

ITTO reinforces commitment to forest law enforcement

The most recent Council session delivered more information on issues of forest law enforcement and illegal logging

ASSISTING COUNTRIES to develop and enforce forest laws remains one of the most important tasks facing the international community, according to Alhassan Attah, Chairman of International Tropical Timber Council.

The Council, ITTO's governing body, convened in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo last June in its 38th session to discuss issues such as forest law enforcement, forest restoration, and the achievement of sustainable forest management.

"The work carried out at this session highlights the need for ITTO to continue its efforts to assist countries in forest law enforcement," said Mr Attah.

The Council received a report from an ITTO diagnostic mission to Gabon, a country with a strong political commitment to sustainable forest management. Nevertheless, the mission found that increased support for forest law enforcement would be necessary during and after the coming into force of a new forest law this year. It recommended that ITTO support training programs that would address, among other things, adherence to the forest law and associated regulations.

The Council also heard the report of a mission to Liberia, where the formal forest sector was destroyed during a civil war. The United Nations has imposed an embargo on the export of timber from the country in an effort to limit the contribution of timber smuggling to civil unrest. The mission recommended that ITTO provide a wide range of support to the Liberian forestry sector as it is reconstructed.

During the session the Council received a progress report on the development of a code of best practices for improving law compliance in the forest sector, a joint initiative of ITTO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. When published later this year the code will provide countries with a compendium of experiences in combating illegal forest activities.

A feature of the Council session was a side-event organised by a coalition of local and international civil-society organisations. The event focused on the relationship between secure land tenure for indigenous and local communities and the task of reducing illegal logging.



For example, Mr Kapupu Diwa, a representative of indigenous people in the Democratic Republic of Congo, reminded delegates of the close relationship that indigenous people in his country have with the forest, but pointed out that their rights to the forest are not being respected and that they are not benefiting as they should from the commercial use of forest resources.

Andy White of Forest Trends, a US-based NGO, urged ITTO to do more to assist its members in tenure and policy reform.

"ITTO is uniquely placed to help," he said. "For example, it can encourage open dialogue within and between countries, conduct studies—not only on what to do but how to do it—and expand its technical assistance to countries."

According to Dr Manoel Sobral, ITTO's Executive Director, the increased commitment of countries to deal with illegal logging will help to significantly reduce the problem over the next few years.

"We are seeing many countries taking bold steps towards better forest law enforcement," he said. "Moreover, there is a growing commitment among developed countries to assist these efforts. For example, the Japanese government intends to take the lead in the elimination of illegal logging in cooperation with ITTO. I warmly welcome this commitment and expect that it will lead to significant tangible results in coming months and years."

ITTO grants US\$7.6 million for tropical forests

Projects to promote the trade of certified timber in Guatemala, create a market for environmental services in China's tropical forests, and assist local communities to rehabilitate degraded forest land in Java, Indonesia, were among those funded by the International Tropical Timber Council at its 38th session in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo last June.

The Council financed a total of 13 projects and three pre-projects at this session, including one that will promote the development of small-to-medium-sized enterprises in Gabon, another that will produce a state-of-the-art publication on African timber species, and another that will assist Myanmar to conserve its teak genetic resources.

A project funded in the Republic of Congo will continue work to improve forest management, conserve biodiversity and enhance local livelihoods in the buffer zone of the Noubale-Ndoki National Park. Funds were also pledged to a Congolese

project that, when fully funded, will use multi-spectral aerial digital photography to improve forest monitoring. In total, some US\$1.35 million was pledged to assist the Republic's forest sector.

ITTO also decided to provide additional support to the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, committing US\$150 000 for activities that will assist the implementation of the Sub-regional Convergence Plan and the COMIFAC 2015 Objective.

The major donors at this session were the governments of Japan, Switzerland, the Common Fund for Commodities and the US, while the governments of the Netherlands, Norway, France, Finland and the Republic of Korea also pledged funds. In addition, funds were mobilised from the Organization's unearmarked resources.

Descriptions of the newly funded projects will be published in the next edition of the TFU.