainable development of the province of North Kivu.

5. Expedite exploration and oil exploration in those blocks open to mining activities in order to increase the chances of the development of the DRC.

SOCO International:

- To ensure, with its withdrawal from the region, that the security of local actors is taken into consideration and the possible impacts of their activities. Explain to the public how SOCO will mitigate and prevent these risks?

The Technical and Financial Partners:

Join the Congolese Government for the preservation of Virunga National Park and make it a force for stability and socio-economic development in the sub-region of the Great Lakes.

Signed in Goma, June 11, 2014.

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