



Strong action needed against Illegal Logging during the International Year of Forests

As UN launches 2011 theme, green group calls on all nations to take responsibility

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New York – As the United Nations launches the International Year of Forests at the 9th meeting of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) this week, the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA-US) called upon countries to make good on their repeated pledges to address illegal logging and associated trade, and establish strong policies to reduce demand for illegal timber.

“The International Year of Forests is an opportune moment for all to address the role of external actors in driving deforestation and degradation,” said Lisa Handy, Senior Policy Advisor for EIA-US. “At this point, all countries should be taking steps to improve their own laws while ensuring that their businesses are good actors in the global marketplace. These simple principles will cut down on trade in illegally logged wood that threatens forests, the climate, forest-dependent communities, indigenous peoples, and biodiversity around the globe.”

A major report released at the UN meetings in New York this week from the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) recognizes that engaging businesses and government agencies beyond country borders and beyond the forest sector is essential to ensuring that rampant forest loss is stopped. The report highlights the important addition of laws in the US and the EU focused on stopping illegal trade – the Lacey Act Amendments of 2008 and the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Regulation, respectively – to the mechanisms established to preserve the world’s forests.

The IUFRO report notes that developing countries are generally receptive to these new laws “because they are aimed at ensuring that products produced in any particular country conform to that country’s domestic requirements.”

“Instruments such as the Lacey Act and EU FLEGT respect national sovereignty while strengthening enforcement and attention to the rule of law. They also support economic development and legitimate business activities by removing trade distorting illegalities and criminal elements from the system,” said Handy. In response to these new laws, she noted, EIA has already documented improvements in supply chain oversight in timber markets that historically have been largely ‘no questions asked’.

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Action by more countries is now needed. Most recently leaders at the November 2010 APEC summit added their voice to similar commitments to curb trade in illegally logged timber, made by the G8, ASEAN and many others over the last 10 years.

Unfortunately after more than two decades of international discussions on improved forest governance, actions have not matched words. The UN's own forum focused on the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests has yet to demonstrate its ability to tackle many of the tough problems that threaten forests. "The UNFF's flagship agreement, the Non-binding Legal Instrument on All Types of Forests, does not mention 'illegal timber trade' or 'corruption' once in the entire document," said Andrea Johnson, Director of Forest Campaigns at EIA.

Illegal logging policy can provide a model for other sectors. This past December UN climate negotiators acknowledged that everyone plays a role in deforestation, reaching an agreement on a mechanism for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+) that calls on all Parties to "find effective ways to reduce the human pressure on forests that results in greenhouse gas emissions, including actions to address drivers of deforestation." Such measures will prove essential to ensure the success of programs undertaken to reduce deforestation and degradation. "We have to broaden our vision if we're going to prevent forests from disappearing," noted Johnson.

As the international community rededicates itself to focus on forests in 2011, EIA calls for all nations to examine their laws, investment and consumption patterns and take appropriate measures to ensure that they are not incentivizing the continuation of destructive forest practices and illegal logging around the world.

NOTES

The EIA is an international campaigning organization committed to investigating and exposing environmental crime and campaigning to protect endangered species and the natural world. www.eia-global.org This press release was issued by the U.S. office of EIA

The United States approach, through the 2008 Lacey Act amendments, prohibits the importation of illegally sourced plants and wood products. Under the amendments, importers are also required to declare the species and origin of harvest of all plants. Penalties for violations include the forfeiture of goods and vessels and imprisonment. The European Commission has since passed the Illegal Timber Regulation (ITR) – with a similar goal of preventing the import of illegal wood into the EU from all sources. Australia has committed to legislation this year, while Japan and New Zealand have signaled interest.

IUFRO report: *Embracing Complexity – Meeting the Challenges of International Forest Governance* [available at: <http://www.iufro.org/publications/series/world-series/worldseries-28/>]