



1 September 2021

Dear Dr. Kars de Bruijne,

Thank you for your letter, received on 4 August 2021, in which you have sought to address some of the serious concerns we raised in our 1 July 2021 response to your report “Laws of Attraction: Northern Benin and risk of violent extremist spillover”. We appreciate your response, however, we want to share some concerns about your methodology, the veracity of information gathered from unspecified sources, the lack of transparency and collaboration in the research process, as well as the legitimacy of the conclusions you draw with respect to African Parks.

Transparency

You request “*in the interest of transparency*” for us to provide you with information on the stakeholders with whom we shared our response. We value transparency and would have welcomed a collaborative approach. However, you acted with no transparency by not including us in your research process, in verifying information, or in providing us the opportunity to give any input prior to publishing your report. We are disappointed you did not to engage African Parks in any manner before releasing inaccurate recommendations based on unsupported data and testimony from unspecified sources.

Engaging African Parks

You say you conducted “*off the record*” conversations with staff, former staff, and two funders. However, confidential engagement with unidentified individuals with no accountability is not the same as “speaking to the organization”. These cannot be considered as official sources of information, nor can they represent their respective institutions. It is lacking in professional integrity to obtain and use information only from undisclosed internal sources, without attempting to engage with African Parks and its funders formally and openly for accurate, verifiable, accountable data and testimony. We frequently engage and share data with many research institutes from around the world and would have offered you the same courtesy in your research.

Veracity of information and conclusions

Despite your assurances on including only verifiable information, and removing information that does not meet these standards, your own response letter acknowledges weaknesses where you have included information which was not verified. Furthermore, you reference numerous “verified” incidents involving African Parks in 2020 and 2021. However, several of these are incorrect either in materially significant detail or in being connected to African Parks. For example, the following incidents you list are not connected with African Parks’ activities or staff: 1 February 2020; 9 February 2020; 6 June 2020; 8 September 2020; April 26 2021. If these incidents were all verified as you claim, then it raises questions around the robustness of the report’s data verification process. It further underscores how the report would have benefitted from formal engagement with African Parks and other named sources.

Issues with scope, balance, and contradictory information

There are fundamental issues with the scope and balance of the report. You assert that your study was limited to providing a “*detailed quantitative analysis of what is driving high levels of violence*”, with the goal “*to warn about the high levels of communal violence in Northern Benin*”. However, there are several problems with this approach:

- 1) You have undertaken an assessment of a list of incidents of violence using data from [acleddata.com](#), some of which is demonstrably unreliable as indicated above, supplemented by a qualitative assessment drawing only on confidential sources of information. This inherently skews the findings.
- 2) There is insufficient scope, reliable information, and hard data within the report to support your conclusion that “APN in particular risks accelerating dynamics that will be hard to control”. This is taken further in an interview with [Le Monde](#), in which your primary recommendation for the prevention of violent spill-over into northern Benin is that African Parks’ actions should be more critically assessed and the expansion of its operations should stop. This contrasts with your response letter to us in which you wrote: “*Tensions around the Park and its management and the role of APN emerged as one concern, but it was just a (small) part of the violence as well as a small part of the report...*”, and “*We hasten to add though that your role has been pivotal in ensuring that Benin has so far not experienced much VEO presence*”. Your report focuses heavily on African Parks. Moreover, your conclusions and public recommendations accentuate our role and are generalised to the full aspect of our work, without including any mention about the positive role and impact we have had in the region, as stated in your letter.
- 3) You suggest that based on the data, your findings show that “*despite all [your] efforts, there is unhappiness around the operation of your organization by local and transhumant populations*”. However, your report only details discrete incidents. Your research never examined community attitudes and perceptions of the parks or African Parks. If we are mistaken, please provide this analysis, inclusive of the methodology and results of your own community attitudinal survey undertaken to produce these insights.
- 4) The report is narrowly focused on select anecdotal events in Benin in isolation of macro political and ecological issues, and arbitrarily links factually disputable incidents purported to demonstrate the exacerbation of conflict with African Parks’ management. As a result, its limited scope and lack of balance severely compromise some of the conclusions and recommendations it makes.
- 5) Finally, in your response to us you misrepresent our assertion that “insecurity has expanded uninhibited in the Sahel precisely because of lack of good governance in these areas, not because of good governance”. We never suggested that it is the absence of State that drives violence and conflict diffusion, as you say we did. Citing your example of the State’s presence in the Est region of Burkina Faso, epitomising a system which is extractive and non-inclusive, can hardly be held up as good governance.

Your olive branch

Olive branches are extended as an act of reconciliation, but we are not in conflict with you or the Clingendael Institute. We are, however, objecting to the lack of professionalism demonstrated in this research and the resulting weakness of the report and the recommendations that were produced.

African Parks is willing to engage with the Clingendael Institute, and any other research organisation where there is a commitment to a robust level of professionalism, greater transparency and a

genuine will to improve the security of these regions for the benefit of the people that live in them. If the Clingendael Institute is committed to a higher level of professionalism, transparency, and integrity, then African Parks will gladly engage further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Andrea Heydlauff" with a stylized flourish at the end.

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