



global witness

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Illegal Malagasy timber trade worth up to \$460,000 a day, report reveals China main market for trafficked rosewood

A new report by Global Witness and the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) has revealed the extent of illegal logging in the National Parks and protected areas of the SAVA Region of Madagascar. The two non-profit organizations state that between 30-115 cubic meters of precious rosewood, worth between \$88,000 and \$460,000, are being illegally harvested *every day*. Members of the Forest Administration, the national police and other Malagasy authorities are accused of serious failings, and in some cases, complicity with the traffickers.

The investigation into the trafficking of rosewood, palissander and ebony, commissioned by the Madagascar National Parks in August, uncovered unprecedented levels of illegal activity in the country's northeast, following the political crisis earlier in the year. Investigators captured video evidence of the logging and collected testimony from local communities, revealing both the scale and brazenness of the illegal trade.

In February, Madagascar was rocked by political instability and frozen out of foreign investment and conservation aid. Thousands of loggers invaded national parks and cut down protected species. The massive scale of the illegal harvest threatens vulnerable communities and Madagascar's last remaining natural forests, home to some of the planet's rarest wildlife. Loggers cut down trees to clear trails and make canoes, hunt rare lemur species, and burn down tracts of forest for temporary settlements, encouraging occupation of once-pristine habitats.

"Some of the world's unique forests, and the communities that rely on them, are being degraded beyond repair to feed our demand for luxury goods," said Andrea Johnson, Director of Forest Campaigns at EIA. The investigation concluded that between 100-200 rare trees were being cut down in Madagascar each day. The majority of the trade is driven by an appetite for expensive rosewood furniture in China. Smaller amounts of precious woods are sent to Europe and the United States for use in high-end musical instruments.

Despite high prices for these woods on international markets—a rosewood armoire can fetch up to \$20,000 at retail—only the smallest fraction of the wood's value remains in Madagascar. The country exports mostly raw timber and an analysis of financial transactions showed that little of the proceeds return to Madagascar.

"A small group of powerful traders have exploited the country's political situation for short-term gain, corrupting local and national officials in a time of crisis," said Reiner Tegtmeier of Global Witness. "Timber traders have effectively bought the right to pillage the country's parks with impunity. They are extracting up to \$460,000 a day worth of illegal timber, while paying workers less than \$5 a day for dangerous, back-breaking work."

Global Witness and EIA are calling on the Malagasy government to repeal several decrees authorizing registered companies to export illegally harvested wood, as this effectively encourages more illicit harvesting. The government should seize and sell all stocks of illegal timber and put the money into a trust fund for forest protection and rural development. Future seizures should be destroyed.

The government should take immediate steps to place rosewood and ebony under the protection of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). More sustainable land management and better support for local populations is also necessary to give them alternatives to being exploited by illegal loggers.

Consumer countries, namely China, the European Union and the US, need to police their imports of Malagasy timber and create strict legal requirements for timber and wood products imports akin to the recent amendment to the U.S. Lacey Act legislation that bans the import of illegally-sourced timber.

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Notes:

- An arithmetic error on log volumes in the original report introduced a series of significant over-estimates. This has been corrected and the report has been re-published today. The error concerned the calculation of estimated log volumes from observations made by the team. The most significant implication of this mistake was that the estimated value of rosewood logs being felled in the areas observed has changed. It is now between US\$88,000 and US\$460,000 per day, not US\$800,000 as previously reported. For a full explanation of the recalculations, see the Global Witness website.
- Global Witness and EIA apologise for any previous dissemination of the report and press release that contained misleading figures.
- Madagascar National Parks (MNP) was mandated by the Minister in charge of forests to seek assistance from Global Witness and EIA to investigate the illegal harvest of precious wood in the SAVA Region and the associated international trafficking of illegal timber.
- Global Witness and EIA acknowledge the support for the investigation received from the outgoing authorities and welcome their willingness to publish the findings. The organizations call on the incoming government to act urgently on the recommendations.
- Global Witness and EIA (US) were contacted by MNP because of the organizations' outstanding track records. Global Witness has conducted investigative work that exposes corruption in natural resource trade and exploitation, and implemented campaigns to end impunity, resource-linked conflict, and human rights and environmental abuses. EIA has investigated and lead campaigns against environmental crimes around the world. It has decades of experience investigating illegal logging and the international trade in threatened wildlife and other environmentally sensitive goods.
- Interviewees available in French and English from London and Washington