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UN plans another gorilla rescue airlift



Future for gorillas in Africa getting bleaker

5 June 2010 – In continuing efforts to preserve gorillas, one of the world's most endangered species, the United Nations mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), will next month carry out a second airlift of six baby gorillas to a sanctuary where they will be cared for before they released into the wild.

"Together, the orphaned gorillas are hoped to form a new "family" of 10," the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)), which recommended the airlift along with INTERPOL, said in a press release yesterday.

The operation, planned for mid July, is the second to be conducted by the UN peacekeeping force in DRC as part of a wider effort to combat the illegal cross-border trade in baby gorillas, which has intensified in recent years with the proliferation of armed groups in the region.

The first rescue was conducted by the peacekeeping mission on 27 May, when four eastern lowland baby gorillas, seized from poachers, were flown to safety by UN helicopters to a sanctuary in Kasughu in North Kivu province.

The ultimate objective is to rehabilitate the gorillas and to reintroduce them back in their natural environment.

According to a report by UNEP entitled "The Last Stand for the Gorilla", unless urgent action is taken to strengthen the enforcement of environmental law and

counter poaching, endangered gorillas may largely disappear from the Greater Congo Basin, in the next 15 years.

Previous projections by the agency in 2002 suggested that only 10 per cent of the original ranges would remain by 2030.

Those estimates now appear too optimistic, given the intensification of pressures including illegal logging, mining, charcoal production and increased demand for bushmeat, of which an increasing proportion is ape meat.

The Greater Congo Basin, including the Virunga mountain range, is considered one of the world's most resource-rich but troubled regions.

In the context of recent wars and continued unrest, the environment remains the silent victim of conflict in the region.

Natural resources are systemically exploited or illegally-harvested. Minerals such as diamonds, gold, cassiterite and coltan - used in laptops and mobile phones - as well as timber, end up crossing borders, passing through middle men and companies before being shipped onto countries in Asia, the European Union and the Persian Gulf.

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