



Embargoed until 00:01 GMT Thursday 9 February 2011

Commitments to improved transparency in the forest sector must be acted on

Forest dependent communities are still in the dark about how their forests are being managed, despite additional commitments from governments to publish information about their policies and practice, says a report published by Global Witness today.

Marking the end of the Year of the Forest, the [Annual Transparency Report](#) published by a coalition of NGOs working across Europe, Africa and Latin America assesses the amount of information available to citizens in seven forest-rich tropical countries (Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Ghana, Guatemala, Liberia and Peru). The report includes measures of how governments deal with threats from mining and agricultural plantations, the way in which deals are done and whether forest-dependent communities have enough say over how their forests are being managed. It finds that governmental commitments to improve transparency in the forest sector are not being acted on.

“The rights of people living in the forest can only be effectively protected if laws, policies and other basic information such as logging contracts and concession maps are widely available to them,” said Joseph Bobia, of Réseau Ressources Naturelles, a forest campaign group based in the Democratic Republic of Congo. “Governments need to provide this information in a timely and transparent way. Only this way will civil society be able to hold them to account.”

Governments have announced a range of commitments to improve transparency over forest sector management. These include: better and earlier public consultation, public disclosure of key documents, and support to small landowners to protect their forests. In addition, four of the seven forest-rich countries covered in the report now have Freedom of Information laws that include commitments to providing information on forest sector management. Worryingly however, very few of these commitments are being acted on and in the case of the freedom of information laws, not one forest authority is meeting its obligations.

“These additional commitments currently amount to no more than statements of intent,” said David Young, forest campaigner at Global Witness. “More and better information must be published immediately. Until this happens, forest-dependent communities cannot know whether their forests are being managed in their interests, or that of a select few.”

The report also raises concerns that commercial interests for land, mining, oil and agricultural plantations are still taking precedent over the need to protect forests and the communities that depend on them. All too often government bodies compete to strike a deal with a favoured investor, rather than working together in the interests of preserving forests.

“With only 20 percent intact natural forest remaining globally, it is vital that governments manage forests in the public interest,” continued Young. “Local civil society are fighting hard to extract better commitments from their governments, and have shown determination and imagination in doing so. But while there have been some improvements, not one forest authority has made a wholehearted change towards more openness. What do they have to hide?”

ENDS

For more information, please contact:

- David Young, Global Witness: +44 7854 047826 dyoung@globalwitness.org
- Cameroon: Samuel Nguiffo, Centre pour l'Environnement et le Developpement (CED); +237 2222 3857, snguiffo@yahoo.fr, snguiffo@cedcameroun.org
- DRC: Joseph Bobia, Réseau Ressources Naturelles (RRN); josephbobia@rnrndc.org
- Ecuador: Sigrid Vásconez, Grupo Fundación para el Avance de las Reformas y Oportunidades (Grupo FARO); +593 22456367 ext 18, svasconez@grupofaro.org
- Ghana: Willie Laate, Center for Indigenous Knowledge & Organisational Development (CIKOD); +233 244 028649, wilraby@yahoo.com
- Guatemala: Victor Lopez, Asociación de forestería comunitaria de Guatemala Ut'z Che' (Ut'z Che'); +502 574 03514, vittillescas@gmail.com
- Liberia: Jonathan Yiah, Sustainable Development Institute (SDI); +231 88 6426271, jyiah@sdiliberia.org
- Peru: Hugo Che Piu Deza, Derecho Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (DAR); +511 266 2063, hchepiu@dar.org.pe

Notes to editors:

[1] The Annual Forest Sector Transparency Report card is published as an interactive database at www.foresttransparency.info. Global Witness has been working on forest transparency and illegal logging for over 15 years. Read more about our work on forests at www.globalwitness.org/forests

[2] The United Nations Year of the Forest 2011 closing ceremony takes place on 9 February 2012. See <http://www.un.org/en/events/iyof2011/>

[3] There were some improvements in six countries:

- In Peru, a new Forest and Wildlife Law establishes a decentralised and integrated system of forest resource use, included issues of governance, transparency and access to information; and a new Law of Right to Prior Consultation reinforces legal commitments and international conventions regarding the rights of indigenous peoples.
- In Liberia a National Benefit Sharing Trust Board was formally constituted with multi-stakeholder representation, including communities and civil society organisations. The Board will play a crucial role in ensuring equitable and effective use of forest revenue distributed to affected communities.
- In Cameroon, the Government committed in August 2011 to regular public disclosure of over fifty key documents in a bilateral Voluntary Partnership Agreement ratified with the European Union to improve forest law enforcement governance and trade.
- In Ghana, a draft new Forest Policy was released for comment in October. It includes the commitment to "Institute transparency, equity and legalize public participation in sustainable forest and wildlife resources management".
- In Ecuador, the Ministry of Environment published a model of forest governance that recognises the importance of transparency and monitoring.
- In Guatemala a new forest law passed by congress, and which was promoted by civil society, will increase support to small landholders, including those with less secure tenure, to conserve and manage their forests and to promote agroforestry practices.

[4] The report card is part of Global Witness' *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project, funded by the UK Department for International Development Governance and Transparency Fund, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Working-with-DFID/Funding-opportunities/Not-for-profit-organisations/Governance-and-Transparency-Fund-GTF-/> .

Global Witness investigates and campaigns to prevent natural resource-related conflict and corruption and associated environmental and human rights abuses