



STATEMENT FROM CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES ON THE EU'S ROLE IN PROTECTING FORESTS AND RIGHTS

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Civil society leaders helping to halt the trade in illegal timber and illegal deforestation came to Europe in March 2018 to meet with representatives from the European Commission, the European External Action Service, the European Parliament, and the Belgian, French, German and Dutch governments.

All of the leaders come from organisations helping to implement the Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPA) to halt illegal logging that make up a key part of the EU's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan. They wanted to show the impact that EU trade and development policies are having on deforestation and human rights. They also came to ask the EU to support new measures to reduce deforestation, to develop ambitious diplomacy about forests, and to release the European Commission FLEGT workplan. Despite coming from countries as diverse as Cameroon, Ghana, Liberia, the Republic of Congo and Vietnam, they have shared goals to reduce deforestation and improve the rights and lives of people that depend on forests.

This is their message to the EU and European Member States:

Forests are vital to people and the planet

Tropical forests cover 31 per cent of global ice-free land, and contain half of the world's biodiversity. Forests regulate water systems and the climate, and directly support the livelihoods of over a billion people. Despite this, a forest area the size of Belgium is chopped down each year. This deforestation and forest degradation occurs for a variety of reasons including (illegal) logging, agriculture, mineral extraction and infrastructure development. Most of it occurs in the global South.

Tackling illegal logging and deforestation is a joint responsibility

Despite ambitious political objectives to fight illegal logging, progress at the global level has been slow, and the forest sector has seen rapid changes:

- Asian countries are now the world's largest importers and consumers of legally and illegally sourced timber products. Regional and domestic markets continue to grow in Central and West Africa, and South East Asia where pressure on tropical forests is often justified by the need for economic diversification.
- Unsustainable logging by small-scale producers can be significant but is often informal and receives little attention from policy makers.
- Forests are increasingly cleared for agriculture and other land uses. Nearly two thirds of tropical deforestation is driven by the production of palm oil, soy, timber, pulp and paper, beef, and leather, much of which is destined for European supermarkets. In 2012, the EU imported €6 billion of such products – almost a quarter of total world trade.
- Pervasive corruption facilitates other illegal acts, especially large-scale illegal logging; puts at risk forest-dependent populations; undermines responsible forest enterprises by distorting markets; and results in a loss of government revenue.

The EU should drive change

The EU has an important role and has already made commitments [to halt deforestation by 2020, to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals](#), and to keep global warming well below 2°C and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C. To achieve these ambitions, it should fully integrate forests into its wider climate and development plans by:

Strengthening VPA implementation:

VPAs have improved transparency and participation of civil society and local communities, and clarified forest laws. However, progress has slowed down in many places. Accelerating and sustaining reforms requires stronger political commitment and efforts to address the core governance issues such as corruption, impunity and tenure rights that drive illegal logging.

Sustaining the participation of diverse and independent groups of civil society actors, including ensuring free, prior and informed consent of local and indigenous community representatives, remains important – but it can only happen if they have the capacity to engage effectively through proper access to resources and information.

The EU should also use VPAs to increase efforts to support small enterprises, the informal and artisanal timber production sector and community-based forest management in producer countries, with a particular focus on generating revenue for women.

Enforcing the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR) and demand-side measures:

The European Commission recently launched infringement proceedings against Belgium for failure to enforce the EUTR. This follows a June 2017 Dutch court ruling against a company which had not fulfilled its due diligence obligations when placing Cameroonian timber on the European market and sends a strong signal that the FLEGT Action Plan needs to be continued. In addition, Member States must improve EUTR implementation, as this is one of the strongest incentives for timber producing countries to get involved in VPAs.

The EU should improve links with other purchasing countries such as China, Vietnam and Japan to see what demand-side legislation they can bring in that would be comparable to the EUTR and the United States' Lacey Act.

Developing an EU Action Plan on Deforestation:

There is an urgent need for coherent cross-sector strategies to protect forests and forest peoples' rights. The EU should therefore develop an EU Action Plan to Protect Forests and Respect Rights, which would improve forest governance, clarify land use, and recognise and strengthen community tenure rights over forest land. This could include expanding VPAs to address forest conversion. VPAs for other commodities such

as cocoa, rubber, and oil palm would lead to a national multi-stakeholder deliberative approach to address deforestation from these activities, using trade and aid levers.

The EU should require due diligence on human rights compliance from companies importing and consuming forest risk commodities in the EU. This would include establishing systems to assess risks, report against them, and act on any environmental and human rights abuses within their supply chains, including subcontractors and suppliers all over the world.

Ensuring forests work for climate:

Forest loss and degradation account for [one sixth of global carbon dioxide emissions](#), and restoring natural forests has the potential to [remove considerable amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere](#). Forested countries should therefore focus attention on the role forests can play in helping them meet the Paris Climate Agreement.

All countries currently negotiating or implementing a VPA have produced Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) – plans to show how the country will contribute to meeting the Paris Agreement goals, including via the carbon captured in its forests. [VPA countries' NDCs too often overlook forests and governance](#) and the role local communities can play in climate efforts. These countries should ramp up their climate commitments by integrating lessons from FLEGT in their NDCs - including adopting more multi stakeholder approaches, increasing transparency, and clarifying the rights of men and women within land and forests.

Improving local livelihoods:

Research shows that legal recognition and government support for community forest rights can help maintain and protect healthy forests, thereby ensuring their role as carbon sinks. Forest communities have a strong interest in protecting forest health as they depend on forests for their food, livelihoods, and culture. The EU should prioritise support to the development of policies and initiatives that promote community forestry as part of its commitments to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development globally.

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