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***EUROPEAN HARDWOOD
FEDERATION***

I.T.T.O. INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON PHASED APPROACHES TO CERTIFICATION, BERN, SWITZERLAND, 19-21 APRIL 2005.

Market requirements of certification and their implications for tropical timber producers.

STATEMENT OF THE UCBD

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The Union pour le Commerce de Bois Durs dans l'U.E. or the European Hardwood Federation (U.C.B.D.), is an alliance of the national federations of tropical and temperate hardwood importers in the European Union.

There are strong trading links between the tropical timber producers all over the world and the importers grouped in the U.C.B.D.. This is resulting in a yearly import in the E.U. of more than 10 million m³ – R.E. : logs, lumber, veneer and plywood.

In first instance the European hardwood importers appreciate the efforts the I.T.T.O. authorities did and the initiatives they launched together with a wide range of private sector, non-governmental and governmental bodies in order to achieve commercially viable sustainable management of their forest resources and this under extremely difficult conditions.

In spite of the fact the fight against illegal logging has more recently emerged strongly, - so that the accent of the discussion in the consumers countries has shifted to a certain extent from sustainable forestry management to illegal logging and associate trade -, certified forest products market remains a strong component of the forest sector generating attention by importers and retailers while final consumers are slowly becoming aware of the issue of sustainable forest management, partly through the certification message.

In the meantime the U.C.B.D. statement as settled a decade ago remains in general unchanged, it is to say :

Forest certification can be seen as one of many tools available to improve worldwide forest management in pursuit of sustainability.

The forest certification and the chain of custody verification system should be based on the following elements:

- a voluntary scheme
- transparency
- credibility
- freedom of movement of goods
- freedom of competition
- independent inspection
- international agreement
- a simple means of monitoring of the wood distribution chain („chain of custody“)

It is also important that certification and product labelling do not become trade barriers. Suppliers in third countries should, under certain conditions, have access to the labelling of importing countries. A compatible, mutually-recognised certificate is a necessary prerequisite in order to carry out such labelling of products by non-certified member countries. Thus, such a certificate would have to be applicable to all wood products originating from timber producing countries where forest management schemes operate in accordance with internationally agreed parameters and principles of a sustainable forest industry.

As traders ensuring the flow of timber goods, the UCBD members are traditionally the link between the producers and consumers. It must be also noted that the attitude of the importers' clients to certification of wood is revealing. Products from sustainably managed forests are viewed positively by consumers but until now the ordinary market mechanism and the law of supply and demand prevail.

One of the underlying aspects of certification is the use of logos or hallmarks for labelling the goods concerned as a means of communicating the environmental quality of the production methods used in the forests. It is important to take into account that when a logo or hallmark is used on or accompanies wood products or product groups this can give rise not only to a wide range of possibilities but also to a series of problems. Therefore, labelling must

- remain voluntary
- be based on similar principles to allow the mutual recognition of different certificates,
- ensure that the consumer and the supplier are protected.

A mark indicating sustainable forest management or environmental quality should not be subjected to stricter requirements than those defined for equivalent technical standards which are based on criteria concerning life, health and safety (cf. regulations concerning building inspection).

Trading companies offering certified timber could also use the logo or hallmark for advertising purposes without being subjected to any contractual conditions. The advertising statement must be correct, not liable to misunderstanding and should communicate a clear message to the consumer (cf. EC Council Directive 84/450 EEC on misleading advertising). To achieve this the logo or hallmark must be assigned to the appropriate product.

The members of the UCBD support an increased use of timber products as they are environmentally sound, competitive and aesthetically pleasing. A credible system of certification acceptable to both producer and consumer states can be instrumental in raising additional support to encourage these countries to follow sustainable management of forests.

Today i.e. more as a decade later the hope the trade set on certification in the beginning of the nineties, remains behind the expectation. While it was a priority the need to create linkages between the various certification schemes could not be achieved because apparent obviousness of seeking mutual recognition is firmly opposed by environmental groups worried that standards would drift towards the lowest common denominator.

So, in this connection, up to now, by far the most certification under FSC scheme has been in temperate and boreal forests and is in spite of all, - in terms of volume -, limited.

Nevertheless, the French and Dutch federations, - members of the U.C.B.D. -, are in order to eradicate the confusion in question preparing a common logo at European level to be put on labels issued from SFM certification schemes.

In order to remove here any misunderstanding the principles and measures referred to shall at least correspond to the UNCED Forest Principles and to the criteria or guidelines for sustainable forest management as adopted under the respective international and regional initiatives (ITTO, Montreal Process, Tarapoto Process, UNEP/FAO Dry-Zone Africa Initiative, Lisbon Ministerial Conference)

Demand by private end consumers remains in spite of all rather low in the market for certified forest products.

Nevertheless general consumer sentiment on deforestation and loss of biodiversity and notably on tropical deforestation keeps the sector under pressure to act the more certified forest products are able to maintain or enhance the overall green image of wood and wood products, one of the most important competitive strengths of wood against substitute materials.

More over, public procurement continued to become a growing source of demand from certified forest products. Several national Governments have announced public procurement measures that directly or indirectly favour certified forest products, especially for tropical timber. Should also be here taken into account the new issue that is likely to push certified forest products in governmental purchasing : the fight against illegal logging.

What it may be U.C.B.D. members are more than ever committed to obtaining their timber from legal sources and encourage their suppliers to work towards sustainable forest management, while recognising that many supplier countries operate in difficult and challenging political and economic circumstances. In this connection information, - which is not always a misinformation -, which has been recently promulgated by some NGOs on the extent of illegal logging about timber smuggling created deep concern in the consumer countries the more that credibility should be the credo in the problem under review.
