

Greenpeace Media Briefing

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PROTECT THE AMAZON - STOP CRIMINAL TIMBER IMPORTS

The Amazon rainforest is one of the biologically richest areas in the world containing more than one-third of the world's remaining ancient forests and supporting up to 50% of the planet's land-based animal and plant species. The Amazon contains more than 2.5 million species of insects, more than 300 species of mammals, 2000 species of fish and more than 60,000 species of plants.

Nearly 80% of world's ancient forests have been destroyed or degraded. The remainder is disappearing at the rate of 10 million hectares every year – an area the size of a football pitch every two seconds. In the Amazon an area the size of France has already been destroyed (about 1/7th of the total) and an area half the size of Belgium disappears annually.

TONY BLAIR AND ILLEGAL LOGGING

At the G8 summit in Birmingham in 1998, the G8 announced the Forest Action Program and committed themselves to eliminating illegal logging and the illegal timber trade. Yet despite the promises of action, illegal logging continues to flourish. For example, the Brazilian Government estimates that 80% of all logs cut in the Brazilian Amazon are extracted illegally.

This is particularly relevant to the UK, as our country is a major customer of timber products from countries where illegal logging in ancient forests is currently the norm rather than the exception.

In a letter to Greenpeace on May 26th Tony Blair thanked us for "the important role Greenpeace is playing in tackling illegal logging" and said, "the UK will continue to tackle illegal logging domestically and will encourage our G8 partners to do the same". The sentiments are welcome but the continuing widespread destruction of ancient forests needs action rather than words. We have asked Tony Blair to ensure that there are no more imports to the UK of timber that cannot be shown to be from legal sources.

Greenpeace is also dismayed that the UK Government has still failed to commit itself to buying only timber, which is independently certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). FSC certification is the only guarantee that timber products from ancient forests are harvested from legal and well-managed sources. Despite fine sounding words in Government procurement documents, the Government currently has no way of knowing if it is buying illegal or unsustainable timber.

A number of major retailers, including Ikea and B&Q have already made this commitment, and there is no reason why the Government cannot do the same. The UK Government has stated on many occasions that a desire for freer international trade does not conflict with the need for high levels of environmental protection. Tony Blair told the World Economic Forum at Davos on 18 January this year that "free trade is not inconsistent with rising standards of environmental protection". But it is no good simply asserting this in conference speeches and taking no action.

TIMBER COMPANIES THREATENING THE AMAZON

With the depletion of SE Asian and Central African forests, the Amazon is being targeted by transnational corporations to be a key source of tropical timber in the coming decades.

Over the past 18 months, Greenpeace has been tracking down illegal logging using the *MV Amazon Guardian* and by air and land in remote regions of Amazonas and Para States. Greenpeace investigations have also uncovered evidence of companies based in the UK trading with several transnational companies that are regularly buying logs from sources with an illicit track record.

In the Brazilian State of Amazonas, all plywood and veneer exporting companies were found to have been involved in illegal logging in the previous two and half years including the Malaysian giant WTK that regularly exports plywood to the UK. In Para State, the largest exporters were found to be regularly buying from illegal sources, including the Japanese timber company Eidai, which exports plywood to the UK.

The examples of illegalities shown below are clearly only the tip of the iceberg. The amount of illegal logs found would be much greater if the Brazilian Government's inspection structure was stronger. They currently rely on only one inspector per 4 million hectares, an area the size of Switzerland.

WTK/AMAPLAC

WTK is a Malaysian logging company behind most of the import of Amazonian plywood into the UK. The company is one of the top rainforest destroyers in the world with operations in Malaysia, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Papua New Guinea, Cambodia and Burma.

WTK's Brazilian subsidiary Amaplac exports over 70% of its plywood and veneer to the UK. It ends up in the timber yards of companies like James Latham plc, which has a royal warrant from the Queen and supplies the UK Government with timber. Huge, majestic trees from

the Amazon like the Samauma, also known as 'Queen of the Forest', end up as cheap plywood, to be trashed on building sites around the UK.

During the log transport seasons from 1997 to 1999, the company was one of the top 10 companies fined by IBAMA, the Brazilian environment agency, in Amazonas State for possessing illegal logs. Many of its third party suppliers were fined during this period for the illegal exploitation, transport and sale of logs. In April 1999 during a routine inspection of documents, IBAMA discovered that Amaplac was unable to confirm the origin of 2,715.2 cubic metres of logs. It was subsequently fined US\$10,000 in May 1999. Since September 1999 illegal acts such as this are now prosecuted under the new Brazilian Environmental Crimes Law.

Earlier this month IBAMA suspended Forest Management Plans of six third party suppliers that have sold logs to Amaplac in the period 97/99 for breaking Brazilian Forest Code legislation.

Amaplac have also acquired land in Amazonas State that is claimed by the Deni Indians as part of their traditional lands. This brings up serious concerns about human rights violations in the Amazon where indigenous people are threatened by outside incursions onto their land. Greenpeace has joined with two indigenous people's organisations to help the Deni Indians demarcate their traditional lands, a crucial step in providing legal protection from the loggers. WTK has previously come into conflict with the Penan longhouse communities in Malaysia who blockaded WTK logging roads and the Kayan community in Malaysia.

EIDAI DO BRAZIL

Eidai do Brazil is owned by Eidai Inc. in Japan. Between April 1998 and October 1999, Eidai received more fines for infringement of national forestry legislation than any other company in the Brazilian State of Para, being fined by IBAMA, the Brazilian Environment Agency, as many as 15 times during this period. Three of the company's third party suppliers were also fined during the same period.

During a lengthy field investigation in Para State in 1999, Greenpeace was able to identify an illegal supply of Faveira logs to Eidai, using a simple technology based on ultraviolet paint. IBAMA officials fined the company and confiscated the logs under the new Environmental Crimes Law. During the same operation, IBAMA also apprehended and fined another logging truck delivering undocumented timber to Eidai. This month the Brazilian Environment Minister threatened to close down Eidai because of the extent of illegal activities by the company.

Eidai is the largest processed timber exporter in Para State and sells plywood and veneer to the USA, Japan, the UK and the Netherlands. In 1997, exports were worth more than US\$31 million.

UK MARKET

Every month up to 1400 tonnes of plywood from the Amazon ends up here in the UK with the majority of it being used on building sites.

On June 20th, Greenpeace volunteers prevented a shipment of Amaplac plywood from being unloaded at London's Tilbury Docks for 75 hours. During that time Greenpeace was in correspondence with the 22 timber companies in the UK known to be buyers of plywood from Amaplac including James Latham plc and Montague L. Meyer Ltd. Several of the timber companies have responded by supporting Greenpeace's demands to stop buying timber from WTK's logging operations in the Amazon.

Among the companies who responded to Greenpeace's demands was International Plywood, who wrote in a fax to Greenpeace,

"...we have been made aware of the trading policies of Amaplac and have since refused to negotiate any further business...we consider that most of the country's plywood manufacturing capacity is being sustained by illegal sources...we alone cannot police this and if you are aware of any other plywood producers conducting business using illegally felled logs, we would be pleased to know their names."

Other companies that have suspended orders of Amaplac plywood include Premier Forest Products Ltd, Mendip plywood, MDM Timber Ltd, Taylor Maxwell Timber Ltd and Quinta Plywood.

AMAZONIAN SOLUTIONS

A vital part of Greenpeace's Amazon campaign is to identify viable alternative economic activities for the 20 million people living there that could act as a solution to illegal and destructive logging. There are a number of initiatives that could help keep the forest alive ranging from the sustainable harvesting of non-timber products like fruits and nuts, rubber and medicinal products to certified logging.

On May 30th Greenpeace applauded the logging company Precious Woods Amazon for its commitment to ecologically responsible logging in tropical rainforest ecosystems. During a meeting onboard Greenpeace's vessel, the *MV Amazon Guardian*, Precious Woods presented their new initiative, which was the outcome of negotiations and on-site forest inspections with Greenpeace experts that lasted more than a year.

On June 8th the governor of the state of Acre in Brazil, Jorge Viana, pledged a commitment to forest certification that could see nearly 4 million hectares of Amazon forest under sustainable management. The announcement was the first sign of the certification challenge being championed in Brazil by people with the power to make it work. It could mark a major turning point in the certification drive. Acre's goal is to have 25% of its forests certified according to FSC Principles and Criteria, and to maintain at least 80% of the state's forest cover.

Another solution is rubber tapping, a traditional activity carried out in extractive reserves. In 1999, Greenpeace set up a partnership with the University of Brasilia, the National Council of Rubber Tappers and the National Centre of Traditional Populations. Greenpeace funded a project for 40 rubber tapping families, using a new Tecbor technology developed by Professor Floriano Pastore of the University of Brasilia.

GREENPEACE IS CALLING FOR: -

- Logging only through certified operations such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC);
- Expanding areas of ancient forest used for other ecologically responsible activities such as rubber tapping;
- Proper demarcation of indigenous Indian lands.

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