



EMBARGOED

EU Plan on Illegal Logging: now it's time to legislate!

Environmental groups react to Council Conclusions on the European Commission's Action Plan on Illegal Logging (1)

Brussels, 13 October 2003: Now that the Council has endorsed the European Commission's Action Plan on Illegal Logging, the opportunity is ripe for the Commission to draft comprehensive legislation, environmental groups said today. Only this will have the power to bring about an end to deforestation, human rights abuses and corruption.

FERN, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and WWF acknowledge the Council Conclusions, and consider that the Plan now needs to be backed by concrete action and sustained political commitment. They are calling for:

- the European Commission to present legislation that makes it illegal to import or sell any illegally-sourced timber or wood products
- the development of FLEGT partnership agreements (2) with producer countries, in conjunction with a wide consultation of NGOs and local communities, based on a Regulation setting up a voluntary licensing scheme for identifying legal timber,
- member states to crack down on the illegal timber trade using existing legislation on money laundering, public procurement and stolen goods
- the Commission to take the initiative on stopping illegal logging in accession and candidate countries.

"The EU can do so much to stop the misery caused by illegal logging, but without the legislation to make it a crime to trade in these illegal products, the whole Action Plan is half-hearted," said Chantal Marijnissen of FERN. *"Let's not forget the key test for this Plan is if it can stop the vast quantities of illegal timber entering the EU."*

"As long as no punitive action is taken by the EU to stop the illegal trade in timber, this multi-million-euro activity will continue to fuel conflict and corruption, harming development and posing a threat to the environment and global peace. The time for Europe to act has come," said Sebastien Rizzo of Greenpeace. *The European Commission must get back to the EU Council with legislation that makes this illegal activity a crime. The EU ought to enforce the international commitments it made during the G8 Summit and the CBD Conference (3).*

Beatrix Richards of WWF said, *"Legislation aside, the actions the Commission propose, supported by the Council, are a good first step. However we need a joined up EU in order to implement these proposals successfully. It is a little depressing to think that while on the one hand the Commission and Council support the FLEGT action plan, they are on the other, slowly unpicking what could be a key economic driver to secure legality, i.e. the Public Procurement Directives.*

"While the European Council is endorsing the European Commission's Action Plan on illegal logging, the Africa Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (AFLEG) (4) process is taking place in Cameroon to address forest crime in the region. If the EU is unable to take action to exclude illegal products from European markets, the AFLEG

won't be able to stop the industrial-scale logging destroying the remaining African Forest," said Frederic Castell of Friends of the Earth-France.

"We expect the EU to enter into negotiations of the FLEGT partnership agreements with the exporting countries," added Filip Verbelen of Greenpeace. *However, and this is crucial, these negotiations have to be driven from a development and environmental perspective, and not hampered by trade considerations."*

The European Commission will report back to the Council on its implementation of the Action Plan and propose legislation to the Council by mid-2004. We expect the Commission to consult NGOs fully on all aspects of its work during the next six months or prior to reporting back to the Council.

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Notes to the editor :

(1) European Commission Communication to the Council and the European Parliament on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT): Proposal for an Action Plan (COM(03)0251); Council Meeting – Agriculture and Fisheries – Brussels, 13 October 2003: Council Conclusions on FLEGT Action Plan

(2) European Commission Communication to the Council and the European Parliament on Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEGT): Proposal for an Action Plan (COM(03)0251) p 11-14

(3) G8 Summits: Birmingham 1998 and Okinawa 2000; Convention on Biological Diversity COP6 The Hague: Forest Biological Diversity

(4) While the EU Council is adopting its conclusions on the FLEGT Action Plan today, EU member states and European Commission officials are meeting in Yaounde, Cameroon for a ministerial conference (AFLEG) to promote law enforcement and governance in the forest sector, which is plagued by massive illegal logging and rampant corruption.