

Green groups urge DR Congo to keep forest moratorium

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A photo from 2007 by Greenpeace to promote their Congo report shows a log park in Madjoko, Bandundu, Democratic Republic of Congo

A coalition of environmental campaign groups on Wednesday urged the Democratic Republic of Congo to maintain its moratorium on new logging licences to protect its tropical rainforest.

The campaigners warned that an area of rainforest twice the size of

France was at risk of being cut down if Congo goes ahead with plans to lift the ban on new logging licences, in place since 2002.

The 12 organisations said Congo's Environment Minister Robert Bopolo had recently announced that steps were being taken to lift the moratorium.

Bopolo confirmed to AFP the government's intention to look at the issue in the interests of boosting the country's finances.

"It is on our agenda, we must debate it, it's among our concerns," he said.

The campaigners accused Kinshasa of backsliding on commitments it made at last year's UN [climate conference](#) in Paris.

"At a time when the global community is working together to protect the world's last rainforests, a vital defence against climate change, the DR Congo government seems to be undermining the commitment to reducing emissions that it presented in Paris," Lars Lovold of Rainforest Foundation Norway, part of the coalition, said.

In 2002, the Congolese government launched a process to convert existing logging rights into concessions and impose a temporary freeze on further concessions. The aim was to bring order to the sector and cut down the [illegal logging](#) of precious timber.

Five times the size of France, DR Congo is home to more than 60 percent of the dense forests of the Congo basin, the world's second largest [tropical rainforest](#), after the Amazon.

Illegal logging is a major problem in many developing countries including Congo, where poverty and decades of instability have put enormous pressure on natural resources.

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