

**Launching ceremony of ITTO project:  
Enhancing the conservation and sustainable management of teak forests and legal and  
sustainable wood supply chains in the Greater Mekong Subregion  
(PP-A/54-331)**

**Statement by Dr Gerhard Dieterle  
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**24 April 2019, Bangkok, Thailand**

Professor Sanit Aksornkoe, Senator of the National Assembly of Thailand and Chair of the Thai National Economic and Social Development Council,

Mr. Athapol Charoenshunsa, Director General of the Royal Forest Department of Thailand,

Dr. Ludawan Puagchit, Vice-President of Kasetsart University,

Mr. Jan Scheer, Deputy Head of Mission and Head of Economic Section, German Embassy to Thailand,

Ms Silke Hertrich, German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL),

Distinguished delegates from participating regional governments,

Distinguished representatives from the private sector and civil-society organizations,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure to warmly welcome you on the occasion of launching the ITTO project, **“Enhancing the conservation and sustainable management of teak forests and legal and sustainable wood supply chains in the Greater Mekong Subregion”**.

First, allow me to express my profound gratitude to the Government of Thailand for its long-term partnership with ITTO in promoting sustainable forest management in the tropics and in assuming a coordinating role in this important regional project. The Greater Mekong Subregion is the origin of all the world’s teak resources, and it holds a vast store of knowledge, traditions and expertise in the sustainable management of this unique species. The regional project that we are launching today will build on this incredible knowledge and wisdom and make use of the expertise as it generates new understandings and insights for the benefit of participating countries. The project reflects ITTO’s strong commitment under the 2018–2019 Biennial Work Programme to improve the management and marketing of natural and planted teak in close cooperation with our many partners.

I will speak more on the expected outcomes a little later.

I thank the Royal Forest Department and Kasetsart University for assuming the role of regional coordination and for the overall support these two institutions are providing to the ITTO teak project. We appreciate your hard work already in the initial stages of the project and in preparing for this launch. I would also like to acknowledge and express my gratitude to the ITTO teak project's participating countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion – the Kingdom of Cambodia through its Forestry Administration; the Lao People's Democratic Republic through its National Agriculture and Forest Research Institute; the Republic of the Union of Myanmar through its Forest Department; and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam through its Academy of Forest Sciences. This regional partnership has the potential to make an important contribution to the sustainable development of the subregion's teak sector.

A regional approach could also have other impacts. For instance, implementing common regional technical standards for teak seedlings and teak products would generate large benefits for teak-based businesses and other stakeholders in the region and beyond. In light of the importance of scaling up teak cooperation in the Greater Mekong Subregion, I would like to especially thank in advance the two keynote speakers for their valuable contributions – Senator Professor Sanit, who is a long-term supporter of ITTO, and Dr. Suwan, a Senior Expert at the Royal Forest Department.

On behalf of all members of the International Tropical Timber Council I express my deep appreciation to the Federal Republic of Germany through its Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) for its financing and commitment to the establishment of legal and sustainable wood supply chains in the Greater Mekong Subregion through ITTO. It is a great pleasure to welcome Mr. Scheer, the representative of the German Embassy to Thailand, and Ms. Silke Hertrich, from the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, who was closely involved in the preparation of the project.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please allow me to highlight the reasons why this project is so significant for the countries in the region, for ITTO and for the international forest regime. Forests and forest products in general are crucial for global efforts to combat climate change under the Paris Agreement, and they must also play a key role in the achievement of many of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly goal 12 on responsible production and consumption; goal 13 on climate action; and goal 15 on life on land. The Ministerial Katowice Declaration on Forests for the Climate, which was adopted last December at the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, calls for accelerated actions to enhance the global contributions of forests and forest products to achieving the Paris Agreement.

The initiative being launched today is unique because it translates the recommendations of the Special Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, published in October 2018, and relevant decisions of the UNFCCC, into action. Last year, for the first time, the role of forests was recognized as a cornerstone for the transition towards a circular economy. Sustainably produced wood and wood-based energy have a demonstrated capacity to substitute for non-renewable materials and energy at all levels. This is a major shift away from the initial focus on protecting and managing standing forests only. But – and this is of critical

importance – these benefits can only be achieved if we adopt an integrated approach across the entire supply chain, from the tree in the forest to the shelves of finished products in the market. As you see, this vision is exactly at the centre of this project, and this regional project will set the standard for others to come.

The project will also help the teak sector create win–wins for climate, biodiversity, the environment and, importantly, poverty alleviation by supplying a rapidly growing population with essential goods and services and enabling economic development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In recognition of the overwhelming benefits of an integrated approach, ITTO has decided to make “Legal and Sustainable Supply Chains” one of its central programmes for which we actively seek funding for scaling up activities at a global level. This project is the first of its kind at ITTO and we are immensely grateful for the Government of Germany’s generous support to kick-start the programme. The Legal and Sustainable Supply Chains programme is also the reason we are one of the main drivers of the “*Sustainable Wood for a Sustainable World (SW4SW)*” initiative, which is a joint effort with FAO, CIFOR and the World Bank under the Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

The Legal and Sustainable Supply Chains programme enables ITTO to provide its tropical member countries with strong support because in addressing the enabling policy, institutional and financial conditions and incentives in a coherent and forward-looking way. For example, the programme will assist members to:

- (a) build enabling institutional and policy frameworks for promoting legal and sustainable supply chains;
- (b) develop, promote and implement incentive mechanisms for increased investments in landscape restoration, SFM and downstream supply chains;
- (c) build capacity in SFM and the marketing and trade of timber and non-timber forest products by ensuring the legality and sustainability of international and domestic trade;
- (d) promote comparability and coherence among national and international regulations and standards related to legality and sustainability; and
- (e) raise awareness of the role of productive forests and sustainable wood in economic, social and environmental development, climate-change mitigation and adaptation, and the conservation of global biodiversity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Teak (*Tectona grandis*) is one of the world’s most important and valuable hardwoods because of its outstanding physical and aesthetic qualities. Natural or planted teak forests are found in about 70 tropical countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and teakwood production and processing have enormous potential to contribute to the livelihoods of local communities and the economic development of nations. I trust that this teak initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion will be instrumental in achieving the positive outcomes mentioned above and will

provide an effective framework for consultation, cooperation and policy development. We hope that, among other things, it will help participating countries to:

- conserve unique natural teak forests and their gene pools;
- increase incomes for forest communities and smallholders;
- improve wood processing and marketing;
- enhance regional collaboration and coordination in teak management;
- improve forest law enforcement and governance through effective monitoring; and
- create an enabling environment to make forest and landscape restoration a profitable venture for all stakeholders.

The initiative is bringing together policymakers, researchers and academicians, practitioners, civil society and the private sector engaged in promoting sustainable teak programmes. I am certain that its outcomes will be of a great value to participating countries and indeed to all ITTO members, to whom we will report at the Fifty-fifth session of the International Tropical Timber Council in Lome, Togo, in December this year.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish you all success in the implementation of this important project. Thank you.

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