

Illegal logging in Cameroon: How French Government action is fuelling rainforest destruction



Abandoned logs, forest concession, Cameroon. © Greenpeace

In 2004 France was the largest market in the EU for imports of African tropical hardwood primary products, accounting for 817,000m³, to the value of 256 million euro.¹ France imports timber and timber products from countries, such as Congo Brazzaville, Cameroon, Gabon, Ivory Coast and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where corruption is rampant and illegal logging is a serious problem.

This timber is logged in countries like Cameroon, where forest destruction generates widespread social conflicts and has a severe impact on biodiversity. In recent years, a number of official reports published by the Cameroonian Government and the World Bank have revealed the widespread nature of illegal activities within Cameroon's logging industry.²

European companies, such as Rougier and Patrice Bois, have been reported to be logging illegally in Cameroon. In certain cases such timber even comes from cutting permits now widely considered illegal in Cameroon. This timber is entering, and is freely available on, the French market. Timber from Rougier can be purchased in stores such as M.Bricolage and Réseau Pro. Furthermore, the Danish company, DLH is a regular purchaser of timber from Patrice Bois and is a major supplier of timber traders in France and throughout Europe.

The French government and the timber trade are recklessly fuelling the destruction of the world's last primary rainforests. By accepting timber from illegal and destructive sources France is also jeopardizing the development of a legitimate trade in legal and environmentally and socially responsible timber.

¹ Changing International Markets for Timber – What African Producers can do: Wood Products Trade – Africa and Europe: Rupert Oliver, Emily Fripp and Andy Roby
² Global Witness - October 2003, Forest Law Enforcement in Cameroon. 2nd summary report of the Independent Observer, December 2001 - June 2003. Global Witness - April 2005, Forest Law Enforcement in Cameroon. 3rd Summary report of the Independent Observer, July 2003 - February 2005.

Ultimately, in order to stop the import and trade in forest destruction, action must come from European Union (EU) Governments and the European Commission, by immediately introducing legislation to ban the import of illegal timber and timber products and to promote sustainable forest management worldwide. Simultaneous action is also urgently required in African countries to put an end to the widespread corruption and lack of law enforcement and governance in the forest sector.



Primary rainforest in Cameroon © Greenpeace

Cameroon's tropical rainforest

The lowland rainforest of Cameroon forms part of the Congo basin forest block. This forest is the home of millions of forest-dependant people. Their future is under threat, as illegal and destructive logging operations encroach deeper and deeper into this fragile forest. This forest also supports thousands of species of plants and animals and is one of the world's last remaining strongholds of threatened species such as lowland gorillas, chimpanzees and forests elephants.

Illegal and destructive logging activities cost the Cameroonian Government millions of euros each year in lost revenue.³ Many companies have been fined for illegal practices such as tax evasion, logging outside legal boundaries, logging after permits have expired, cutting undersized trees and logging in unallocated concession areas.

One of the main factors driving this corrupt, destructive and economically inefficient industry is the demand for cheap timber from the international marketplace; the importing nations who largely choose to ignore what is going on in the forest and just carry on with business as usual.

3 Auzel P, Fomété T, Owada, L'exploitation des forêts du Cameroun: Exploitation illégale, perspectives, November 2002. Study commissioned by DFID - UK Department for International Development.

'Salvage' logging permits: a façade for illegal logging



SFID / Rougier sawn timber in french port of Sete. October 2005. © Greenpeace.

There are various types of timber extraction permits issued in Cameroon. One of these is salvage permits. Salvage permits were designed for well-defined cases in which specific development projects required the clearing of trees such as for road building⁴ or industrial development, such as plantations.⁵ There were several strict conditions imposed before a salvage permit could be allocated. A 1995 decree required that an environmental impact assessment be undertaken.⁶ In 1998 the maximum area for salvage operations was fixed at 1,000 hectares,⁷ and the allocation had to be through public auction. These permits were known as Timber Recovery Permits ~ in French Autorisation pour la Récupération de Bois (ARB's).

In July 1999, the Forestry Minister, by decree,⁸ indefinitely suspended the allocation of all new salvage permits, due to the "abuses observed in their award".⁹ Despite the suspension and the fact that it has never been rescinded, the allocation of salvage permits has continued.¹⁰

Global Witness recently noted that following the suspension the Forestry Minister "devised" a number of permits to allow for the continued salvaging of timber, known under various names

- Coupe de Sauvetage de Bois (CSB)
- Timber Recovery Authorisations (TRA) also known as *Autorisation d'Enlèvement de Bois* (AEB's). These permits allow companies to collect abandoned logs in the forest that were illegally felled.
- Timber Recovery Special Authorisation (TRSA) (*Autorisation spéciale d'enlèvement de Bois - ASEB's*)

Global Witness states "[n]one of these titles are specifically addressed by any Cameroonian law or legal document. Furthermore, it is suspected that the beneficiaries of such permits are, in most cases, those responsible for cutting and abandoning the wood – and that this method of extracting timbers is pursued in an effort to avoid paying the Annual Forest Licence Fee and felling tax".¹¹

These "new" permits are therefore widely considered to be illegal in Cameroon.

How timber logged using salvage permits is finding its way onto the French market

The EU, in 2004, imported timber and timber products from Cameroon to the value of around Euro 400 million. France imported about one tenth of this timber by value, around Euro 38 million.¹² By far the largest volume of this timber is in the form of sawn wood, with smaller volumes of logs and plywood.¹³

Greenpeace has evidence that both Italian-owned Patrice Bois, and the Cameroon subsidiary (SFID) of the leading French tropical timber producer and seller, Rougier, which both supply sawn timber from Cameroon to the European and French markets, are processing timber from "salvage" cutting permits.

4 Décret n° 95/531/PM du 23 août 1995 fixant les modalités d'application du régime des forêts, Article 111.

5 Loi n° 94-1 du 20 janvier 1994, Article 73. Trees may also be removed in cases of "natural disaster".

6 Décret n° 95/531/PM du 23 août 1995 fixant les modalités d'application du régime des forêts, Article 111, Article 110.

7 Décret du 29 mai 1998. Portant réglementation de la procédure de délivrance des ARB.

8 Ministerial Decision No. 0944/D/MINEF/DF

9 Ibid.

10 A Ministry listing dated August 2001 shows that 49 'salvage' permits had been allocated. Global Witness stated that in 2004 alone, 39 salvage permits had been allocated.

11 Global Witness. Forest Law Enforcement in Cameroon. 3rd Summary Report of the Independent Observer. July 2003 – February 2005. Published in April 2005. p.9

12 Changing International Markets for Timber – What Can African Producers Do. Producer Country Draft – Cameroon. Oliver & Frapp. Timber Trade Federation/Forests Forever

13 Ibid.

Rougier Group - The rhetoric, the reality and the profit

Société forestière et industrielle de la Doumé (SFID), one of the Rougier Group's best known subsidiaries operating in Cameroon, has been repeatedly involved in illegal logging in Cameroon, including sourcing timber from salvage cutting permits.¹⁴

The rhetoric

The Rougier Group is a leading French tropical timber company, logging in Africa for over 50 years and is considered within the trade to be one of the leaders in sustainable forest management. It prides itself on a threefold "philosophy of timber" based on conserving and respecting the primary resource (i.e. wood), promoting the better use of timber species, and elaborating and developing innovative products. According to Rougier, the group's future depends on the future of timber.

Rougier is also a member of the ATIBT (Association Technique Internationale des Bois Tropicaux) and of IFIA (Interafrican Forest Industries Association). IFIA has developed a Code of Conduct to which its members are required to conform¹⁵, and which declares as its aim (amongst other objectives), the promotion of sustainable forest management and the improvement of the image of the forest industry. In accordance with the self-declared IFIA aims, Rougier claims that it has been involved for some time now in the process of sustainable forest management of all its forestry concessions¹⁶.

The Reality

However, in 2004, Rougier/SFID declared producing over 25.000 m³ of timber using a salvage permit; East Province ARB 1003001. As discussed above, ARB permits had been suspended since 1999.

SFID, was exposed in 2002, for involvement in illegal logging using a salvage permit. In August 2002, the Independent Observer, Global Witness, was barred access for the third time to a zone in which logging operations were being carried out under the pretext of salvage permit ARB 192.¹⁷ The zone was situated near President Paul Biya's hometown, Mvomeka.

Reports of Intimidation and Violence against local populations:

Extraction of this timber involved reported human rights abuses against local residents, including "illegal arrests, arbitrary detention, intimidation and beatings."¹⁸ The area allocated under ARB 192 amounted to over 129,000 hectares, well in excess of the 1,000 hectare limit.¹⁹ SFID was identified as one of the three processors of ARB 192 timber.

According to Global Witness' mission report, "control measures and forestry sector laws and procedure seem not to apply" to the ARB 192 zone. The control mission had been aborted following a telephone call from the Minister's office, ordering the team to return to Yaoundé.²⁰

Inoperative law enforcement processes:

In its 2nd summary report on forest law enforcement in Cameroon²¹, Global Witness warned that the investigations on Timber Recovery Permit 192 revealed that the law enforcement process is inoperative.

"This single case seriously undermines any apparent progress achieved by the Project overall, considering the negative official reaction to any attempt to document the case in compliance



Non timber forest products such as this moabi fruit provide an important source of income to forest dependant communities.
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¹⁴ SFID in Cameroon is 100% subsidiary of Rougier Gabon, which in turn is 86% owned by Rougier International. See Rougier Organogram - accessed 5 December 2005. <http://www.rougier.fr/financ.htm>

¹⁵ http://www.ifiasite.com/index.php?rub=Actions&nom_page=D%E9ontologie& sous_page=elements&langue=fr

¹⁶ <http://www.rougier.fr/gb/gestion.htm>

¹⁷ Global Witness report #22. <http://www.globalwitness.org/projects/cameroon/downloads/022En-Fpdf>

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.7. A SFID employee was named in the report as being involved in the intimidation of local people.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.15. This area was calculated using some four differing maps related to the allocation.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Global Witness. Forest law enforcement in Cameroon. 2nd Summary report of the Independent Observer. December 2001 - June 2003. Published in October 2003. Cf. p. 8 - case study on ARB 192. <http://www.globalwitness.org/reports/show.php/en.00047.html>

with the independent Observer's contractual duties." And "The Independent Observer has never documented a case of this scope and scale".²²

In its 2005 report, Global Witness states that only 50% of the cases that it brought to the attention of MINEF have been acted upon and showed particular concern that the case of ARB192 had not been taken further. Global Witness states:

*"It remains troubling.....that MINEF appears to have failed to initiate any sanctions against the other 50%. Despite multiple requests for information, none has been forthcoming. The most outstanding cases remain those of the influential companies involved in the cases of TRA 192....."*²³

The Profit

While many forest communities in Cameroon live in poverty, the Rougier group increase in net financial result in the first semester of 2005 was reported to be up 44% over the same period in 2004.²⁴ The company attributes this to "a solid level of production", "strong development of Cameroonian activities," and "the excellent state of distribution operations in France".²⁵

The fact that one of Rougier's own subsidiaries is known to have been involved in illegal logging activities in Cameroon and that unknown volumes of logs from destructive and illegal timber operations enter the sawmills, while making record profits raises very serious doubts to its image of being a leader in responsible forest management.

Patrice Bois - supplier to the European market

Patrice Bois is an Italian company, founded in 1997,²⁶ operating in Cameroon. The company's Yaoundé sawmill began operating in January 1999 and has an annual input capacity of 40,000 m³.²⁷

Patrice Bois depends largely on partnerships with other companies to supply its mill with logs, many of which can be shown to have been involved in illegal logging activities.

Illegal and/or destructive logging activities

Cameroon's new independent observer, Resource Extraction Monitoring (REM), exposed Patrice Bois's most recent involvement in illegal logging activities.²⁸ In April 2005, REM exposed Patrice Bois logging a Coupe de Sauvitage de Bois - CSB n° 0644, which had been awarded in March 2004 to a company called GAU Services.²⁹ The permit had been awarded on the basis that forest needed to be cleared for expansion of nearby sugarcane plantations.

REM reported many infringements under this permit, including the fact that it had been allocated as a salvage permit, while such permits had been suspended since 1999. Further, the area allocated was 10,000 hectares, there was no evidence regarding the need to extend the sugarcane plantations, no impact study had been undertaken, no public auction had taken place for the allocation of this permit and that the Field Register,³⁰ had not been accurately filled in.

Moreover, REM noted that the permit itself was recorded in the SIGIF³¹ registry as invalid and concluded that the field register should never have been delivered to GAU in the first place.³²



Patrice Bois timber from Cameroon, unloaded in Sete, France 8 December 2005, from the ship Riomare.
© Greenpeace

22 Ibid.

23 Global Witness. Forest Law Enforcement in Cameroon. 3rd Summary Report of the Independent Observer. July 2003 – February 2005, p27. Published April 2005.

24 www.rougier.fr

25 Ibid.

26 Envoyé Spécial. N° 68. Monday april 5th. 2005. P.12. "Patrice Bois n'est pas en crise".

27 Njoya Fochivé Emmanuel. Etude comparative de la situation des entreprises forestières en 1998 et 2004. April 2005. Study commissioned by the World Bank.

28 Rapport De L' Observateur Independant, No.001/01/REM/, p4
<http://www.observation-cameroon.info/Rapports.html>

29 Ibid

30 Known as the 'carnet de chantier', in which daily logging activities must be recorded.

31 SIGIF – Systeme Informatique de Gestion d'Informations Forestieres. The official digitalized forest management information system, developed under the Programme of Sustainable Management of Cameroonian Forests.

32 Rapport De L' Observateur Independant, No.001/01/REM/
<http://www.observation-cameroon.info/Rapports.html>

As a result of the investigation, REM called for the cancellation of this cutting permit and demanded that the Cameroon Government investigate how the permit had been awarded.

In October 2005 further Greenpeace investigations revealed that salvage cutting continues in the same region (département de la Haute Sanaga) but now under a different permit "AEB 0682".

Previous involvement in illegal logging activities

Patrice Bois has a history of involvement in illegal logging activities with its various business associates. Known associates of Patrice Bois have included³³ Société Forestière Fanga (SFF)³⁴ and Compagnie Forestière Assam (COFA)³⁵.

Some of the recorded infractions of Patrice Bois & its associates include:

- In January 2002 MINEF accused Patrice Bois of unauthorized logging (a "major" offence) and fined it 10 million FCFA.³⁶
- In January 2003 MINEF accused Patrice Bois of "complicity in non authorized forest exploitation" and fined it 50 million FCFA.³⁷ Due to errors in the paperwork by the Ministry, this charge was altered and a lesser fine imposed. Nevertheless the company was fined for a forest related infraction.
- In April 2003 the independent observer accused Patrice Bois associate, SFF of cutting undersized trees, out-of-boundary logging, and fraudulent marking of felled timber.³⁸ SFF was reported to operate via the Société d'exploitation des grumes du Cameroun (EGC), of which Patrice Bois is a shareholder.³⁹ In 2002-2003, SFF itself declared cutting 819 trees in excess of authorized amounts.⁴⁰
- On 27 August 2003, MINEF officials seized elephant meat inside concession UFA 09.004B, controlled by Patrice Bois partner COFA.⁴¹ This concession is adjacent to the Dja Nature reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

French & European Market - forest destruction for sale

France is a major destination for SFID and Patrice Bois timber. Rougier/ SFID timber is imported both through Rougier's own companies and through major French importers such as Bois des Trois Ports. This timber is likewise sold through the Rougier companies to the French and the European market and through the national Réseau Pro network (part of the Wolseley Group).⁴²

One of Patrice Bois's clients is the Danish based timber multinational Dalhoff Larsen & Horneman (DLH).⁴³ Whilst DLH claims it carefully selects its timber suppliers based on an internal screening project, called the GSP – Good Supplier Project, it is clear that this is not the reality based on the information set out above.⁴⁴

French Government – lots of talk but where is the action?

There is currently no legislation in place either in France or the EU prohibiting illegal timber from openly crossing Europe's borders.



Patrice Bois timber from Cameroon with DLH logo, Nantes, France. March 2005. © Greenpeace

33 MINEF « Paiement de la taxe forestière annuelle », CT 11 June 2004.
 34 UFA 09.006 (75,892 ha, awarded in 1998)
 35 Concession UFA 09.004b (81.335 ha, awarded 2000); UFA 09.016 (66, 007 ha, awarded 2002).
 36 MINEF communiqué published in CT 9 January 2002 (procès verbal n°052/PVCI/MINEF/CAB/UCC du 29/11/2001).
 37 MINEF communiqué n°00147 du 19 avril 2004 (procès verbal n°001/PVCI/MINEF/CAB/UCC du 26 janvier 2003). The penalty was unpaid as of April 2004.
 38 Global Witness report #61, 22 April 2003. <http://www.globalwitness.org/projects/cameroon/downloads/061En-Fpdf>
 39 CT 9 September 2002.
 40 Global Witness Report: d'Analyse des données produites par le SIGIF au Cameroun exercic 2002/2003. Available in English from <http://www.globalwitness.org/reports/show.php/en.00058.html>
 41 Delegation provinciale de l'Environnement et des forets base de données Djoum-Mintom.
 42 Greenpeace exposed the Wolseley Group as trading in timber from illegal sources. See Partners in Crime: The UK timber trade, Chinese sweatshops and Malaysian Robber Barons in Papua New Guinea's rainforest. <http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/MultimediaFiles/Live/FullReport/7251.pdf>
 43 DLH response to accusations of purchasing timber from companies undertaking illegal logging, states that Patrice Bois is a DLH supplier. http://www.dlh-group.com/en/index/nyheder_home/nyh-generellenyheder/nyh_shownews.htm?newsid=6204
 44 http://www.dlh-group.com/en/miljo_home.html

In a letter to Greenpeace in 2004, French President, Mr Chirac recognised that the situation of the African forests was an ecological and social tragedy.⁴⁵ In France's April 2004 Action Plan for Tropical forests, the government declared that it would support "initiatives aiming to determine how to make illegal the imports into the EU of illegally harvested timber".

Despite these statements, France's leadership on tackling illegal logging and trade has fallen short of the mark, evidenced by the ongoing high volumes of tropical rainforest timber imports and active support, including funding, of companies involved in illegal and destructive forest activities.⁴⁶

A recent review, published by the French Government, regarding its cooperation efforts in the African forest sector stated that "Cameroon is part of the "pré carré" ("exclusive territory") of French cooperation. France must manage its contradictions between the requirements of development and the defence of its own interests. France has so many interests in the country that its objectivity is greatly affected"⁴⁷.

FLEGT and Illegal Logging

In May 2003, the European Commission published an Action Plan on Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT). Nearly three years on there is still no concrete action, with the focus of the debate on Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) between the EU and timber producing countries.

Although the VPAs, under certain conditions, could contribute positively, alone they will be insufficient to stop the imports of illegal timber and timber products into the EU or to contribute effectively to the preservation of the last ancient forests.

The European Commission itself acknowledged that the VPA's alone won't be enough to solve the problem of illegal logging and committed to investigate and report on further legislative options. The report was promised in mid 2004, but has still not been released. This stands in stark contrast to the rapid introduction of laws to stop imports of pirated CD's or clothing labels.

The EU must immediately introduce legislation to stop imports of illegal timber products into Europe.

Call to action:

Stop the Destruction

French Government, EU and European Commission

- Introduce legislation to prohibit the import of illegal timber and timber products into France and Europe and to promote environmentally and socially responsible forest management.

French Government

- The french government should immediately suspend direct and indirect funding to logging companies.
- The french government should make public all its direct and indirect investments in the african forest sector since 2000.

⁴⁵ French President Mr. Jacques Chirac, Letter to Greenpeace, February 2004.

⁴⁶ Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, DGCID, Evaluation Rétrospective de la coopération française dans le secteur forestier, 1990-2000. Paris, 2004

⁴⁷ Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, DGCID, Evaluation Rétrospective de la coopération française dans le secteur forestier, 1990-2000. Paris, 2004. p130

Government of Cameroon

- Immediately publish the details of all current salvage logging permits
- Immediately investigate the logging practices in all these salvage logging operations to verify that they do not serve as a cover for other logging operations
- Strengthen forest law enforcement operations to fight against illegal logging and the trade in illegal timber
- Immediately investigate and act upon the information provided by Greenpeace on Rougiers/SFID's and Patrice Bois illegal logging activity through use of salvage permits.

Clean up the Trade

- Retailers must immediately cease trading in timber where legality and responsible logging cannot be guaranteed.

Support the Solution

- French Government should adopt a 'greener' procurement policy, with 100% of its purchased timber from legal and well managed forestry operations, which are certified at least to the standards demanded by the Forest Stewardship Council.
- Timber traders should adopt purchasing policies that support environmentally responsible and socially just forest practices, such as those embodied by the principles of the FSC.

Information Available from Greenpeace

- Resource Extraction Monitoring (REM) report n° 1 (on Gau Service – Patrice Bois salvage logging) can be downloaded from:
<http://www.observation-cameroun.info/Rapports.html>
- Global Witness reports can be download from:
<http://www.globalwitness.org>
- Record showing 2004 Salvage Permit of SFID