



global witness

For immediate release: 29 March 2010

Campaigners welcome Madagascar rosewood export ban but warn that maintenance and enforcement will be crucial

Global Witness and the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) today welcomed a move by Madagascar's transitional government to reinstate a ban on logging and export of rosewood, but warned that the ban must be strictly enforced and that existing timber awaiting export should be dealt with in an open and transparent way.

Reiner Tegtmeier, Forest Campaigner at Global Witness said: "We are pleased that pressure from conservation groups, donors and non-governmental organizations seems to be having an effect. However, this is not the first time that the Malagasy authorities have banned export of precious timber, and we know from experience that official decrees are often not enforced. We are calling on the authorities to keep this decree in place, ensure that it is fully observed, and prevent loopholes or exceptions that enable export of illegal timber."

Decree no. 2010-141, announced on Wednesday, prohibits all exports of rosewood and precious timber for between two to five years. It is not clear what will happen to the 10,000-15,000 metric tons of rosewood that has already been illegally felled and is awaiting export.

In November 2009, in a report commissioned by the Madagascar National Parks, Global Witness and EIA documented widespread illegal logging of precious Malagasy timber, including rosewood, worth up to \$460,000 a day. The report warned that this illicit activity was threatening Madagascar's last remaining forests, and the people and animals that depended upon them.

The Global Witness/EIA report included the recommendation that the authorities should seize all precious wood in the country's ports and auction it under the supervision of an independent auditor and representatives of civil society. All proceeds should be used to support the national parks, improve forest management and control systems, and promote rural development and conservation.

Andrea Johnson, Director of Forest Campaigns at EIA, said: "To end the cycle of illegal harvest and corruption, the government should take the step of destroying all stocks that are not contained in the latest official inventories. Traders, who are currently stockpiling illegal timber, hoping for another 'exceptional' export authorization, must receive a clear signal that it will be impossible to profit from the illegal trade in the future."

The report described constant shifts in regulations governing the export of precious woods and exposed contradictions in the legislation regarding forests and logging. These loopholes and general confusion allowed uncontrolled logging and export to take place. The report showed how in a number of cases export bans were relaxed in order to facilitate export.

Last week, Global Witness and EIA raised the alarm again, revealing that a vessel owned by the French shipping company Delmas was loading rosewood for export in Vohémar port in Madagascar. "The exceptional export permits granted by the Malagasy authorities for the illegal rosewood is in fact a laundering operation by the cash-strapped government", Tegtmeier warned.

Global Witness and EIA are calling on the Malagasy authorities to suspend all extraction and export agreements and authorisations and maintain the export ban on precious woods in all forms until a controlled forest exploitation management system is in place.

Johnson: "We hope this is the end of the story of uncontrolled exploitation of Madagascar's forests for quick profit, not the beginning of a new chapter of corruption and environmental devastation."

/ Ends

Contacts: Amy Barry, Global Witness, +44 207 4925858; +44 7980664397; Reiner Tegtmeier, Global Witness, +44 207 492 5871; Andrea Johnson, EIA, +1 (202) 483-6621;

Websites: www.globalwitness.org; www.eia-international.org