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EU and US company executives could face jail terms for illegally importing suspect timber from the Democratic Republic of Congo

New analysis reveals DRC's €87.1 million timber trade is shot through with illegality, social and environmental abuses

European and US company executives could face fines and even jail time for trading with Congolese logging companies accused of systematic illegal logging and social and environmental abuses, says Global Witness. A new investigation by the campaigns organisation reveals that the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) €87.1 million timber trade is shot through with illegality, and is entering Europe and the US despite international trade laws aimed at keeping illicit wood off these markets. (1)

Exporting impunity: How Congo's Rainforest is Illegally Logged for International Markets found Congolese companies breaking the law in every logging operation investigated. (2) The report also provides, for the first time, comprehensive data on DRC timber flows, showing that in 2014 the country exported at least €19.8 million of timber to Europe and the US.

"We knew that DRC logging companies were breaking the law, but the extent of illegality is truly shocking," said Alexandra Pardal, campaign leader for Global Witness. "The EU and US are failing in their legal obligations to keep timber linked to illegal logging, violence and intimidation off our shop floors," said Pardal. "Traders are cashing in on a multi-million dollar business that is pushing the world's vanishing rainforests to extinction."

France and Portugal are the biggest recipients of DRC timber globally after China. US, UK, Spain and Belgium each imported at least half a million euro's worth of DRC timber in 2014.

Investigations reveal that two of the DRC's biggest loggers, the *Société Industrielle et Forestière du Congo* ([SIFORCO](#)) and the *Société de Développement Forestier* ([SODEFOR](#)) - which together account for half of the country's timber exports - log without permits, exploit above legal limits, trade in officially protected species and underpay their taxes. (3)

Both companies are allegedly complicit in the beating and raping of local populations, and in SIFORCO's case even the killing of a community member who took a stand against their operations. (4)

Global Witness is calling on EU and US law enforcement authorities to crack down on companies that are helping fund these abuses.

Under the EU's Timber Regulation (EUTR) and the US' Lacey Act, companies are prohibited from importing timber that breaks the laws of the producer country. In the US such violations are considered a criminal offense. Sanctions in the EU differ by country, but in France a violation is punishable by two years' imprisonment and a €100,000 fine. EU companies are also obliged to carry out checks on their supply chains and screen out products at risk of illegality.

DRC, home to two-thirds of the world's second largest tropical rainforest, is synonymous with conflict, failing institutions and endemic poverty. With little to no government oversight, logging companies there enjoy free reign over an area of rainforest equivalent to the size of Bulgaria, or the US State of Virginia.

The country reaps very few benefits from this economic activity. According to a 2013 Global Witness [investigation](#), for example, the DRC Treasury only received 10 percent of the surface taxes that are imposed on logging companies by law, leading to a shortfall of over € 10 million.

“International traders are undeterred by the high-risk nature of DRC timber. This needs to change. EU and US authorities should enforce their laws and clamp down on this influx of illegal wood,” Pardal said. “If the international community is serious about saving the world's last rainforests, it should stop lining the pockets of the people who plunder them.”

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Notes to editors:

(1) The figures are based on customs records instead of usual export estimates, providing the most reliable figure to date. Conversion rate of 0.714 tonne to cubic meter, the average rate for DRC's main timber exports of iroko, afromosia, sapelle, sipo and bosse. Timber prices based on [FAO](#) 2013 DRC roundwood price of \$600 per cubic meter.

(2) The investigation uses a range of inspection reports, and found companies breaking the law in every logging operations visited between 2011 and 2014, in 28 out of the country's 57 concessions. Fifteen companies, which together are responsible for the vast majority of the timber felled in DRC, were examined as part of the report.

(3) SODEFOR responded denying having logged without permits, and claimed it was up to date with its fiscal and social obligations. SODEFOR added that the exploitation of unauthorised species was due to minor and 'acceptable' human error. It stated that overharvesting in their concessions was due to the system of cutting permits under-estimating the size of certain tree species, pointing out that this has been noted as an issue by the Independent Forest Monitor. Indeed, the IFM has noted that the forest administration and logging companies disagree on the current system, and has proposed a new system which has nonetheless not yet been adopted by the administration.

(4) Global Witness has contacted the companies concerned by these allegations. SODEFOR responded stating that they were the 'powerless victim' of these conflicts. SIFORCO did not respond.

For the latest data on DRC's global timber trade see: www.globalwitness.org/drctimbertracker

DRC Timber Exports in 2014 – World

Country	Tonnes	Euro	%
China	72,779.70	56,266,658.82	64.6 %
EU	24,470.40	18,918,292.44	21.7 %
Vietnam	3,896.50	3,012,420.17	3.5%
Taiwan	3,384.80	2,616,820.17	3.0%
UAE	1,810.40	1,399,636.97	1.6%
USA	1,109.30	857,610.08	1.0%
Other	5,223.60	4,038,413.45	4.6%
TOTAL	112,674.70	87,109,852.10	100%

DRC Timber Exports in 2014 – EU

Country	Tonnes	Euro	%
France	13,131.60	10,152,161.34	54.1 %
Portugal	6,088.60	4,707,152.94	25.1 %
Belgium	2,094.90	1,619,586.55	8.6%
UK	951.80	735,845.38	3.9%
Spain	697.70	539,398.32	2.9%
Italy	499.50	386,168.07	2.1%
Denmark	248.90	192,426.89	1.0%
Germany	177.70	137,381.51	0.7%
Other	361.60	279,556.30	1.5%
TOTAL	24,252.30	18,749,677.31	100 %