

*The French logging company SIBAF (Bolloré) was recently fined for wrong demarcation of cutting area and for failing to mark logs.*  
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In 1998-9, Thanry's subsidiaries held some 650,000 ha of forest concessions in Cameroon - 16 percent of the total concession area in that period<sup>13</sup>.

During the MINEF investigations, Thanry's subsidiaries were found to be logging 'anarchically' and "without the least respect for the logging area". They were also found to be logging undersized trees, as well as logging in some areas without legal permits. The subsidiaries SAB and SEBC were described as "flagrant examples of companies violating all kinds of forestry laws". The report concludes that the kind of forest exploitation carried out by these companies is "putting at stake the entire forestry policies to promote sustainable forestry management in Cameroon."

Moreover, along with another French company, Coron, Thanry's subsidiary CFC has been severely criticised for obtaining concessions by irregular procedures and for owning forest operations which are larger than the law currently allows<sup>14</sup>. Both Coron and CFC obtained concessions through an unlawful discretionary process: a presidential decree signed by the Prime Minister in March 1996. This is in clear violation of the country's new forest legislation that requires a public and competitive allocation process to grant new concessions<sup>15</sup>.

In 1996-97, Thanry's subsidiaries produced around 460,000 m<sup>3</sup>. Their main markets include China and the G8 country, France<sup>16</sup>.



*CFC, a Cameroonian subsidiary of the French logging company Thanry was recently fined for systematic logging of undersized Sapelli trees and wrong demarcation cutting area.*  
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## Footnotes

- 1 Ancient forests are defined here as the world's remaining forests which have been shaped largely by natural events and which are little impacted by human activities.
- 2 Destructive logging operations are now rapidly expanding in East Cameroon, northern Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon.
- 3 The G8 countries France, Japan and Italy are major importers of timber from Cameroon and Gabon.
- 4 CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora).
- 5 Letters to Greenpeace from Jürgen Trittin (19th May 2000), Tony Blair (28 March 2000) and John Prescott (19th April 2000)
- 6 FAO (1999) The State of the World's Forests 1999. Rome; ITTO (1998) Annual Review and Assessment of the World Tropical Timber Situation 1998. [www.itto.or.jp/inside/review1998/index.html](http://www.itto.or.jp/inside/review1998/index.html)
- 7 Transparency International 1998 and 1999.
- 8 Milol AC, Pierre J-M (2000) Impact de la fiscalité décentralisée sur le développement local et les pratiques d'utilisation des ressources forestières au Cameroun. Janvier 2000. Rapport final.
- 9 *Vente de coupes* - short-term licence of a maximum 2,500 ha. The least regulated type of logging permit, the ventes de coupes are rarely depicted on government maps.
- 10 MINEF (1999) Rapport de la mission d'évaluation des progrès réalisés sur les concessions forestières (UFA) attribuées en 1997 dans la province de l'est. MINEF (1999) Rapport de la mission d'évaluation des progrès réalisés sur les concessions forestières (UFA) attribuées en 1997 dans les provinces du centre et du sud.
- 11 The penalties were summarised in a communiqué published in the *Cameroon Tribune* (24th March 2000) p 20.
- 12 This is equivalent to only US \$5,815 - \$29,076 (Based on exchange rates on Monday 3rd July 2000).
- 13 GFW (2000) An overview of logging in Cameroon. WRI, Washington DC, p 31.
- 14 GFW (2000) An overview of logging in Cameroon. WRI, Washington DC. According to Cameroonian law, each subsidiary logging company is recognised as its own legal entity and is entitled to a maximum of 200,000 ha of concession area. Three French subsidiaries, SIBAF (Bolloré), CFC (Thanry) and Coron each control logging concessions totalling well over 200,000 ha.
- 15 Decree of application 95/531/PM of forestry law 94-1.
- 16 CED (1999) Etat des lieux du secteur forestière au Cameroun Données statistiques. CED.

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Greenpeace International  
Keizersgracht 176, 1016 DW Amsterdam  
The Netherlands  
Tel: 31 20 523 6222, Fax: 31 20 523 6200  
E-mail: [forest@diala.greenpeace.org](mailto:forest@diala.greenpeace.org)  
[www.greenpeace.org/~forests](http://www.greenpeace.org/~forests)

# Spotlight on the illegal timber trade: Cameroon

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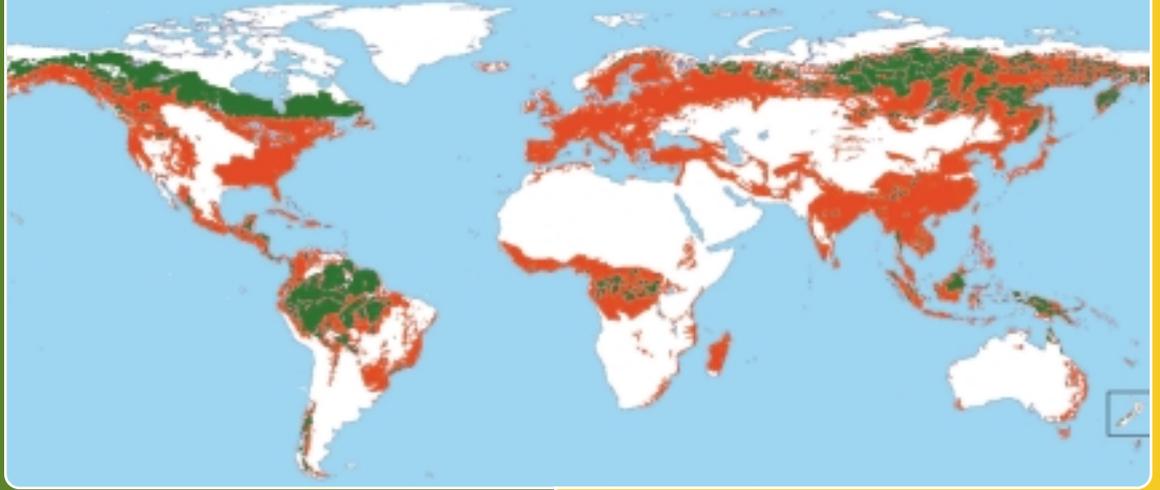
*The Baka 'pygmy' communities of Cameroon are under threat from a logging industry in which corruption and the violation of indigenous peoples' rights are widespread.*

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The remaining large ancient forests of West Africa are under threat<sup>1</sup>. Nigeria, Ghana and Ivory Coast have already lost almost all of their natural forest. Liberia is the only west African country where large areas of ancient forest remain. But since the end of the war in 1997, foreign logging companies have been rapidly destroying vast forest areas, operating in an environment of almost total lawlessness. In Central Africa, where large areas of relatively intact forests still remain, destructive logging operations are now expanding rapidly into the heart of the Congo Basin - an area famous for its rich biological and cultural diversity<sup>2</sup>. Most logging operations in this region are highly destructive and a significant proportion are illegal, with corruption and the violation of indigenous peoples' rights widespread. Despite claims to the contrary by the G8 governments, a substantial part of the trade in illegal timber is fuelled by demand from the international market<sup>3</sup>. Greenpeace is calling on all governments to stop their role in this trade.

Today, only around one fifth of the world's large ancient forests remain, most having already been destroyed by human activity. In West Africa almost all of the natural forest has gone, while Central Africa now faces increasing threat from the rapid expansion of destructive logging operations



# Overview

In April this year, Greenpeace documented illegal activities in the global timber trade in its report *Against the Law: the G8 and the illegal timber trade*. The report summarised examples of illegal activities in the African timber trade, including the unauthorised trade in CITES-listed species<sup>4</sup> and the harvesting of trees below the legal size for cutting.



The forests of Cameroon support many species which do not occur elsewhere.

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The response of G8 governments to the report has been to play down the role of the international timber market in driving demand for the illegal production and trade of wood, and to argue that this is largely a domestic issue<sup>5</sup>. Thus governments seek to minimise their role in driving this trade and limit their responsibility for its environmental and social impacts.

However, such arguments are inconsistent with the trade figures. These show that, for example, all of the industrial roundwood produced in Gabon and at least 50 percent of that produced in Cameroon is exported as logs, sawnwood or panels - and that around half of these exports go to G8 and EU countries<sup>6</sup>.

Since the release of *Against the Law*, a number of leaked reports on the forest industry in Cameroon have revealed major illegalities in almost all concessions, in what has been described as "the most corrupt country in the world"<sup>7</sup>.

There is much evidence to suggest that illegality and corruption within Cameroon's forest industry are the norm rather than the exception.

A recent study<sup>8</sup> financed by the World Bank reveals that the Cameroonian government is losing millions of dollars due to fraudulent practices and illegal logging. The least regulated type of logging licence, the *vente de coupe*<sup>9</sup>, is currently the most prevalent. In 1998-99, *ventes de coupes* accounted for almost 200,000 of the 350,000 ha of forest allocated for cutting in that period. The study indicates that in some areas up to 90 percent of these logging licences are operated illegally. Harvesters were found to be logging without a licence, overlogging the designated area, logging far beyond the defined boundaries of the licence and logging after the licence had expired. While most of these cutting licences are owned by Cameroonian nationals, they are commonly subcontracted to foreign logging companies, which then export the majority of this illegally harvested timber.

The donor community is finally becoming increasingly concerned about the escalating illegal logging practices in Cameroon. Discussions are currently underway to determine how best to improve monitoring capacity on the ground as a primary tool to curb illegal logging.



In March 2000 the Cameroonian Government published a communiqué summarising the illegal practices found in logging concessions in the East, South and Central provinces of Cameroon in December 1999.

Once again, Greenpeace is calling on G8 governments to honour their commitment to combat the illegal production and trade of wood and wood products. It demands that these governments:

- DO NOT buy illegal timber products
- DO NOT fund forest destruction through aid for unsustainable forestry
- DO NOT allow G8 countries to be markets for illegal timber
- DO buy wood products from sustainable certified forests
- DO provide urgent assistance to forest countries to tackle illegal logging
- DO increase the capacity for monitoring and transparency throughout the production and transport of wood and wood products globally



*The French company R Coron is one of six logging subsidiaries owned by companies in G8 countries which were fined for operating illegally in Cameroon in December 1999.*

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## Case studies

### *Illegal loggers owned by companies in G8 countries*

Following pressure from the World Bank, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MINEF) of Cameroon conducted a series of field inspections in the country's East, South and Central Provinces during December 1999. The MINEF team inspected 26 concessions allocated in 1997. The result was two internal reports detailing major illegalities in almost all of the concessions visited<sup>10</sup>. Illegalities ranged from logging outside concession areas to fraudulent markings on logs in order to avoid payment of tax. Yet despite the seriousness of the infractions, the penalties<sup>11</sup> allocated were far too low (only 4-20 million CFA<sup>12</sup>) to discourage the logging companies from continuing their illegal activities.

No less than four of the logging operations found to be operating illegally have parent companies in G8 nations: these are Bolloré, Coron and Thanry (French), and Vasto Legno (Italian). Together, these four companies control more than a third of all logging activity in Cameroon. The inspected subsidiaries were SIBAF (Bolloré), SAB, CFC and SEBC (Thanry), EGTF (Coron) and SEFAC (Vasto Legno).

### *Thanry (France)*

Of the European-owned companies listed in the MINEF report, the worst offender was the French-owned Thanry, with its three inspected subsidiaries fined a total of 41 million CFA.

Thanry has numerous forestry operations in West and Central Africa. In Cameroon, Thanry is the largest logging company, operating through six subsidiaries: CFC (Compagnie Forestière du Cameroun), CIBEC (Compagnie Industrielle du Bois au Cameroun), J Prenant, Propalm, SAB (Société Africaine des Bois) and SEBC (Société d'Exploitation Forestière des Bois du Cameroun).



*On the 6th April 2000 - the opening day of the G8 Environment Ministers meeting in Okinawa, Japan - Greenpeace denounced the role of Italian company Vasto Legno in illegal logging in Africa.*

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