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Illegal timber trade in Europe driving global forest loss and poverty **News release from WWF**

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Gland, Switzerland – Unless urgent action is taken by the European Union, the illegal timber trade in Europe could contribute to large-scale depletion of timber in some areas and loss of important forests, especially in the Congo Basin and Indonesia, in about 10 years time, a new WWF report shows.

The report, which focuses on the trade between EU countries and the Amazon Basin, the Congo Basin, East Africa, Indonesia, the Baltic States and Russia, found that the EU imports roughly 20 million cubic metres of illegal timber from these regions annually. As a result, the EU is responsible for around €3 billion of the global €10–15 billion in lost revenue due to illegal logging each year.

WWF believes current EU efforts, including the Forests Law Enforcement Governance & Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan, which promotes voluntary agreements between member states importing timber and external countries producing it, fall far short of the measures needed to tackle illegal logging. While the aim of the regulation is to prevent illegal timber being imported into the EU, it is neither mandatory, nor does it prevent illegal timber being imported via third countries, the global conservation organization says.

As Ministers meet to discuss measures to consider illegal logging at a meeting in Brussels today, WWF is calling for new EU-wide legislation to prohibit the import of illegally logged timber. WWF also urges the EU to take far more active steps to encourage other major producers such as China, Japan and the US to eliminate illegal timber from their own imports.

“The EU must take much tougher action if it wants to make a difference in both conserving the world’s most important forests and help alleviate poverty,” said Duncan Pollard, Head of WWF’s European Forest Programme. “Only measures that make it mandatory for EU members to prohibit illegal timber coming into Europe will really help combat illegal logging.”

According to the report, the United Kingdom is the biggest importer of illegal timber in Europe (and the third biggest importer of illegal timber and pulp and paper combined, followed by Sweden and Finland respectively). The trade is responsible for the loss of 600,000 hectares of forest each year – more than twice the size of Luxembourg.

“The has made poverty a central plank of its EU presidency yet its consumption of illegal timber is robbing countries such as Africa and of invaluable income,” said Andrew Lee, Director of Campaigns for WWF-UK. “Illegal logging deprives local communities who often rely on forests for their livelihoods, while big international companies reap the profits.”