

**ITTO INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON
PHASED APPROACHES TO CERTIFICATION
Hotel Allegro-Kursaal, Berne, Switzerland, 19-21 April 2005**

Opening Remarks by the Chairman of the International Tropical Timber Council (ITTC)

Mr. Alhassan Attah

Mr. Hans-Peter Egler, Head of Trade Cooperation, the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (Seco),

Mr. Amha bin Buang, Assistant Director, Economic Information and Market Intelligence, ITTO,

Distinguished guests and participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am extremely delighted to be present here this morning to say a few words on the occasion of the opening of the ITTO International Workshop on Phased Approaches to Certification. Allow me, at the outset, to join the Executive Director of ITTO in cordially welcoming you all to this Workshop which, I understand, is the first on phased approaches to be conducted in a consuming member country within one of the most important markets for tropical timber which, arguably, is also the most environmentally conscious!

Indeed, Western Europe is a major international market for tropical timber but it is particularly of crucial importance to exporters from Africa where I come from. The degree of reliance of African exporters on this market is still at such a high level that it is essential for the market to remain accessible to them even as its requirements for the assurance of legality and sustainability of the products imported are mounting.

In his message, the Executive Director has highlighted the basic problem in certification encountered by developing tropical countries as well as its causes and implications. As the markets for certified timber continue to grow, particularly in the higher value consuming regions of Europe and North America, there is increasing concern that the limited impact of certification in these countries may act as a barrier preventing tropical timber and timber products from entering these markets.

It needs to be pointed out that in spite of the seemingly insurmountable constraints and obstacles facing developing tropical countries in embarking on the path towards sustainable forest management (SFM) and certification, there are already efforts being undertaken in many of these countries to take up the challenge of SFM and certification. Apart from instances of forests in the tropics being certified under the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) scheme, we are hearing more about the progress being made in the development of national certification schemes by CERFLOR/INMETRO in Brazil, LEI in Indonesia and MTCC in Malaysia as well as the moves towards certification at the regional level involving developing tropical countries in Africa and ASEAN.

In Central and West Africa, member countries of ITTO and the African Timber Organization (ATO) are implementing an ITTO funded regional project 'Promotion of Sustainable Management of African Forests' which involves the formulation and implementation of the ATO/ITTO Principles, Criteria and Indicators for the Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forests (PCI) and capacity-building in the field of auditing, reporting, data collection and dissemination and development of national PCI/certification standards. On 1 October 2004, a significant milestone was achieved when the Pan African Forest Certification (PAFC) Gabon was established under which the ATO/ITTO PCI will become the reference point for the formulation of management plans, the conduct of auditing and securing international recognition by the PEFC.

There is still a lot of ground to be covered in generating the key enabling conditions for SFM and certification in developing tropical countries including in Africa. However, these developments I have cited are a clear indication of the growing awareness, will and commitment of these countries to embrace SFM and certification. Such positive developments fully deserve to be

nurtured into concrete and lasting progress towards the achievement of the sustainability goals by a supportive international economic and trading climate which facilitates and encourages the acceptance of transition and certified tropical timber products at prices which are remunerative and reflective of the costs of certification. I am convinced that together with technical assistance and capacity-building, this particular measure will be effective in supporting efforts to achieve and maintain SFM in the tropics.

Be that as it may, the concept of phased approaches to certification can be developed as a solution that integrates the requirements of legality and sustainability being insisted by some consumers. Even so, the differing minimum requirements for phased approaches being demanded by them is a cause of great confusion and anxiety to developing tropical countries involved in certification. The need for some streamlining of these requirements is rather clear and urgent. In this regard, I think it is important to point out that while phased approaches to certification do not imply any lowering or compromising of standards, their implementation must be seen to be more practical and doable by developing tropical countries. Judging from the potential range and complexity of the issues involved, we must all ensure that the tasks to be undertaken under phased approaches are not as, or more complex and demanding than those under the full certification process. Otherwise, phased approaches would not be much of an option and this would defeat the very purpose of its advancement.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having shared with you some of my thoughts on phased approaches to certification, I would like to express my hope and expectation that some concrete and practical proposals will emanate from this Workshop that will help regain the momentum to our quest for greater progress in the implementation of forest and timber certification in developing tropical countries. On that note, I have the pleasure of wishing you all a very productive enriching and fruitful meeting.

Thank you.