

Illegal logging threatens 'ecological disaster': DR Congo bishop

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Illegal logging already threatens the mukula tree with extinction in neighbouring Zambia

A Congolese bishop says an "ecological disaster" is unfolding in the southeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo as illegal logging

destined for Chinese buyers is threatening the rare mukula tree.

"While the whole world decries the ravages of the Amazon fires, an [ecological disaster](#) is underway near us" in the Haut Katanga region bordering Zambia, Monsignor Fulgence Muteba said in a statement received by AFP on Thursday.

Muteba, the Catholic bishop of Haut Katanga's Kilwa-Kasenga province, said "intensive, lawless activities" are threatening the already endangered hardwood, which is used for construction as well as furniture.

Known by botanists under its Latin name of *Pterocarpus chrysothrix*, the mukula, a tree famed for the red tinge of its wood, is threatened with extinction in Zambia, environmentalists say.

"Those who exploit this precious natural resource... returned to the area a few weeks ago," Muteba said, charging that "Chinese subjects and people close to the government" were behind the [logging](#).

The illegal loggers often pick up timber that has been abandoned in the forest, but also fell the slow-growing [trees](#) in some areas, Muteba said.

The bishop also warned that the "looting... does not in any way take into account the degradation of biodiversity" that it causes.

He said he feared the activity would spread into the Kundelungu National Park, a protected area in Haut Katanga province.

Muteba has been pointing the finger at [illegal logging](#) by Chinese operators in the [province](#) since 2016.

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