

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 12, 2011

The Honorable Hillary R. Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

We write to express our serious concerns regarding reports that individuals acting on behalf of senior officials in the Government of Sierra Leone may have solicited bribes in exchange for permission to conduct illegal and destructive logging operations.

During the 1991-2002 civil war, Sierra Leone lacked the means to enact or enforce effective forest management systems and its environment was severely degraded. Now that Sierra Leone is at peace, it is imperative that the Government of Sierra Leone judiciously regulate logging to stop dangerously rapid continued deforestation. As you know, healthy forests -- especially primary, or "old-growth," forests -- are essential to sustainable growth.

A 2006 European Union report identified illegal logging as the leading cause of environmental degradation in Sierra Leone, and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2010 Global Forest Resources Assessment reported that Sierra Leone lost old-growth forest at a rate of 3.21% per year -- the fifth fastest rate of old-growth forest loss in the world.

A recent report aired on Al Jazeera English, "Africa Investigates - Sierra Leone: Timber!" showed footage of individuals claiming to represent senior Sierra Leonean officials soliciting bribes in exchange for permission to conduct illegal and destructive logging operations, although permitted logging was suspended. It is our understanding that the Government of Sierra Leone has launched an inquiry through its Anti-Corruption Commission and domestic law enforcement authorities to investigate the report.

We hope the Department of State will encourage the Government of Sierra Leone to give this matter the diligence and attention it deserves and we request that you relay to us any information you may have regarding the progress of investigations conducted by the Government of Sierra Leone.

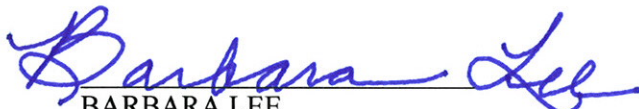
Sincerely,



HANK JOHNSON
Member of Congress




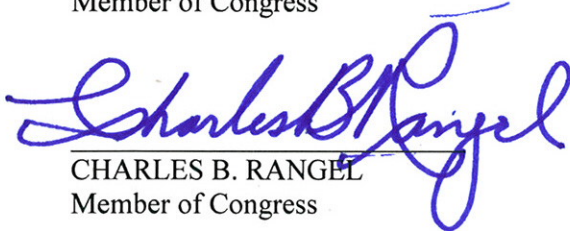
DONALD M. PAYNE
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Africa & Global Health


BARBARA LEE
Member of Congress

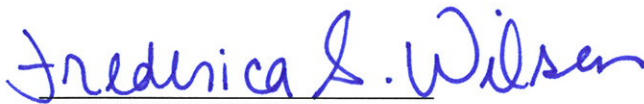

JESSE JACKSON, JR.
Member of Congress


MAXINE WATERS
Member of Congress


YVETTE CLARKE
Member of Congress


CHARLES B. RANGEL
Member of Congress


EARL BLUMENAUER
Member of Congress


FREDERICA WILSON
Member of Congress

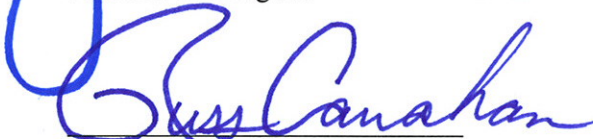

SHEILA JACKSON LEE
Member of Congress

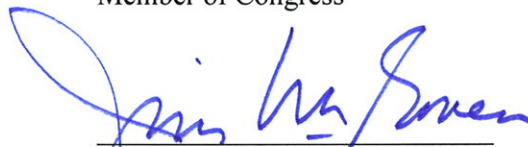

RAÚL GRIJALVA
Member of Congress

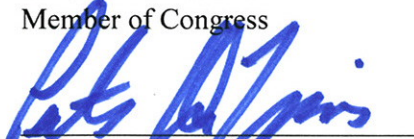

KEITH ELLISON
Member of Congress



JAN SCHAKOWSKY
Member of Congress

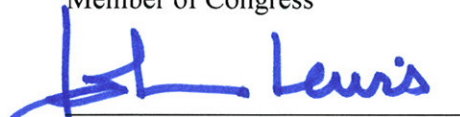

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