

# Communiqué

## The trees must not hide the forest: the loss of Malagasy Heritage

During the last 20 years, Madagascar has undertaken significant and exemplary efforts to stop environmental degradation, effectively manage natural resources and preserve its unique biodiversity in the pursuit of sustainable development.

Beyond their inherent value, these natural riches – which are a source of national pride – also guarantee the benefits and services that are essential to the daily lives of the rural majority of the population, providing them among other things with water, food and energy. These natural resources also guarantee the development of the agriculture, fisheries and tourism sectors.

We, non-governmental organizations working to conserve these natural resources for the long term well being of local communities, hereby express our deep concern at the current devastation occurring to the country's natural resources:

- Open and organized plundering, sometimes using firearms, of precious wood from several natural forests, including national parks such as Marojejy and Masoala, which have been declared World Heritage Sites.
- Intensified smuggling of wild species, especially reptiles such as tortoises, to the national and international markets.
- Proliferation, due to the current impunity, of destructive practices such as illegal mining and slash-and-burn agriculture within protected areas and environmentally sensitive areas.

These deplorable acts will only further impoverish the country and deprive future generations of the Malagasy people from their unique natural heritage.

This situation once again compromises the efforts that have been achieved up until now to help local communities to preserve their resources from individuals attempting to plunder the national heritage for their own short term benefits.

We hereby call upon the competent authorities and all Malagasy citizens to urgently take action to stop and punish such acts so that natural resources are no longer held hostage to political crises and post-cyclone emergencies.

Through this appeal, we confirm our commitment to work for the biodiversity of Madagascar and for the well-being of the local communities, who are the stewards of this natural heritage. We invite each citizen to recognize that the sustainability of the development of the country depends upon its natural resources and we call on every individual to take responsibility.

Antananarivo, March 27, 2009

World Wide Fund for Nature, Madagascar et Océan Indien Occidental  
Conservation International – Madagascar et les Iles de l'Océan Indien  
Wildlife Conservation Society – Madagascar  
Missouri Botanical Garden  
Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust  
Institute for the Conservation of Tropical Environments  
The Peregrine Fund  
ONG Fanamby  
Madagascar Fauna Group  
L'Homme et l'Environnement  
Plant Resources for Tropical Africa

