

Contribution John Hontelez, FSC, on behalf of the Major Groups
To high level segment on illegal wildlife trade
26/6/14

My name is John Hontelez, and I work for the Forest Stewardship Council, FSC. The nine major groups here at the Assembly have presented a joint message this week on what are the essential barriers and actions needed to overcome these to effectively combat illegal wildlife trade.

In my contribution I focus on illegal harvesting and trade of timber, estimated to have an economic value of up to 100 billion USdollars a year. Illegal harvesting of timber is contributing to deforestation and forest degradation, it has serious negative social impacts, undermines the economies of the countries of harvest, and it is seriously undermining efforts to promote sustainable forest management. Part of illegal logging is purely domestic, driven by poverty and lack of alternatives. Then enforcement needs to be complemented with creating sustainably livelihoods, building upon the important role local communities can have as primary stewards of forests, and for example the promotion of agro-forestry. However, a large component is without doubt criminal and needs to be eradicated. It is also truly a global phenomenon, with all countries involved on the demand side. And tackling the demand side is essential. Raising consumer awareness is important, and governments at all levels have a role to play here, but illegal timber gets converted in ordinary products such as charcoal, paper, furniture, wall panels, construction wood, products that cannot be easily identified with crime.

Therefore it is essential that all governments in the world, and in particular also importing countries, together with the processing industry, act to prevent illegal timber from entering the supply chain. There are good examples in the EU Timber Regulation, the US Lacey Act, the coming Australian Illegal Logging Act. Where such laws exist, they however need much stronger enforcement. Both in the US and EU we see that is mostly environmental organizations that trigger legal action. That needs to change. We should be able to rely on the authorities to do their enforcement job: systematically and effectively. However, without involvement of the processing industry it will never be perfect. So industry needs to apply due diligence, and governments, at all levels, can stimulate that further by, in their public procurement policies, requiring legality verification or credible certification such as from FSC. [Denmark mentioned this as example tonight.] Recognising and supporting effective chain-of-custody certification schemes can help business indeed to contribute to the eradication of this important component of illegal wildlife trade.

Legality is not equal to sustainability, but it is a first and indispensable step, so it certainly belongs to the responsibility of environmental ministers, in cooperation with their colleagues on social, trade and economic issues, to take determined action.