



**AFLEG MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
HIGHLIGHTS:
MONDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2003**

Delegates to the Africa Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (AFLEG) Ministerial Conference met in Plenary throughout the day on Monday. They heard opening statements, announcements by Ministers, and presentations on forest governance issues and harnessing natural resources for growth. In the afternoon, Plenary addressed issues regarding forest governance and legal frameworks, information and monitoring, and multilateral and bilateral institutions.

PLENARY SESSIONS

OPENING CEREMONIES: Madi Ali, Cameroonian Secretary General of the Ministry of Environment and Forests and President of the AFLEG Organizing Committee in Cameroon, welcomed delegates and underscored the value of international cooperation.

Henri Djombo, Minister of Forestry and the Environment of the Republic of Congo, outlined forest-related measures undertaken by his Government, including taxation, noted his Government's aim to rehabilitate national parks and protect biodiversity, and emphasized its commitment to a new forestry code.

Dominic Fobih, Minister of Lands and Forestry of Ghana, stressed the importance of the forestry sector for Ghana's economy and employment. He described challenges, including low stumpage fees and reduced foreign exchange earnings from timber, and noted that industry has little incentive to improve its performance. Minister Fobih outlined Ghana's reforms including market-based pricing, equitable benefit-sharing programmes, an increase in allowable cuts, and a national forest plantation programme.

Anselme Enerunga, Minister of Environment, Conservation of Nature, Water and Forests of the Democratic Republic of Congo, noted that Congo Basin countries still face obstacles to sustainable forest management (SFM), including lack of trained personnel, poor infrastructure, inadequate funding mechanisms, and conflicts. He stressed the need to strengthen capacity, improve monitoring, involve local populations in management and decision making, and improve allocation of funds.

Tanyi Clarkson Mbyawor, Minister of Environment and Forests of Cameroon, underscored his country's commitment to SFM and the need to focus on: methods for achieving SFM; stakeholder involvement; and political commitment at the Ministerial level. He stressed the need for sub-regional solidarity.

Delegates then elected the Conference Bureau by acclamation.

OVERVIEW PRESENTATIONS: Simula introduced the structure of the conference and its organization of work. He explained that AFLEG recognizes that: adequate legal and institutional frameworks and their effective implementation are preconditions for SFM; law enforcement and governance are the sovereign responsibility of States; and illegal logging and associated trade is a shared responsibility of producer and consumer countries. Simula stressed that AFLEG will not create a new international instrument but will make use of, and strengthen, existing instruments to achieve SFM.

Pak Wandojo, Indonesia, presented experiences from the FLEG East Asia Process, highlighting key aspects of the 2001 Bali Ministerial Declaration, including a recognition that exporting and importing countries share the responsibility of combating forest crime. He noted that the East Asia FLEG Regional Task Force identified the need for a clearinghouse mechanism for transparent reporting, research on timber supply and demand, and a strategic framework for, and an information-sharing format on, FLEG implementation at national and regional levels.

Jean-Claude Nguinguiri, the Republic of Congo, said concerns related to forest governance for high forest-cover countries include: inadequate training and understanding of laws, and lack of power and motivation of implementing actors; lack of transparency in relevant public institutions; and socio-political instability. He noted the need for improving legal frameworks, controls and monitoring, including through partnerships and developing indicators, and for strengthening capacity and adopting codes of ethics.

Noting the increasing reliance on non-wood forest products in low forest-cover countries, Lamin Bojang, the Gambia, called for adopting an ecosystem approach to management, developing management strategies, recognizing rural communities' roles and traditional rights, addressing inconsistencies in legal frameworks, and improving inter-agency coordination.

Paul Collier, World Bank, discussed the importance of harnessing natural resources for growth, and said dependence on natural resources increases risk of civil war. He highlighted similarities between timber and other natural resources, such as diamonds, including their use by rebel groups to finance activities and buy arms. He also drew attention to the unique character of timber, underscoring the relative ease of stripping timber, the implications of multiple property rights, and the need for regulation and investment to ensure renewability. Regarding post-conflict policies, he emphasized that donors must act with a long-term view and said low transparency in budgets and over-exploitation of forest resources prior to the reconstruction of effective government institutions and regulatory environments often lead to criminality.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENTS

FOREST GOVERNANCE AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS:

David Kaimowitz, Center for International Forest Research, described the negative effects that forest law enforcement can have on rural livelihoods. He commended those African countries that have adopted laws that increase the rights of local peoples. Stressing that small-scale logging activities are seldom harmful, he recommended focusing on major violators and called for innovative and integrated approaches to forest law enforcement that involve communities.

Robert Kofi Bamfo, Ghana, discussed his country's experience with forestry policy and institutional reform. He outlined unsuccessful past policies, and highlighted new initiatives, including the creation of a Forestry Commission, the introduction of market-based incentives, and the lifting of bans on log exports. He concluded that improved governance is essential to encourage private sector investment in the forestry sector.

Patrice Talla, FAO, spoke on legal frameworks for FLEG. Drawing attention to the temptation for officials to become involved in illegal activities, he said forestry laws should: not be overly ambitious; balance damage and correlative sanctions; have acceptable definitions; set clear objectives; include the concepts of transparency, participation and flexibility; provide for codes of conduct and mechanisms to fight corruption; and recognize local property rights.

Jean-Jacques Landrot, Interafrican Forest Industries Association, presented private sector perspectives on forest governance, noting problems associated with poor governance. Landrot underlined the need to convene: a working group of forest administrators, donors, advisors, and the private sector to address legislative, fiscal and other issues to facilitate SFM; country-level committees with members representing financial, forestry, civil society, and private sector interests to implement AFLEG-related measures; and a working group consisting of international, private sector and other representatives to tackle conflict and post-conflict SFM issues in Liberia.

Samuel Egbe, Cameroon, provided an overview of the strengthening of forest governance and legal frameworks in his country. He reviewed new practices and approaches used in Cameroon, including land-use planning reforms, forestry planning, involvement of local communities in forest management, increased transparency, and the intensification of control and enforcement measures. He noted the Government's increased revenues from these measures and strong political will for the reforms.

Nsita Steve Amooti, Uganda, outlined experiences and lessons learned through forest sector reforms in Uganda, focusing on its national forestry plan. He said participatory reforms are long-term and expensive, underlined the value of involving civil society, and stressed the need to build capacity to effectively implement reforms.

INFORMATION AND MONITORING: Scott Poynton, Tropical Forest Trust, presented key issues for global wood markets. Noting that wood buyers now take into account environmental and social impacts, he stressed the benefits of certification schemes. Poynton said third-party verification and wood control and chain of custody systems allow producers to prove that their wood was legally obtained.

Jacqueline Van de Pol, Global Forest Watch, outlined links between information, monitoring and policy reform. She described cooperation agreements between her organization and governments to support and update geographic information systems, highlighting the benefits of digital information for delimitating forest concessions and controlling the implementation of management plans.

Jeanne Marie Mindja, Cameroon, introduced the network on forest policies in the Congo Basin (REPOFBAC), highlighting its success in promoting information exchange between governments, and identifying priority areas for action, including forest planning, the valuation of non-wood forest products, community participation, and decentralization.

She said REPOFBAC could meet the information exchange needs of AFLEG, but noted that sustainable funding and civil society and private sector involvement are required.

Jeerima Djibrila, Cameroon, and Albert Barume, Global Witness, discussed partnerships and independent monitoring in Cameroon. Djibrila said an agreement signed between Cameroon and Global Witness has led to improved: licensing control; tracking of logs; monitoring; tax revenue from forestry; and revenue spending. Barume highlighted success in increasing transparency and awareness-raising, and called for building capacity of local populations, extending observation work to other Congo Basin countries, and developing adequate means for forestry monitoring.

Jean-Pierre van de Weghe, Observatoire des forêts d'Afrique centrale (FORAC), explained that the FORAC programme consists of an internet site for knowledge sharing on Central African forests, and addresses conservation in protected areas and exploitation in forest concessions.

MULTILATERAL AND BILATERAL INITIATIVES: Dinah Baer, White House Council on Environmental Quality, presented the US President's initiative on illegal logging, launched in July 2003. She said the initiative focuses on: good governance; community-based actions; technology transfer; and market forces. Baer emphasized that the US will not impose its laws on other countries, but will aim to reinforce other countries' efforts to implement their laws. She noted that the US will review its relevant import laws, and will seek partnerships with international organizations.

Neil Scotland and John Bazill, European Commission, presented the EU Action Plan for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT). Scotland explained that the Commission encourages actions regarding development cooperation, timber trade, conflict timber, public procurement, private sector initiatives, and financing and investment. Bazill noted the need for stakeholder consultations and collaboration with the US, and said the Commission wishes to pursue FLEGT partnership agreements.

John Hudson, UK, described a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Indonesia and the UK to address illegal logging in Indonesia. He said the MoU prompted the finalization of an action plan, the establishment of systems to verify the legality of wood products, and the development of a working definition of "legality" in Indonesia, and the adoption of a timber procurement policy in the UK.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: Delegates will meet at 9:00 am in the Plenary Hall to hear a summary of the AFLEG Preparatory meeting held in Brazzaville, the Republic of Congo, in June 2002, and messages from civil society, the private sector and national and regional preparation workshops.

BREAK-OUT WORKING GROUPS: Working groups will convene in Rooms A to E at 10:50 am to address: implications of illegal activities in the forest sector, institutional reforms and immediate strategies to implement them; marketplace and trade issues; conflict timber issues; illegal trade in bushmeat; and tenure and related governance issues.

OPEN SESSIONS: Participants will meet at 2:00 pm in a room to be announced to discuss the organization of open sessions to be held in parallel to the negotiations. Open sessions will include an NGO meeting at 3:00 pm in Room B, a private sector meeting at 3:00 pm in Room C, and a presentation on the Congo Basin Forest Partnership at 4:30 pm in Room D.

NEGOTIATIONS: Government representatives are scheduled to meet in closed intergovernmental negotiating sessions from 10:50 am in the Palais des Congrès Negotiations Room.