Pygmy Delegation from Democratic Republic of Congo Visits World Bank

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WASHINGTON, October 21, 2007 – At the Annual Meetings of the World Bank and IMF, a Pygmy delegation from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) met with senior World Bank Group managers including Ms. Obiageli Ezekwesili, Vice President for Africa, and Ms. Kathy Sierra, Vice President for Sustainable Development. In addition, President Robert B. Zoellick responded to a question from a member of the delegation at a forum for civil society groups and spoke with the delegation informally afterwards.

The delegation discussed the implementation status of ongoing forest sector reforms in DRC, and ways in which the World Bank could strengthen its collaboration with local communities and protect the rights and way of life of forest-dependent people, including Pygmies.

The meeting took place against the backdrop of concerns expressed by some Pygmy groups that logging and rehabilitation of infrastructure may threaten the rainforests that are a source of income, food, fuel, medicine, and shelter for their communities. The rainforests also fulfill the cultural and spiritual needs of forest-dependent people, while providing environmental services such as absorbing carbon, the greenhouse gas, on a global scale.

Ms. Ezekwesili assured the delegation the World Bank is interested in strengthening its partnership with Indigenous Peoples, moving forward in a constructive, problem-solving mode, together with national and sub-national authorities. The Bank is keen to promote both participation of indigenous people in key decision-making activities and programs that support local communities, using its full range of social development instruments and policies. It supports government and other stakeholders in improving the lives of extremely poor, disadvantaged people including pygmies and recognizes the need for a strong consultation processes with such groups.

The constructive dialogue was aimed at strengthening cooperation on the ground. Initially, the World Bank will organize a meeting in DRC to continue the discussion of issues and agree on next steps. The agenda would be designed to engage and consult representatives of Pygmy groups, and benefit from their insights about how the implementation of forest sector reforms could be improved. Ms. Ezekwesili requested the delegation to provide the World Bank with a list of Pygmy groups to be invited to the meeting.

The three-member delegation comprised of Ms. Adolphine Muley of the Union pour l’émancipation de la femme autochtone; Mr. Adrien Sinafasi of Dignité Pygmée, and Mr. Jean de Dieu Wasso of Africapacity/Rainforest Foundation, DRC. The delegation was joined by staff of the Rainforest Foundation (UK and Norway), Greenpeace, and the Bank Information Center.

Background:

The World Bank is helping to fight poverty and improve living standards for the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo. As of March 2007, the World Bank had approved a total of 82 loans and credits for the Democratic Republic of Congo for a total amount of approximately US$3.6 billion. The commitment value of ongoing IDA/IBRD-financed operations is approximately US$1.4 billion.

The DRC has the second largest swath of rainforests in the world. With 86 million hectares of forested area (1 ha = 2.5 acres), DRC accounts for over half of the total remaining rainforests in the Central Africa region.
The World Bank Inspection Panel, an independent entity established in September 1993, registered a Request for Inspection on December 1, 2005 from a national NGO on its own behalf and on behalf of local communities in DRC which asserted that World Bank policies had not been adequately applied for two operations in the forests sector. The Inspection Panel Report and Management Report and Recommendation will be submitted for consideration by the World Bank’s Board of Executive Directors. Until the matter is discussed, Bank staff is not permitted to discuss the Inspection Panel Report.

For more information about the World Bank’s work in DRC and forestry:

Forestry in Africa
Democratic Republic of Congo Website

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