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Cameroon agrees to cut illegal wood out of its supply chain

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One of Africa's largest exporters of tropical hardwoods, Cameroon, has announced today a trade agreement with the European Union (EU) to rid all illegal wood from its supply chain to the EU and worldwide. Cameroon signed a legally-binding Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) that will cover all wood products produced in Cameroon.

"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," said Stefano Manservigi, Director General for Development of the European Commission in a press release.

Currently about 80 percent of Cameroon's sawn timber exports go to the EU, while 60 percent of its log exports head to China. Cameroon's total exports of wood and wood products reached nearly half a billion dollars in 2006, three-fourths of which went to EU member nations.

"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 [local currency] through allocated fiscal revenue. We are convinced that FLEGT [Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade] will strengthen governance and fiscal revenue and strengthen the overall third place of forests among economic sectors," commented Cameroon's Minister of Forest and Wildlife, Elvis Ngolle Ngolle.

The agreement states that

by 2012 all wood-products from Cameroon to the EU must have a license showing they were legally obtained. In addition, the agreement states that the wood products must have been harvested in a way that retains the health of the nation's forests and gives benefits back to forest communities.

Almost half of Cameroon today is under forest cover: approximately 20 million hectares. From 2000-2005 Cameroon lost about 220,000 hectares of forest annually, a rate of nearly one percent. From 1990-2005, Cameroon lost 13.4 percent of its forest cover or 3.3 million hectares. Illegal logging has long plagued the central African nation, while much of the nation's wood has been harvested unsustainably by foreign companies.



Logs in harbour in Kribi, Cameroon, waiting to be shipped to Doula for international export. Photo by: Jade Saunders

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