

Illegal logging claims put to rest

PORT MORESBY (December 3, 2008) - The Papua New Guinea Forest Industries Association (PNGFIA) said today that the award of the first SGS certificate of independent verification of the legality of forestry to Saban Enterprises Limited puts to rest claims that most forestry in Papua New Guinea is illegal.

"We can close the book on false allegations by Greenpeace and other NGOs that have run an ongoing smear campaign against the forestry industry in PNG", said Mr. Bob Tate, the Executive Officer of the PNGFIA.

Mr. Tate made his comments at the presentation of the independent verification certificate to the Papua New Guinea National Forest Authority building in Port Moresby. The certificate was awarded to Saban Enterprises Limited (SEL), a PNG based forestry company, by one of the world's leading independent auditors, Societe Generale de Surveillance (SGS).

Mr. Tate noted that introduction of third party legal verification had been pioneered by Rimbunan Hijau (PNG), the parent company of SEL.

"Rimbunan Hijau (RH) is to be congratulated," said Mr. Tate. "The company has gone out of its way to initiate and complete this pilot project. It shows that RH is a transparent company with nothing to hide," he added.

"This initiative will be followed by the application of the same system of legality verification by other PNG FIA members," he said.

Mr. Tate said Western and local NGOs had run a shallow and misleading campaign against the forest industry in PNG for a number of years.

"The shallowness of their claims was demonstrated September this year when Greenpeace illegally seized a ship carrying legally produced timber. Greenpeace claimed the timber was illegal and belonged to Rimbunan Hijau," said Mr. Tate.

"When it was publicly demonstrated that neither the timber nor the ship were Rimbunan Hijau's, Greenpeace continued to claim falsely it was," Mr. Tate went said. "After practicing piracy, it then falsely accused the company of underpaying its workers when it has always paid its workers well above the PNG minimum wage," he said.

Mr. Tate said anti-forestry NGOs and donors from Western countries seemed to think it was reasonable to make false claims and behave badly in PNG. He also instanced a report last year by the Australian Conservation Foundation which was prepared with PNG-based NGO CELCOR.

"The report claimed the forest industry was responsible for gun running and people trafficking, yet there was no credible evidence to support the claims. In the same report,

ACF and CELCOR also accused RH of bringing police to a village to harass people when the villagers in fact called the police in to apprehend a fugitive from justice who had been charged with murdering someone in Port Moresby," Mr. Tate said.

"Further, the report claimed without any substantiation that forest company staff had sexually abused female workers and practiced child abuse without substantiation," he added.

"This week Greenpeace are claiming at the United Nations climate change conference that forestry in PNG is a leading contributor to climate change," he said. "But even the UN itself acknowledges that implementing sustainable logging is the most cost-effective means of increasing carbon sinks in developing countries."

Mr. Tate said it was shocking that wealthy NGOs like ACF believed it was acceptable to engage in such activity in developing countries when they would draw censure if they behaved the same way in their own countries. He said it was even more disturbing that the report had been financed by Caritas Australia, a Catholic charity, and the British Embassy.

Mr Tate said Green NGOs wanted to stop commercial forestry in PNG, despite the fact that less than 20 percent of the country had been set aside as forest production areas and the industry employed 10,000 workers. He said that it could easily be concluded that they did not care about the welfare of Papua New Guinea's people.

For comment, please contact Bob Tate, The Executive Officer of the PNGFIA (telephone +675 325 9458).

Notes for editors

PNGFIA

Members of the PNG Forest Industries Association represent around 85 percent of production of timber in PNG. It is the policy of the PNGFIA not to engage in illegal logging. All PNGFIA members — constituting 85 per cent of the industry — practice legal forestry. PNGFIA members adhere to all environmental codes, the PNG Logging Code of Practice and sustainable yield as defined by the PNG Forest Authority.

PNG's forest resources

Just over 25 per cent of PNG's total forest area is available for commercial forestry. The FAO reports that 75 per cent of timber removals in PNG are for fuelwood and for clearing of land for crops — the remainder is for forestry.

The forest industry in PNG

The forest industry in PNG provides 10,000 jobs in the private sector. It provides US\$ 200 million in export revenue and US\$100 million in royalties and premiums. It provides significant health and education facilities plus transport infrastructure in remote areas.

Forests and climate change

The UNFCCC reported in 2007 that implementing sustainable forest management in developing countries was a more cost-effective way of increasing forest carbon sinks than simply avoiding deforestation — the choice of NGOs such as Greenpeace. The UNFCCC also noted that the leading cause of deforestation in the developing world is the clearing of land for agriculture — not the forestry industry.