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20<sup>th</sup> October 2015

His Excellency, Muhammadu Buhari, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

Through: Mrs. Nana Fatima Mede, Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Environment

### **The Planned Super-Highway and Cross River National Park, Our Position**

Your Excellency,

We congratulate you on your recent election as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and are greatly encouraged by your recent drive against corruption in the country.

We are approaching you now in reference to recent articles in the Nigerian press regarding the construction of a super-highway from Calabar to Obudu via Ikom, connecting to a new seaport in Calabar. We congratulate you and the Federal Ministry of the Environment on insisting that the super-highway should be planned in accordance to Nigerian law and must not be allowed to damage Nigeria's most important national park or its remaining rainforests, and hereby express our strong support for these mitigation actions.

Cross River National Park is a proposed UNESCO *Man and the Biosphere Reserve* and a tentative *World Heritage Site*, the richest site in Nigeria for biodiversity and indeed one of the richest sites in Africa. It is recognised as a *Centre of Plant Diversity* by WWF and IUCN, and as an *Important Bird Area* by Birdlife International. Indeed the biological importance of the Oban Hills was recognised as early as 1912 when a large part of the area was declared a forest reserve. In 1991, the Oban forest reserve was upgraded to create the Oban Division of Cross River National Park through which the super-highway is now expected to pass. The Oban Division covers an area of around 3,000km<sup>2</sup> of lowland rainforest. It is the largest area of closed-canopy rainforest in Nigeria and contiguous with Korup National Park, Cameroon.

The Oban Hills are an extremely important watershed, with peaks of between 500 and 1,000meters, giving rise to numerous rivers that guarantee a perennial supply of freshwater to hundreds of downstream communities in Cross River State. The Oban Hills formed part of one of the lowland rainforest refugia in Africa during the last glacial period. As a result the area is now a centre of species richness and endemism particularly for primates, amphibians, butterflies, fish and small mammals. Oban is an internationally recognized biodiversity hotspot and contains a number of rare and endangered species such as the Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes ellioti*), the drill (*Mandrillus leucophaeus*), Preuss's red colobus monkey (*Procolobus preussi*), leopard (*Panthera pardus*), forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) and the grey-necked Picathartes (*Picathartes oreas*) as well as 75 plant species endemic to Nigeria.

Cross River National Park is part of our national and international heritage and of immense value for present and future generations of Nigerians and humanity at large. At the same

time, it is facing severe threats due to widespread hunting, illegal logging and farming. We admire Governor Ben Ayade's bold vision for the development of Cross River State, but feel strongly that economic growth must be reconciled with the protection of the region's immense biological heritage which, if properly managed, can generate sustainable revenues for Nigeria, the state and its forest communities for generations to come.

We respectfully request your support to ensure that:

1. *Route of the Super-Highway*: the route of the new super-highway should be re-drawn so that it goes around Cross River National Park *and* its Support Zone. Protection of the Support Zone is vitally important for the long-term integrity of the National Park. Without wishing to pre-empt the findings of the ESIA our suggested route is shown (*dotted blue line*) in the map below. The current proposed route (*dotted orange line*) is too close to the park boundary and slices through the middle of the Ekuri community forests which are the largest community owned forests in Nigeria and a proposed REDD+ pilot site. Deforestation that would be caused by a super-highway situated too close to the park boundary would soon affect the park itself.
2. *ESIA*: an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) of the proposed super-highway is urgently required and we are encouraged to hear that one has been started already. To ensure that the ESIA meets both national and international standards we would recommend that a Peer Review Panel be set up constituted of national and international environmental experts to peer review the ESIA and the process it follows. We offer our technical support for the production of this ESIA, which should be developed with participation from all stakeholders including affected communities, national and international NGOs.
3. *Amending the boundary of the Oban Division of Cross River National Park*: the current park boundary (*white line on the map*) is unrealistic and unworkable and does not favour the management of the national park or the development of Cross River State. When the 1991 National Park Decree was passed, for speed, the House of Assembly simply inserted the boundaries of the Old Oban Group Forest Reserve, much of which was already heavily degraded or open farmland. We offer our technical support to the Federal Government to locate the revised boundary (*red line on the map*), originally proposed by WWF to conserve the most important forests remaining and excluding those areas that were already heavily degraded.
4. *Commercial Plantations*: in recent years, a number of commercial plantations have been illegally established inside the Oban Division of Cross River National Park, partly due to the current confusion concerning the exact location of the park boundaries. We would be pleased to provide the Federal Government and Cross River State with the information and technical support necessary to identify illegal plantations and to provide the legal basis for their closure.
5. *International Listing*: to boost the international image of both Cross River State and of the Federal Republic of Nigeria we offer our technical support to complete the nomination of Cross River National Park as a UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Reserve and UNESCO World Heritage Site.

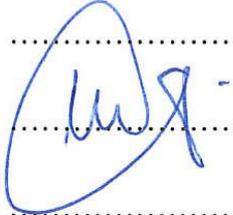
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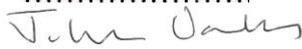
John Robinson, Wildlife Conservation Society, New York, USA



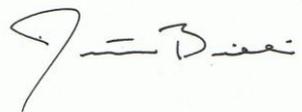
Hazell Thompson, Birdlife International, Cambridge, UK



Tasso Leventis, Leventis Foundation, London, UK



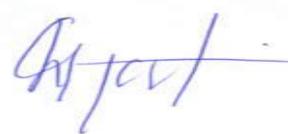
John Oates, Professor Emeritus, Hunter College, City University of New York, USA



Jonathan Bailie, Zoological Society of London, London, UK



Adeniyi Karunwi, Executive Director, Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF)



Godwin Ojo, Executive Director, Environmental Rights Action (ERA)/ Friends of the Earth Nigeria (FoEN)



Ako Amadi, Executive Director, Community Conservation and Development Initiatives (CCDI)



Christine K, Director, Heinrich Böll Foundation, Nigeria



Marie Kvarnström, Senior Programme Officer, Swedish Biodiversity Centre, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, and Board Member, FOEN/ERA



Tunde Morakinyo, Founder and Director, Iroko Foundation



Liza Gadsby, Director, Pandrillus Foundation



Zoe Parr, Consultant and Ex Director of Development in Nigeria (DIN)

Copied to: His Excellency Ben Ayade, Governor of Cross River State, Calabar, Nigeria

*Recommended route (in blue) of the Cross River Superhighway*

