



**Centre pour
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Hope that signed Cameroon-EU VPA will begin an end to illegal logging

BRUSSELS and YAOUNDÉ (6 May 2010)

After 31 months of negotiations and waiting, today 6 May 2010, saw representatives from Cameroon and the European Union (EU) sign a trade agreement that aims to ensure Cameroonian timber is legal when sold on the domestic market or exported to the EU and other countries(1). Both parties and Non-Governmental Organisations from Europe and Cameroon believe that, if implemented properly, this VPA (2) could spell the end of illegal logging in Cameroon.

“One of the strengths of this agreement lies in the fact that it clearly identifies the information that must be publicly disclosed, thereby providing a tool to improve transparency and governance in the forest sector”, said Symphorien AZANTSA, the Coordinator of the local NGO platform monitoring the development of the VPA in Cameroon.

The level of civil society involvement in this process was unprecedented and has led to strong written commitments from the government to make information publicly available; continue independent monitoring of the forest sector; carry out reform of the legal framework applicable to the forest sector; and include civil society in the implementation of the agreement.

Civil society believes that the ultimate failure or success of this agreement will depend on the continuation of this inclusive process. Rodrigue NGONZO of FODER (Forêts et Développement Rural) notes that:

“Although we’ve seen very positive changes in areas such as participation of civil society, to succeed in improving forest governance we need to ensure that all governmental and non-governmental stakeholders stay on board and jointly find ways forward. Changes must not be linked to those individuals that have participated in the process, but permeate the Cameroonian forest system.”

A key objective of the agreement is to ensure recognition and strengthening of the rights of forest communities (3). Local citizens in timber producing countries suffer the most from corrupt regimes and unjust legal systems that exclude them from forest-related benefits. The VPA has done a good job of reforming the legal framework, but as Iola LEAL from the European NGO FERN notes, new policies will have to be duly implemented:

"This is the third VPA to be signed in Africa after Ghana (2008) and Congo (2009). Like the other two, the negotiation process in Cameroon has shown how well the Commission and country governments can work together. We must remember however that forests benefit from good implementation of good policies, not good policies alone."

For further information/interviews:

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An in-depth NGO counter brief on the Cameroonian-EU VPA is available from

www.fern.org and www.cedcameroun.org

Notes for editors

(1) VPA negotiations in Cameroon were officially launched in September 2007 with a joint declaration from the head of the EU delegation in Cameroon and Cameroon's Minister of Forestry and Wildlife. The launch signalled a mutual and reciprocal commitment to combat illegal logging and trade in associated products and to ensure the sustainable management of the Cameroonian forests. It is expected that the first VPA licenses from Cameroon will be issued in 2011.

(2) Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPA) are part of the EU's Action Plan on illegal logging (4).

(3) The EU Council Conclusions on FLEGT (2003/C 268/01) underline the need for FLEGT agreements to "strengthen land tenure and access rights (for local and indigenous) communities."

(4) EU Action Plan for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade. COM(2003)251 final. The Action Plan has been in progress since 2003 and aims to address the problem of illegal logging by concentrating on its drivers. It is innovative in ensuring that all stakeholders affected by illegal forest use are involved in setting the policy reforms that are needed to reverse the problems (5).

(5) The EU Council Conclusions on FLEGT (2003/C 268/01) called for FLEGT agreements to support "forest sector governance reforms" and to "strengthen effective participation of all stakeholders, notably of non-state actors and indigenous peoples, in policy-making and implementation".

The Centre for Environment and Development (CED) is an independent non-governmental organization (NGO) created by a group of Cameroonians and foreigners in 1994. It was created as a response to the growing crisis in the management of Cameroon's forests in the 1990s marked by an increase in industrial and illegal logging, poaching, and socioeconomic and ecological effects due to pressure on the forests. CED's field of action has gradually been extended to issues in the extractive industries sector considered as threats to community rights and the environment. CED's mission is to contribute towards fair and sustainable natural resource use in the Congo Basin which respects the rights, interests, culture and needs of forest peoples and communities who live there.

FERN is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) created in 1995 to keep track of the European Union's involvement in forests and coordinate NGO activities at the European level. Our work centres on forests and forest peoples' rights and the issues that affect them such as trade and investment and climate change. All of our work is done in close collaboration with social and environmental organisations and movements across the world. The name FERN was chosen because ferns are one of the few species that grow in all forests.