



global witness

Trade in illegal wood uncovered: Luxury market fuelling destruction of Madagascar's forests, says new report

Embargoed until 6pm Tokyo/Nagoya time, 26 October 2010

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Nagoya, Japan – Consumer demand for expensive rosewood furniture and musical instruments in China and elsewhere is the primary driver of an ecologically devastating trade in illegal timber, according to a report published today by the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) and Global Witness. The report, launched at the 10th Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), shows how this ongoing trade has been facilitated by the complicity of some of Madagascar's state authorities and weak law-enforcement by the country's transitional government.

"Madagascar's natural assets are being stripped to feed a ready network of international buyers," said Reiner Tegtmeier of Global Witness. "We first exposed the scale of this problem in October last year but the plunder shows little sign of slowing."

Since June 2009, the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) and Global Witness have been contracted by Madagascar National Parks (MNP) to investigate the illegal harvesting and trade of ebony, palisander and rosewood, which spiked dramatically following the political coup in Madagascar. The new report shows that the vast majority of wood is destined for the Chinese luxury furniture market, with small quantities moving to Europe and the US for use in musical instruments.

"In China, Malagasy rosewood beds sell for a million dollars apiece, yet less than 0.1% of the profits remain with local people," said Alexander von Bismarck of EIA, noting that the group's investigations found that Chinese traders were often aware that the wood they purchased was endangered and not legally cut. "I don't think the buyers of these beds would sleep well at night if they knew the full story behind their beds."

A Decree issued in early 2010 by Madagascar's Forest Minister reinstated a ban on export of all precious woods. However, the report shows that further shipments of wood have left Madagascar's ports since then while logging within parks continues. In July, UNESCO put the Rainforests of Atsinanana, the site most affected by the illegal logging, on its World Heritage in Danger List. It urged Madagascar to "take the necessary measures to enforce the decree and halt all illegal logging activities."

The UNESCO decision also encouraged countries to "ensure that illegal timber originating from Madagascar is both banned and prevented from entering their national markets." These words echoed a Decision passed by the CBD in 2008 that urged Parties to "take effective legislative and non-legislative measures to prevent harvesting of forest products and resources in violation of national legislation."

Meanwhile, in Madagascar, new legal measures and enforcement activities appear to indicate a genuine commitment from the Forest Ministry to curb the harvesting and export of precious wood. Madagascar has also formally requested that their trade be controlled through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

“We welcome the latest indications from the Madagascan government,” said Tegtmeyer, “However, past experience has shown that such measures are often undermined by special exemptions and weak implementation. To plug the gaps, governments of all timber-consuming countries must follow the example of the US and crack down on import of illegal timber.”

Following the first joint report from EIA and Global Witness, the US authorities launched an investigation under the amended Lacey Act, which prohibits companies from trading in illegally sourced timber. This action, coupled with an extensive awareness campaign by civil society groups and concerned scientists, has seen demand for Malagasy rosewood largely dry up in the US and Europe.

The organizations called upon China to take immediate steps to halt imports of wood from Madagascar and move towards stricter policies for its own companies and traders.

“China’s response to these findings will be critical for Madagascar’s biodiversity. China has a great opportunity to help put an end to illegal timber trade and protect biodiversity,” said von Bismarck.

Notes:

- Full report, *“Investigation into the Global Trade in Malagasy Precious Woods: Rosewood, Ebony and Pallsander,”* available in English and French at www.eia-global.org and www.globalwitness.org.
- The groups’ 2009 report, *“Investigation into the illegal felling, transport and export of precious wood in SAVA Region Madagascar,”* documents the illegal logging crisis in detail. The report is available at: http://eia-global.org/forests_for_the_world/forests_for_the_world_reports.html
- The annual rate of primary forest loss in Madagascar is -0.65%, three times higher than Indonesia, according to FAO statistics.
- For more information about the UNESCO decision to place Rainforests of the Atsinanana on the List of World Heritage in Danger, see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1257>
- “Illegal Logging and Related Trade: Indicators of Global Response” (includes estimated impact on emission reductions): <http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/publications/papers/view/-/id/911/>
- EIA is a UK- and U.S.-based NGO specializing in exposing environmental crime and abuse, and has investigated illegal timber trade and deforestation for over a decade.
- Global Witness investigates and campaigns to prevent natural resource-related conflict and corruption and associated environmental and human rights abuses.