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### **Decision on SECU Case No. 0009**

UNDP takes note of the compliance review that the Office of Audit and Investigations conducted on Case No. SECU0009 and wishes to thank the Social and Environmental Compliance Unit for the final report.

SECU's purpose is to ensure accountability to those individuals and communities with whom we work. It is important that these voices are heard, and that UNDP has an opportunity to respond to and address the issues that they raise.

In my capacity as Administrator of UNDP, I therefore take very seriously SECU's findings and recommendations and our responsibility to comply fully with our Social and Environmental Standards (SES).

The SECU report dated 4 June 2020 has been thoroughly analyzed by the Regional Bureau for Africa, the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, and the UNDP Country Office in the Republic of Congo.

In reviewing the project 'Integrating Transboundary Biodiversity Conservation into the Basins of the Republic of Congo', SECU has acknowledged its important contribution to protecting endangered biodiversity and ecosystems in the TRIDOM region and combating illegal wildlife trade while promoting community-based natural resource management and sustainable livelihoods. However, SECU has also shown that the rights of the Baka communities in this project were not fully taken into account during the development and implementation of this project in line with UNDP's Social and Environment Safeguards policy (SES). This is an issue we take very seriously.

UNDP has discussed the detailed findings and recommendations of the report with our government and NGO partners and the report has been shared and discussed with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Secretariat and GEF Council members.

Following these discussions and taking into account the exceptional circumstances surrounding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we believe a fundamental reset is necessary at this time and have therefore decided to close this GEF-funded project. However, UNDP will continue to support this critical area of work and remains strongly committed to supporting the Government of the Republic of Congo in its efforts to promote community-based conservation and livelihood development activities in the country. Discussions are already underway for a new phase of work, including options to:

- Provide small grant allocations directly to indigenous people and local communities – including the Baka – for conservation, livelihoods and COVID-19 response.
- Leverage the use of sustainable forest products for improved social and economic well-being of the Baka people and other vulnerable communities.



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- Enhance youth involvement in nature-based income generating activities.

This new phase of work will complement the Republic of Congo's recent efforts to strengthen its legal provision on Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for economic, industrial and development projects and programmes affecting indigenous people. It will also complement WWF's important efforts to advance their inclusive conservation approach in the TRIDOM, including the establishment of the Natural Resource Governance Platform, which offers a forum for multisectoral engagement and includes representatives from the indigenous community.

Finally, the findings also show that we need to further intensify our corporate practice and learning on social and environmental safeguards across UNDP. While UNDP's SES are recognized as being of very high quality and exceed the requirements of many of our partners and donors, these standards will only work if they are put into practice thoroughly and consistently. To support this, we have recently approved a 2020 corporate Social and Environmental Safeguards Plan focused on immediate steps to improve SES implementation, accountability, oversight and support functions across UNDP.

I would like to reiterate my strong personal commitment to ensuring that indigenous peoples' rights and sound environmental standards must underpin all that we do. The establishment and work of SECU is designed to help us to achieve this.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Achim Steiner'.

Achim Steiner  
Administrator

18 November 2020