

We Baka are born for the forest. We look for our food in the forest. We look for meat in the forest, honey in the forest. But the ecoguards have come to put an end to all that, and how are we going to live? It's causing us such suffering.¹

Not long ago the ecoguards came to the village and started beating everyone. They beat my brother with a machete and cut his back, right to the bone – and they beat my mother with a piece of wood.

They beat my brother and myself at the same time, everyone. They destroyed our cooking pots with their boots, they looked for ivory in our houses but they found nothing.

██████████² asked me, "You are the president of the village. You know what is happening here." He slapped me three times in the face.

This is the kind of suffering we have experienced.

You must make an effort so that we can stay here in peace. If they want to work in our forest they must come here and seek our consent; that is the law.

Yours sincerely,

A simple, handwritten signature consisting of a vertical line and a horizontal line crossing at the top, resembling a plus sign or a stylized 'T'.

¹ Ecoguards in this region are supported by WWF's Espace Tridom Interzone Congo (ETIC) project and the UNDP-implemented Global Environment Facility Project # 9159.

² ██████████ works as an ecoguard in Sembe.

In the past we knew no boundaries in the forest. A Baka knew that the forest belonged to him.

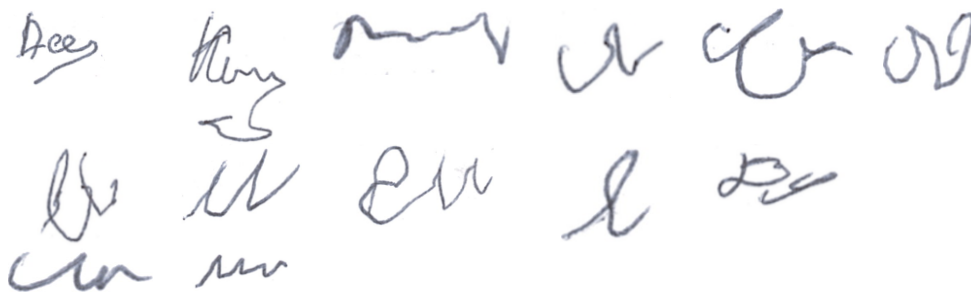
Now they have brought boundaries to the forest.³ What do they want? We are suffering – they come and beat us, they take our meat to sell it in town, if we make camps in the forest the ecoguards burn them down.

Many Baka are dead today. Children are getting thinner. We are already finished off with malnutrition and the lack of forest medicines. We know that it is Komba⁴ who created the forest. If we knew that it was Komba's will that the funders and the ecoguards take the forest by force, that would be another matter. But we know that it is not Komba's will.

Before they used to say to us that the boundary of the new Messok Dja park was at the Koko river. But now they say that it's four kilometres from here. We tried to explain our difficulties to WWF but they did not accept them. They just came to tell us that we can no longer go there.

We are told that according to international law our consent is required for these projects. We ask you to come here to ██████████ to make sure the law is respected. Otherwise, it is the end of our world.

Yours sincerely,



³ Part of WWF's Espace Tridom Interzone Congo (ETIC) project and the UNDP-implemented Global Environment Facility Project # 9159 aims to establish a new protected area known as Messok Dja on the Baka's land.

⁴ The creator God among the Baka

WWF came to tell us that they are going to make a new park and that we will no longer have the right to go in it.⁵ But that is our forest and we do not want this park. We know that it means destruction for us and that ecoguards will come and beat people and burn down houses.

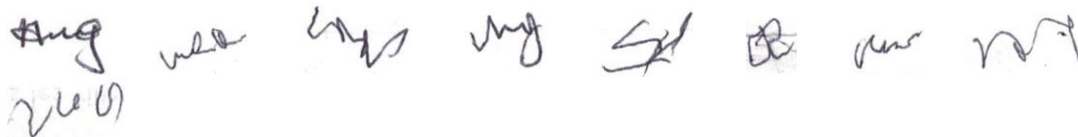
We cannot accept that they come here. Many of us have been beaten with machetes and guns by the ecoguards from Sembe.⁶ They have destroyed the things we use for work. They say that we are poachers. That is not true.

For us the forest is so good. If people want to come and do work in our forest, they need to come here and ask for our consent.

We Baka live through the forest: the wild yams, fish, wild mangos, that's in the forest. We do not eat tins of sardines.

If they deny us the forest how will we live? We want to be free and in peace in our village. We do not want to be beaten every day.

Yours sincerely,



⁵ Part of WWF's Espace Tridom Interzone Congo (ETIC) project and the UNDP-implemented Global Environment Facility Project # 9159 aims to establish a new protected area known as Messok Dja on the Baka's land.

⁶ The ecoguard unit in Sembe was set up with the help of WWF and continues to receive financial and logistical support from WWF.

A delegation from WWF came here and asked us to show them Lipolo.⁷ We know this forest very well because we carry out our activities there and so we showed it to them.

When we got there, they told us: “Now this is forbidden, the boundaries of the park will be at the Tere river. You no longer have the rights to go there.”

But all the things we need are there: wild mangos, honey, meat, all of our medicines we need to stay in good health. If the park is established in our forest, it will be very serious.

Instead of working with us, the ecoguards have made us suffer so much: they beat us, they whip us with their belts. If that carries on, how will our children live?

We are told that according to international law, before starting a project in our forest they need to ask our consent.

So we ask you to come here, listen to us and see our suffering, and make sure the law is respected.

Yours sincerely,

Handwritten signature consisting of three distinct symbols: a stylized 'U' shape, a star-like symbol, and a wavy line.

⁷ Lipolo refers to a part of the forest that lies either side of the Lipolo river. Part of WWF's Espace Tridom Interzone Congo (ETIC) project and the UNDP-implemented Global Environment Facility Project # 9159 aims to establish a new protected area known as Messok Dja on the Baka's land.

We, the Baka and Bakwele together, refuse this new park that WWF wants to create.⁸ That is our forest, where we find wild mangos, *koko*⁹, fish and meat to feed our children with.

In our forest we also find all the medicines we use to heal ourselves. We cross the forest and go as far as Souanke. For us the forest has no boundaries. If they cut the forest, how will our children and grandchildren live?

Already the ecoguards make us suffer a lot. They take our things, they send us to prison, they beat us and then we have to pay fines. We cannot find justice.

We do not understand the purpose of all this. We are told that international law says that they need to get our consent before doing a project in our forest. We invite you to come here, to listen to what we have to say and to make sure this law is applied.

Yours sincerely,

⁸ Part of WWF's Espace Tridom Interzone Congo (ETIC) project and the UNDP-implemented Global Environment Facility Project # 9159 aims to establish a new protected area known as Messok Dja on the Baka's land.

⁹ Wild greens (*Gnetum africanum*)

Together, we the inhabitants of ██████████ – Bantu and Baka – refuse the park outright. WWF arrived in our forest and is establishing boundaries without our consent.¹⁰ They are going to create the park five kilometers from our village, at the ██████████ river. But we cannot accept that.

There, from the Zedi right up to the Chollet rapids, there are old villages of our grandparents. We do dam fishing, there are wild mangos, *koko*¹¹ – everything is there. How are we going to live?

No one has even explained to us what a park is. And why do they want to impose it here? They just told us that we no longer had the right to go in the forest.

Already the ecoguards are making us suffer. They beat people but they don't protect elephants. We're told that, according to international law, our consent needs to be obtained before a project is carried out in our forest. So we ask you to come here and listen to us and make sure that this is done.

Yours sincerely,



¹⁰ Part of WWF's Espace Tridom Interzone Congo (ETIC) project and the UNDP-implemented Global Environment Facility Project # 9159 aims to establish a new protected area known as Messok Dja on the Baka's land.

¹¹ Wild greens (*Gnetum africanum*)

Handwritten scribbles and symbols, possibly representing a sequence of operations or a diagram. Includes symbols like \rightarrow , $+$, \times , and \ominus . Some text is partially legible, such as "Duck-Pace" and "Lull-Pace".