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Note to editors: For background information and photos, please visit:
http://www.efi.int/portal/projects/flegt/cameroon_VPA_conclusion

EU-Cameroon Trade Agreement Ensures Timber Legality from One of Africa's Biggest Exporters of Tropical Timber

BRUSSELS and YAOUNDÉ (6 May 2010)—The European Union (EU) and the Government of Cameroon today announced a trade agreement in which Africa's biggest exporter of tropical hardwood to Europe has agreed to ensure wood traded within the country and shipped from Cameroon to the EU and other destinations worldwide contains no illegal timber. Cameroon has committed itself to implement a comprehensive programme to press ahead the country's reform process, including further strengthening its control of the forest sector and community rights. The EU has committed to excluding unlicensed timber from the whole EU market while providing assistance to Cameroon for enforcement and auditing systems.

The EU is Cameroon's main market for sawn timber (80%) which goes particularly to Italy and Spain. China is the main market destination for its log exports (60%). Cameroon, custodian of about 20 million hectares of tropical forests, exports about USD 481 million in timber and timber products Round Wood Equivalent (RWE), the majority of which—about USD 362 million worth—is purchased by the 27 EU member states [data for 2006]. In addition to its lead role in exports Cameroon is the important processing hub of tropical timber for the region.

Mr. Stefano Manservigi, Director General for Development of the European Commission congratulated Cameroon for its determination in fighting illegal logging both nationally and internationally, and for the ambition it has brought to the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) to establish transparency and good governance in the sector: "As producers and consumers of tropical timber, Cameroon and the EU have a joint responsibility to eradicate illegal logging and related trade. This is good for Cameroon and good for European consumers, who remain as concerned as ever about climate change, which has forest degradation and illegal logging as one of its causes."

"For Cameroon, signing the Voluntary Partnership Agreement is one more step forward in our efforts to strengthen forest governance. The Government also commits to work with neighbouring countries in this process, and, thankfully, we share the same vision"; said Cameroon's Minister of Forest and Wildlife, Mr. Elvis Ngolle Ngolle: "Cameroon is well aware of the importance of fair and legal timber trade that we seek to establish through various measures we have taken since 2000. This includes the benefits to 70 local communes and communities of more than 60 billion FCFA through allocated fiscal revenue. We are convinced that FLEGT will strengthen governance and fiscal revenue and strengthen the overall third place of forests among economic sectors."

The Voluntary Partnership Agreement, initialled by the Government of Cameroon and the European Commission on behalf of the EU today in Yaoundé, is legally-binding. It proposes a control system of timber production that will apply to all markets—domestic, EU and other—and it suggest covering all wood products produced in Cameroon. If Cameroonian operators source

timber from third countries, they must also have evidence of legal compliance, e.g. through a private certificate.

To date it has been difficult for importers in the EU to confirm whether exported wood products from Cameroon have been derived from timber harvested in accordance with national laws. Starting in 2012, all timber and timber products entering the EU from the Central African country will require a license showing that they contain only legally-harvested, -processed and -sold wood. Under the agreement, the timber must have been obtained in a manner that sustains the health of the country's forests and provides benefits to local forest communities.

Cameroon is of particular significance with one of the Congo Basin's largest forest areas. The Congo Basin is the world's biggest tropical forest outside of the Amazon. Its forests are estimated to contain between 25 and 30 billion tonnes of carbon in their vegetation and therefore play an important role in global efforts to combat climate change. Deforestation is estimated to be the driver for up to 20% of global GHG emissions per year. In addition the area is highly prized by timber companies for its untapped wealth of valuable wood.

Reaching Agreement is just the beginning, successful implementation will require work and investment to improve and upgrade existing regulatory mechanisms. For example, the VPA includes an extensive "chain of custody" independent tracking system of all timber shipments at each point in production, from the felling of trees in the forests to processing in saw mills to their point of export. Furthermore, it establishes a transparent system for collecting timber fees and ensuring that timber harvests and sales are in compliance with national law.

The agreement is the culmination of several years of work between the EU, the Government of Cameroon, the private sector and civil society groups. Rather than impose EU standards, it adopts national systems developed with stakeholders to define and enforce legal requirements for timber sales.

"The VPA says clearly that its objective is the promotion of good forest management. The unprecedented participation of civil society during the negotiations and the clarity on the documents that will have to be made public are major steps forward", said Mr. Rodrigue Ngonzo from Forêts et Développement Rural (FODER), a Cameroon-based non-governmental organisation (NGO). "It is crucial to ensure that those principles continue during the implementation", he said.

"The VPA has enabled the identification of major shortcomings in the Cameroonian legal framework. The extent to which those shortcomings can be addressed will largely depend on the parties' willingness and commitment to strengthen community rights as well as on the stakeholder processes that will inform the law reform", said Symphorien Azantsa, Coordinator of the EC (European Community) Forest Platform in Cameroon. This platform was launched in 2002 with the support of the European NGO FERN to ensure that EU development co-operation has a positive impact on forests and forest people.

"For the members of our association in Cameroon, the implementation of the VPA is particularly important as it should give us the means to fight against the unfair competition that we face in all markets", said Hervé Bourguignon, President of the Interafrican Forest Industries Association. He added: "The IFIA has engaged, through its members, in verification of legality processes and then in sustainable management of forests. Therefore the new measures taken at the international level, of which the FLEGT Action Plan (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade) is an example, follow the same orientation of our members' commitments over the last decade to responsible certification requirements in the Congo Basin."

The pact with Cameroon comes on the heels of similar accords with Ghana and the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville). In addition negotiations are underway to secure what are known as VPAs covering timber exports from Liberia, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam, demonstrating that the EU is moving rapidly to reduce the timber harvested illegally in timber producing countries from reaching EU markets, in partnership with producers.

The accord is an instrument that emerged from the European Commission's 2003 Action Plan on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT). The Action Plan aims to reducing the consumption of illegal timber in the EU and ultimately major consumer markets elsewhere in the world by reducing market access for illegal wood.

Beyond VPAs, the FLEGT Action Plan also addresses the requirement of legal and sustainable wood for government purchasing in EU Member States. Legal and/or sustainable public purchasing requirements have been taken into national policy by Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK.

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