

Answers to accusations

Forest Crime File; Chainsaw criminal Wijma

Recently Greenpeace confronted Wijma with different accusations regarding logging illegally in Cameroon. We always take this kind of information seriously however we now feel we have to differentiate their accusations.

Our affiliate in Cameroon, Wijma Douala has been involved in imperfections regarding the limits of a forest concession in Cameroon by an ex-subcontractor named Soforoc. From the moment this incident became known to us in the end of 2001, we stopped the project, informed the government and the neighbour involved (for it concerned a timber production area appointed by the government) and compensated them both including the fines and taxes according national laws. In spring 2002 Greenpeace called us to attention to the fact that in the area involved social conflicts arose by damage suffered by the local community. To solve this social conflict Wijma proposed and organised an independent mission under the supervision of the local prefect with the aim to determine the damage. From the total of 73 claims presented to Wijma, 23 turned out to be fake. Besides that 44 persons concerned admitted to already have received their compensation in 2001. The remaining 6 claims turned out not to be put in before. The extra damage has been determined and paid in good consultation with the community and local authorities. Besides that the final report of this mission has been signed by all commissions members and agreed by the local community. It is Wijma's opinion that the case described above has properly been brought to completion.

Wijma was extremely surprised with the accusation of Greenpeace regarding not respecting the limits of another forest area by subcontractor CUF. It concerns an even older case (January – May 2001) than the one described above. It is difficult to make a statement regarding the content of this old case without very thorough investigation. However it is questionable if Greenpeace is considering the fact that in 1999/2000 before exploitation by Wijma, and in the year after, two other companies exploited the same area. For this reason it will be difficult to determine who is responsible for the roads and exploitation discovered on site. After a period of disorderly exploitation in Cameroon at the time of this exploitation caused by instability in forest laws and regulations, today Cameroon has a clear and stable policy regarding forestry matters, which makes it much easier to exploit in a sustainable way. This and the recent allocation of three large long-term concessions gives Wijma the opportunity to fully implement its environmental policy of sustainable forest management in the near future. Next to that Wijma bought a new generation GPS-system for the reliable control of the boundaries (GPS was not common practice in the timbertrade a couple of years ago) to prevent exceeding concession limits in the future. We would be extremely surprised when boundary limits are still exceeded today.

Wijma officially stated it had stopped buying timber from Liberian sources already July of last year, as it was unclear whether timber production in this country is linked with illegal arms trade or not. All affiliates of Wijma were informed to act according this statement. Unfortunately internal investigation in Germany revealed that since June 2002 our German affiliate received supposed Liberian timber (Abura / Bahia) from a German company in Nordenham twice since it seemed impossible to conclude this from the available documents. Wijma never imported timber from Liberia and regrets the fact that Liberian timber found its way in to the Wijma group. Wijma will take appropriate measures to prevent such an incident from happening again. Our tracing policy, which deals with the implementation of a tracking system, will be a tool to prevent these kinds of problems in the future.

Wijma regrets that in the past incidents have occurred with subcontractors linked with our company, however, we cannot rewrite the past. Today Wijma is dedicated to prevent these kinds of cases from happening in the future, continuously repeating incidents from the past are detrimental to that. Especially to our very serious intentions to work on improvements, where lately important goals have been achieved, such as:

- *Sustainable forest management plan handed in for one of our concessions in Cameroon.*
- *Organising and financing Reduced Impact Logging (RIL) workshops.*
- *Selling certified wood like azobé and other species.*
- *Appointing an environmental co-ordinator.*
- *Development and implementation of an environmental policy.*
- *Development and implementation of a tracking system.*
- *Avoiding debatable suppliers such as Hazim from Cameroon.*
- *Decision against Liberian timber despite reticent (European) Governments.*

We hope that the intentions of Wijma, to continue to contribute to sustainable forest management are clear. We tend to look at the future in a constructive solution focused way, that in the end will improve the well-being of the forest and therefore find it unjustified that Greenpeace highlights the mistakes (for which we are doing our utmost to avoid them) as if it is our general way of working.