

U.S. Position on the World Bank's Request for Inspection and the Management Report and Recommendation for the Democratic Republic of Congo: Second Additional Financing for the High-Priority Roads Reopening and Maintenance Project

December 8, 2017

We appreciate Management's updated response to the Request for Inspection. However, we are deeply troubled by the Inspection Panel's preliminary observations, as detailed in the Panel's Report and Recommendation to the Board. The harms, which include claims that several young girls have been raped by the contractor's workers, are extremely serious. We further express our significant disappointment at the recurrence of these claims in World Bank projects.

The Panel's Report and Recommendation as well as Management's Update expose a long list of shortcomings in the design and implementation of this investment. As in similar cases, it appears the supervision and safeguards of the World Bank have failed to manage appropriately the risks involved in road construction, especially in fragile environments. Indeed, this is not the first Inspection Panel case involving gender based violence in a Bank-financed roads project. Unfortunately, it appears the lessons from previous cases, including the Uganda Transport Sector Project, have not yet materially changed the way in which the Bank manages high-risk operations. That case was a wake-up call that led to significant process changes that should catch these types of issues much sooner.

In addition, we note that the requesters reached out to the Bank's country office months ago, on two separate occasions, and that they did not receive a response. This is a particularly unsettling break-down in oversight and real-time monitoring by the team and requires an in-depth investigation to determine responsibilities in the chain of command. Again, this was a lesson that should have been learned, and we request an update to the Board on the findings.

Given that the situation is evolving, our main concern now is the safety of the girls and the requesters who contacted the Inspection Panel, given the precarious security situation. Therefore, the Bank's immediate efforts should focus on engaging with the affected girls, their families, and any requesters that may be in danger of retaliations. Care should be taken that the handling of the investigation does not lead to any further risks of harm.

We are deeply concerned about the unauthorized use of military forces in the context of this project, and we call on management to urgently work with MONUSCO to provide safety and security to all those involved, as the investigation moves forward and before other mitigation measures take place. It is particularly troubling that some of the allegations in this case were supported by the security forces, thus undermining the legitimacy of why security forces should be used at all. We feel providing safety and security to all those involved is a moral obligation for the World Bank and not a procedural matter.

Other allegations like child labor, sexual harassment, and excessive use of force, among others, are also relevant and shall be thoroughly investigated by the Panel. Still, in the interim, we call on Management to consider whether corrective measures can be applied to mitigate any additional harms.

Finally, we request an explanation as to why this matter was brought to the Board's attention six days after the Inspection Panel completed its Report and Recommendation. Given the severity of the case, the Board should have been promptly informed.

Moving forward, we call on the Board to take a proactive and decisive stance on this case by, first and foremost, supporting the Panel's recommendation to conduct a thorough investigation. We also call on Management to engage constructively with the Panel throughout the process.