



West African Forestry Leaders Take Historic Action to Fight Illegal Rosewood Trade

BISSAU, GUINEA-BISSAU | April 11, 2016 | For the first time, representatives from 11 West African countries have agreed to take action aimed at curbing illegal rosewood logging and associated trade in the region. At the first international conference ever held in Guinea-Bissau, deputies from Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) member countries Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo produced a series of precise recommendations to address what has become a critical issue throughout the region.

"This conference marks a watershed moment for our country, and could prove to be a turning point in West Africa's fight to solve its illegal rosewood crisis," said Braima Embaló, Director of Forest Resources, Directorate General for Forests and Fauna, in Guinea-Bissau.

"This is an unprecedented step taken by Guinea-Bissau and its neighbors to address the large-scale logging in contravention of Guinea-Bissau's own laws and regulations, which is driven by increasing – and unregulated – demand in consumer countries, particularly China. These logging activities have had far-reaching and debilitating environmental, social, economic, and cultural impacts, particularly on local communities that depend on the forests," said Kerstin Canby, Director of the Forest Policy, Trade, and Finance Program at Forest Trends.

By the end of the historic conference, which took place from March 29-31, participants agreed to:

- Improve national policies and legislation to reduce illegal logging and related trade, and strengthen their implementation;
- Reinforce regional cooperation;
- Reach out to the principal consumer countries for West African timber, in particular China; and
- Support the uplisting of the species *Pterocarpus erinaceus*¹ to Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).²

These recommendations are particularly symbolic because they stand in sharp contrast to the host country's recent history of illegal rosewood exploitation. After the April 2012 coup d'état in Guinea-Bissau, timber traders – particularly those from China – flocked to the country looking to replace dwindling supplies of South-East Asian rosewood. Due to the country's political instability, authorities were unable to enforce national laws regulating logging and timber trade. This enforcement failure also led to local communities' loss of a critical source of livelihood and ecological protection, exacerbating their already-precarious position and fueling conflict between villagers.

Altogether, between 2012 and 2014, Guinea-Bissau supplied China with nearly 94,000 cubic meters of rosewood, valued at \$65.3 billion, up to 30 shipping containers of rosewood logs per day.

¹ Known locally as "*pau de sangue*" in Portuguese, "kosso" in English, and "vêne" in French; also referenced as African rosewood.

² CITES is an "international agreement between governments ... [whose] aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival."

“The pattern that has unfolded in Guinea-Bissau reflects a wider trend in the West African rosewood trade, in which foreign timber traders take advantage of unstable situations in fragile states, swiftly moving from country to country to capitalize on the absence of governance and enforcement as well as cross-border smuggling networks that have arisen in response to consumer demand,” noted Kate Horner, Director of Forest Campaigns at the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA). “Timber and other natural resources also play a significant role in catalyzing, or exacerbating, conflict, particularly when governance is weak,” Horner added.

To address the situation within its borders, Guinea-Bissau’s new president and government issued a temporary logging ban in 2014, and a five-year moratorium on log exports was imposed in 2015. In addition, the National Guard established a task force to seize illegally logged rosewood and protect remaining stands. Thus far, they have seized between 200,000 and 300,000 logs and transported over half that amount to stockpile lots within the capital. However, additional resources are needed to further address existing stockpiles, prevent additional illegal harvesting, and replant deforested areas.

Coordinated and comprehensive steps are now being taken to address the situation on an international level as well. Delegates at the meeting in Bissau committed to using regional diplomatic channels to encourage legal and sustainable trade that emphasizes due diligence on legal sourcing. They also called for development of sound business practices that benefit African and Chinese small and medium enterprises, importers, and consumers, while also preserving forest resources and benefitting local communities.

“A regional approach is essential to addressing this crisis,” explained Babacar Salif Gueye, Technical Advisor to the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, Senegal. “But we need help from consumer countries to make the next leap in combatting illegal logging and trade, and China has the opportunity to play a key leadership role in reforming the rosewood trade. Together we can develop sound business practices that preserve our forest resources while benefitting both local communities as well as African and Chinese enterprises, importers, and consumers.”

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Forest Trends works to conserve forests and other ecosystems through the creation and wide adoption of a broad range of environmental finance, markets and other payment and incentive mechanisms.

Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) is a non-governmental organization that investigates and campaigns on a wide range of environmental crime, including illegal wildlife trade, illegal logging, hazardous waste, and trade in climate and ozone-altering chemicals.

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