



19 February 2009

Press Release

Global Witness Testifies at the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the role of national and international timber companies in fuelling Liberia's civil war

At 15:00 on 19 February 2009, Global Witness (1) will testify before the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on the subject of economic crimes (2) committed during Liberia's civil war.

Since 2000, Global Witness exposed the way in which exploitation and trade of natural resources fuelled armed conflict in Liberia and across the region. The focus was former president Charles Taylor's harnessing of Liberia's forest sector to fund his political ambitions and military campaigns, and the role of national and international companies in abetting him. Since the end of the conflict, Global Witness has worked with local partners, advocating for Liberia's natural resources to be managed as a basis for sustainable and equitable development.

Liberia's conflict exemplifies a post-Cold War pattern of wars being financed by the exploitation and trade of natural resources. Resource-fuelled wars in Africa alone have caused the deaths of millions and destabilised entire regions. *"Liberia provides a salutary lesson to the international community in the need to identify these conflict resource cases much earlier and develop a far more effective array of responses."* said Global Witness Director Patrick Alley.

Global Witness' testimony will detail the patronage system via which Charles Taylor granted logging concessions to Liberian timber companies, and their owners, in exchange for financial and military support. It will describe how these companies and individuals proceeded to commit a range of crimes relating to tax evasion, environmental destruction, human rights abuses and UN sanction violations.

The testimony will also highlight international dimensions of this resource-conflict nexus. It will outline the role in sustaining the conflict played by foreign buyers through their purchase of illegally sourced timber. It will also examine the failure of the international community to halt these activities quickly.

"Without the material support of international buyers, Taylor would have been unable to fund his war - these timber buyers were one cheque book away from the terrible human cost of the wars they helped fund" said Global Witness Director Patrick Alley. *"Global Witness urges the TRC and any court which may subsequently be established, not only to hold to account the key players in Liberia, but also those international actors who facilitated the natural resource trade that kept the conflict alive."*

Over the course of the conflict, Global Witness produced five reports (3) on Liberia. These reports and supporting documentation were submitted to the TRC on 20 March 2008.

As well as presenting evidence of the crimes committed, Global Witness will also put forward recommendations for the TRC to include in its final report.

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(1) Global Witness is a non-profit organisation that exposes the corrupt exploitation of natural resources and international trade systems to drive campaigns that end impunity, resource-linked conflict, and human rights and environmental abuses.

(2) Economic crimes include any prohibited activity committed with the view to making a financial benefit.

(3) The reports, which are available at www.globalwitness.org, are:

- Liberia: Back to the future-What is the future of Liberia's forests and its effect on regional peace?' May 2004;
- The Usual Suspects: Liberia's weapons and mercenaries in Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone', March 2003;
- For a Few Dollars More, March 2003
- Logging Off: How the Liberian Timber Industry Fuels Liberia's Humanitarian Disaster and Threatens Sierra Leone', September 2002;
- Taylor-made: The Pivotal Role of Liberia's Forests and Flag of Convenience in Regional Conflict', September 2001.