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## Gorillas could disappear from Central Africa in 15 years, UN agency warns



Future for gorillas in Africa getting bleaker

24 March 2010 – Gorillas could disappear from large parts of the Greater Congo Basin in central Africa by the mid-2020s unless urgent action is taken to safeguard their habitats and counter poaching, a new report by the United Nations Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) and INTERPOL warned today.

Projections in 2002 had suggested that only 10 per cent of the original gorilla ranges would remain by 2030, but the report found that those estimates were too optimistic given the intensification of pressures including illegal logging, mining, charcoal production and increased demand for bush meat, of which an increasing proportion is ape meat.

Outbreaks of the Ebola haemorrhagic fever virus are adding to concerns. These epidemics have killed thousands of great apes, including gorillas, and by some estimates up to 90 per cent of animals infected by the virus will die.

The report, launched at the meeting of the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) currently taking place in Qatar, said the situation is especially critical in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where a great deal of the escalating damage is linked with militias operating in the region.

It stated that the militias are behind much of the illegal trade, which may be worth several hundred million dollars a year.

"This is a tragedy for the great apes and one also for countless other species being impacted by this intensifying and all too often illegal trade," said Achim Steiner, UNEP's executive director.

"Ultimately it is also a tragedy for the people living in the communities and countries concerned. These natural assets are their assets: ones underpinning lives and livelihoods for millions of people. In short it is environmental crime and theft by the few and the powerful at the expense of the poor and the vulnerable," he added.

Mr. Steiner welcomed the involvement of INTERPOL and called on the international community to step up support for the agency's environmental crime programme.

Christian Nellemann, a senior officer at UNEP who was lead author of the 2002 report and headed up the new one, said the original assessment had underestimated the scale of the bush meat trade, the rise in logging and the impact of the Ebola virus on great ape populations.

"With the current and accelerated rate of poaching for bush meat and habitat loss, the gorillas of the Greater Congo Basin may now disappear from most of their present range within 10 to 15 years," said Mr. Nellemann.

"We are observing a decline in wildlife across many parts of the region, and also side-effects on poaching outside the region and on poaching for ivory and rhino horn, often involving poachers and smugglers operating from the Congo Basin, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda, to buyers in Asia and beyond," he added.

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