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## Dutch Court of Appeal finds insufficient evidence to convict conflict timber trader

On 10<sup>th</sup> March 2008, the Court of Appeal in The Hague cleared Guus Van Kouwenhoven, a “member of [Charles] Taylor’s Inner Circle,”<sup>1</sup> of breaking the United Nations arms embargo enforced against Liberia.

Global Witness is extremely disappointed by the appeal court’s decision. “*The barbaric regime of Charles Taylor was financed and maintained by the revenues generated from the timber trade, in which Guus Van Kouwenhoven was the biggest player. This decision is a sad day for peace and justice in Liberia and for the ending of impunity,*” said Alex Yearsley of Global Witness.

The conviction was originally bestowed by the Court of First Instance in The Hague on 7<sup>th</sup> June, 2006. Guus Van Kouwenhoven was convicted of illegally importing weapons into Liberia that were used during the civil war in Liberia by Charles Taylor’s forces to commit horrific crimes. The Court of the First Instance held that the “*supply of weapons to Liberia was unjustified*”<sup>2</sup> and sentenced him to 8 years of imprisonment.

From 1999 to 2003, Guus Van Kouwenhoven operated the largest timber concession and dominated the Liberian timber industry as president of OTC, one the biggest timber concessionaires.<sup>3</sup> The timber revenues contributed to the funding of the Liberian civil war, which resulted in sanctions being placed on timber from Liberia by the UN Security Council in 2003.<sup>4</sup> The UN Panel of Experts for Liberia concluded that timber was being traded by rebel and government forces in exchange for arms<sup>5</sup> and that its revenue was being used to fund the conflict. Subsequently, the Forest Concession Review set up in 2005 ruled that all of the timber concessions in Taylor’s Liberia were operating illegally.

It should be noted that Guus Van Kowenhoven is still included on the UN Travel Ban<sup>6</sup> and Asset Freeze<sup>7</sup> lists as a result of his activities Liberia. More recently, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia<sup>8</sup> has decided to probe the transactions of his timber companies and has also requested information regarding his individual role.<sup>9</sup>

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### Notes to editors:

The role of timber revenues and the trade’s infrastructure in bankrolling Charles Taylor’s ambitions of regional destabilisation has been detailed by Global Witness. Reports by Global Witness and by the United Nations expert panels resulted in UN-imposed sanctions on Liberia’s timber trade in 2003. For more information on Global Witness’s work on Liberia see: <http://www.globalwitness.org/reports/index.php?section=liberia>

Under the Ending Impunity campaign Global Witness continues to investigate and campaign so that individuals and companies responsible for funding conflict, corruption and human rights abuses from natural resource revenues are brought to justice.

<sup>1</sup> UN Expert Panel Report on Sierra Leone (S/200/1195) at paragraph 215 (pg 37).

<sup>2</sup> Quote taken from the English translation of the judgment given by the Court of First Instance on 7 June 2006.

<sup>3</sup> UN Expert Panel Report on Liberia dated 5 August 2003 ( S/2003/498) at paragraph 168.

<sup>4</sup> UN Security Council Resolution (S/RES/1478).

<sup>5</sup> UN Panel of Experts Report on Liberia (S/2003/779) at paragraph 70.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1521/tblist.shtml> updated 28 November 2007

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1521/aflist.shtml> updated 28 November 2007

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.trcofliberia.org>

<sup>9</sup> <http://allafrica.com/stories/200803070700.html>