

## PRESS RELEASE

### CONCLUSION OF NEGOTIATIONS OF A VOLUNTARY PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT BETWEEN CAMEROON AND THE EUROPEAN UNION ON FOREST LAW ENFORCEMENT GOVERNANCE AND TRADE IN FOREST PRODUCTS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

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On 6 May 2010 **Mr Raul Mateus Paula**, the Ambassador representing the European Union in Cameroon and **Hon. Elvis Ngolle Ngolle** Minister for Forests and Wildlife representing Cameroon concluded negotiations of a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) on Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) in forest products to the EU. The VPA expresses a strong mutual commitment to respond to the problem of illegal logging, by linking good forest governance in Cameroon with a trade agreement and leverage offered by the EU's internal market.

This brings to a close a negotiation process that has spanned several years. In November 2007 the European Commission and the Government of Cameroon started a dialogue to frame our mutual commitment to combat illegal logging; talks have continued since then with face to face sessions and meeting via video conference. The two parties have agreed on the key elements of a FLEGT licensing scheme. These include (a) a clear description of legal requirements (legality definition) (b) systematic verification of legal compliance (c) timber tracking through the supply chain (d) licensing procedures and (e) Independent auditing.

The Agreement lends support to ambitious policy and legal reforms that will foster good governance, transparency and accountability in the forest sector of Cameroon. Reinforcing Cameroon's on-going sector reforms, embodied in the Forest and Environment Sector Programme (PSFE, the Agreement will help consolidate forest laws and strengthen regulation to ensure legal compliance in all timber production. Cameroon intends to build a national system to assure legal compliance. The system will apply to all exports no matter the final market destination and timber produced for the national domestic market as well. The EU for its part will guarantee free and unrestricted access to its entire market of all FLEGT licensed timber products coming from Cameroon and will seek to increase visibility of FLEGT licensed products in the EU. The EU and its Member States are also contributing to the needed sector reforms and providing support to development and upgrading of regulatory systems framed in the VPA through the PSFE sector programme. With increasing expectation in the European market for independently verified proof of legality of timber products, the VPA should help Cameroon to consolidate and improve its European market access. It is expected, that the first FLEGT licenses from Cameroon will be issued by the end of 2011.

The Agreement underpins Cameroon's legal reform process; it will establish capacity for legality verification and introduce a licensing system to provide market assurance and visibility. The Agreement also focuses on good governance, of particular note; it includes strong provision for increased transparency that should reinforce the efforts to improve accountability. The sector reforms agreed are far reaching, and emphasize Cameroon's long term vision for a sustainable forest sector and the livelihoods of those who depend on it.

Throughout the negotiations Cameroon has brought together a constructive and continuous consultative process with stakeholders, including industry and civil society. The Agreement enshrines this vision for active stakeholder engagement: establishing a national platform and stakeholder participation in the committee established to monitor progress with VPA implementation.

The conclusion of these negotiations follows closely on the heels of VPA agreements with Ghana and the Republic of Congo. While negotiations are on-going with Liberia and Central African Republic as well as Indonesia and Malaysia with many other countries showing interest to enter into dialogue too.

Now that the negotiations are finished the Agreement will go through ratification by Cameroon's Parliament and for adoption and ratification by the European Council of Ministers of all EU Member States as well as the European Parliament.

**Mr. Stefano Manservigi**, Director General for Development of the European Commission congratulated Cameroon for its determination in fighting illegal logging both nationally and internationally, and for the ambition she has brought to the Voluntary Partnership Agreement to establish transparency and good governance in the sector. As producers and consumers of tropical timber Cameroon and the EU have a joint responsibility to eradicate illegal logging and related trade. This is good for Cameroon and good for European consumers, who remain as concerned as ever about climate change, which has forest degradation and illegal logging as one of its causes.

“For Cameroon, signing the Voluntary Partnership Agreement is one more step forward in our efforts to strengthen forest governance. The Government also commits to work with neighbouring countries in this process, and, thankfully, we share the same vision”; said Cameroon's Minister of Forest and Wildlife, **Mr. Elvis Ngolle Ngolle**: "Cameroon is well aware of the importance of fair and legal timber trade that we seek to establish through various measures we have taken since 2000. This includes the benefits to 70 local communes and communities of more than 60 billions FCFA through allocated fiscal revenue. We are convinced that FLEGT will strengthen governance and fiscal revenue and strengthen the overall third place of forests among economic sectors."

For further information, contact:

- Ministère des Forêts et de la Faune (<http://www.minfof.gov.cm/>)  
M. Koulagna Koutou Denis : [koulagnakd@yahoo.fr](mailto:koulagnakd@yahoo.fr)

- Délégation de l'Union Européenne au Cameroun (<http://www.delcmr.ec.europa.eu/>)  
M. Carl Frosio : [Carl.frosio@ec.europa.eu](mailto:Carl.frosio@ec.europa.eu)