



## UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Programme des Nations Unies pour l'environnement    Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Medio Ambiente  
Программа Организации Объединенных Наций по окружающей среде    برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة

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### Africa-Wide Action Plan Focus of Year of the Gorilla 2009

#### Uniting Development Needs of People with Conservation Needs of Charismatic Primates Unveiled at International Wildlife Conference

#### 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Parties to the UNEP-Convention on Migratory Species 1-5 December

**Rome, 1 December 2008** – Projects promoting super-efficient ‘Rocket Stoves’, encouraging alternative livelihoods to reduce poaching and federating successful eco-tourism programmes across Africa are among a range of initiatives to be promoted under the Year of the Gorilla 2009.

The Year, launched today by His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco at the opening of a United Nations wildlife conference, aims to boost conservation of humankind’s closest relatives and their habitats by boosting the livelihoods and incomes of local people.

The initiative also aims to improve the management of national and cross border populations of primates and ones living in National Parks by strengthening cooperation between range states and providing improved support for rangers and other key personnel.

Experts last week met under the new Gorilla Agreement coordinated by UN Environment Programme’s Convention on Migratory Species (UNEP-CMS). Here they adopted a comprehensive action plan to support the upcoming Year.

The action plan includes a range of inspiring and transformational projects available for backing by governments, business, civil society groups and individuals.

#### Projects

- Tests in the Democratic Republic of Congo have found that locally made ‘Rocket Stoves’ can cut charcoal and wood use by up to 70 per cent. Expanding the pilot to thousands of homes in the region could help reduce pressure on gorilla forest habitats; boost incomes and livelihoods for local people and improve air quality in local homes.
- A second pilot project, this time in Cameroon, is boosting alternative livelihoods in order to reduce commercial hunting of bushmeat—the Year of Gorilla plans to expand the ‘Aparists for the Apes’ (an Aparist is a beekeeper) programme to more communities.
- Rwanda and Uganda are two countries generating significant economic returns from ape-based eco-tourism. Indeed tourism, linked to a significant extent with Rwanda’s Mountain Gorilla populations now surpasses coffee and tea exports as Rwanda’s number one foreign exchange earner. It is planned to dispatch guides and operators from successful eco-tourism programme in East Africa to countries such as Gabon in order to boost the success of eco-tourism initiatives in West Africa.

The Year of the Gorilla (YoG) is a joint initiative of the UNEP-CMS, the UNEP/UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s Great Ape Survival Partnership (GRASP) and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA).

His Serene Highness said:” It is in the interest of the international community and our honourable task to save these unique natural resources and the World Heritage Sites where they live.”

Renowned primatologist and Year of the Gorilla 2009 Patron Dr. Jane Goodall echoed Prince Albert II of Monaco's sentiment saying: "It is time for us to pool all of our resources toward saving these magnificent creatures. I am pleased to lend my voice to the Year of the Gorilla 2009, a campaign aimed at ensuring a future for this close cousin of humankind."

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, said: "Flagship species such as the gorilla can be a powerful catalyst for improved conservation and the more intelligent management of economically-important ecosystems. In doing so, initiatives such as the Year of the Gorilla can galvanize and re-vitalize action on the ground so urgently needed to reverse the rate of loss of biodiversity while generating incomes and improving livelihoods for local people and communities".

Robert Hepworth, Executive Secretary of the CMS, said the initiative came at a time of particular concern as a result of the armed struggle in parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

"We are deeply concerned about the current situation in the region which threatens communities and conservation efforts aimed at achieving the wide-ranging targets of the UN Millennium Development Goals as they relate to poverty eradication and environmental sustainability."

"Without doubt a special aim of the Year of the Gorilla will be to bring recovery-focused projects to the DRC once hostilities have ceased and community-based conservation projects can be fully resumed," he added.

Today the Year of the Gorilla also announced luxury travel company Abercrombie & Kent as its first sponsor.

Justin Wateridge, the company's Managing Director, said:" Abercrombie & Kent are delighted to be able to support the Year of the Gorilla 2009 and in turn help raise awareness for the plight of the gorillas and much needed funds towards their conservation".

## **Background**

### **Current Situation of Gorilla Populations**

The CMS Agreement came into force in June this year. It comes in response to growing concern that despite years of efforts by the UN, governments and non-governmental organizations, the plight of the gorilla remains cause for serious concern.

Indeed many experts are warning that without urgent action gorillas will become extinct in the wild within the next few decades.

Three of the four gorilla species are listed as 'Critically Endangered' on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, putting them at risk of extinction.

The populations of the Mountain Gorilla in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Uganda and the Cross River Gorilla in Cameroon and Nigeria number only 700 and 300 individuals respectively.

The Eastern Lowland Gorilla population in the DRC has plummeted dramatically over the last 10 years with probably only about 5,000 of the formerly 17,000 animals remaining.

The most numerous subspecies, the Western Lowland Gorilla which occurs in Angola, Central African Republic, Cameroon, DRC, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and the Republic of Congo, number perhaps as many as more than 200,000 animals. Nevertheless these populations remain threatened on several fronts.

### **Key Threats**

The main threats to gorillas are hunting for food, with at least one million tons of 'bushmeat' being extracted each year from the Congo Basin forests, alongside their use in traditional medicine, capture of live infants as pets as well as ensnarement in traps set for other species.

Habitat loss is being accelerated through logging and slash-and-burn agriculture. In addition, the region's abundance in natural resources combined with the production of charcoal and mining for gold, zinc, uranium and Coltan - an ore used in electronics such as mobile phones - is gradually destroying gorilla habitat.

In addition, armed conflicts can trigger the displacement of huge numbers of people who then may use natural resources unsustainably. On top of this, diseases like Ebola can wipe out entire populations.

### **Conservation Action**

Ecotourism, sustainable timber harvesting and improved agricultural practices can support reforestation campaigns, anti-poaching efforts and implementation of development projects. One focus will be on the regions bordering areas protected for gorilla conservation.

Developmental projects that can also contribute include schools and educational initiatives alongside ones that cover water supplies and health care.

A wider educational approach informing the public about the value of intact ecosystems and the catastrophic consequences of their loss envisages translations of applicable wildlife law into the languages of the communities sharing habitat with the gorillas.

Research on the various subpopulations and surveys on their numbers will be promoted, and corridors should be established to link otherwise separate subpopulations.

The Year of the Gorilla invites individuals, conservation bodies, corporate sponsors and governments to support this unique global drive for gorilla conservation. Specific projects to protect gorillas can be found on the dedicated website ([www.yog2009.org](http://www.yog2009.org)).

CMS and its partners have committed themselves to developing and implementing this Agreement. It provides the gorilla range states, as well as the other governments and organisations involved, with a legal framework that will reinforce and integrate conservation efforts.

### **Notes to editors:**

The Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) works for the conservation of a wide array of endangered migratory animals worldwide through the negotiation and implementation of agreements and species action plans. With currently 110 member countries, many of them in Africa, CMS is a fast-growing convention with special importance due to its expertise in the field of migratory species. ([www.cms.int](http://www.cms.int))

The Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP) is a strategic alliance of UN agencies, governments, NGOs, foundations and corporate sponsors. CMS is one of the members of the international GRASP partnership to stop the decline of great ape populations. Mobilizing and pooling resources by providing a communication platform for scientists will improve coordination among NGOs. National plans have helped great ape range countries develop tailored conservation strategies. ([www.unep.org/grasp](http://www.unep.org/grasp))

The World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) is the umbrella organisation for the world zoo and aquarium community. Its members include selected zoos and aquariums, and regional and national Associations of Zoos and Aquariums, as well as some affiliate organisations, such as zoo veterinarians or zoo educators, from all around the world. ([www.waza.org](http://www.waza.org))

The world-renowned great ape conservationist Dr. Jane Goodall (DBE) will lend her voice to the YoG campaign as the official campaign patron. Founded in 1977, the Jane Goodall Institute continues Dr. Goodall's pioneering research that transformed scientific perceptions of the relationship between humans and animals. It also is widely recognized for establishing innovative community-centered conservation and development programs in Africa. ([www.janegoodall.org](http://www.janegoodall.org) , [www.rootsandshoots.org](http://www.rootsandshoots.org))

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