

Mahogany report UK summary Protect the Amazon not the criminals

October 2001

On-the-ground investigations by Greenpeace in the Brazilian Amazon have documented damning new evidence of the truth behind the glamorous image of mahogany. Two mahogany kings now largely control the illegal mahogany trade in Pará State – the major point of export for mahogany in Brazil. Moisés Carvalho Pereira and Osmar Alves Ferreira are ruthless and corrupt. More than 70% of the direct exports of mahogany from Pará to the UK came through companies connected to these two kings.

Illegalities include logging on Indian lands, which is strictly prohibited, obtaining fraudulent authorization papers, and falsifying mahogany inventories. But by the time it is shipped from the Amazon to ports such as Liverpool or Tilbury, the mahogany appears legal and its illegal origins are untraceable. When you buy a mahogany dining table, be it from Harrods or John Lewis, there is no way of knowing whether the mahogany they sell is legal – and the odds are that it is not. The Brazilian government's own assessment is that 80% of timber from the Amazon is illegal.

The UK is the world's second largest importer of Brazilian mahogany from companies linked to the two 'mahogany kings'. *Epoca*, Brazil's second largest weekly news magazine, reported in August that one of these players '*exploits mahogany from Kayapó Indian lands. He pays them US\$30 and resells it for US\$1390. Most of the timber is exported to the UK.*' A tree provides enough mahogany timber to assemble up to 15 of Rackstraw's twelve-seater solid mahogany dining room tables. These retail to the public in Harrod's for £5,979 (US\$8,550) each – amounting to a total of US\$128,250 for the products of one US\$30 tree.

As a member of the G8, the UK government agreed that urgent action is needed globally to tackle rampant illegal logging and destruction of the world's ancient forests at last year's G8 summit in Japan. At this year's Labour Party Conference, Tony Blair reaffirmed this commitment, saying 'we could provide work and trade without deforestation'.

Over the past four months, Greenpeace has been investigating the UK end of the mahogany trade. Our research shows that UK retailers such as Harrods and John Lewis continue to provide a respectable face for this criminal trade. However unwittingly, by failing to take deliberate steps to end the mahogany trade, the UK aids and abets high level crime in the Amazon. Fredmar Corrêa, in Brazil's Ministry of Environment, observes: '*The UK calls for the conservation of the forest, but has an extremely voracious market for the very products that are the basis for the destruction of the Amazon.*'

Those implicated potentially include:

- **High class retailers:** Harrods, John Lewis Partnership
- **Prestigious manufactures:** Rackstraw, Arthur Brett, Wood & Mott, Titchmarsh & Goodwin, Restall Brown & Chennell, Charles Barr, Burns Guitars
- **Timber importers, traders and agents:** DLH Nordisk, John Boddy, International Timber, Timbmet, James Latham plc, Vincent Murphy

UK Government – protecting the criminals, not the forest

Despite its fine words, the UK Government has done little to back the rhetoric with action. No effort has been made to ensure transparency and openness of information concerning the 'chain of custody' of timber products coming from the world's last remaining ancient forests. Today, Environment Minister, Michael Meacher is hiding behind the Data Protection Act, undermining efforts at transparency that would protect the forest rather than the criminal.

On 5 July 2001, Greenpeace wrote to Michael Meacher requesting copies of CITES documents and permits that UK importers are legally obliged to complete for mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) from Brazil. More than two months later, on 18 September 2001, Michael Meacher replied: *'The specific information you request is held by my department under the provisions of the Data Protection Acts, and can only be released in certain circumstances. Whilst there are dispersions within the Acts which allows the release of information for the purposes of prevention or detection of a crime, or the apprehension or prosecution of an offender, this only applies to enforcement organisations named in the Departments Data Protection Act entry. Greenpeace is not such an organisation.'*

This is despite the fact that last year, Tony Blair himself wrote to Greenpeace: *'Thank you for the important role Greenpeace is playing in tackling illegal logging.'* Brazil's Environment Minister, José Sarney Filho, stated: *'Greenpeace does nothing less than what we do... The partnership between the Ministry and Greenpeace is long-standing and has brought many results, reducing the huge illegal operations.'*

Greenpeace is the only organization currently investigating the mahogany trade in the region surrounding the Middle Land – a region of the Amazon rainforest of critical importance to the survival of creatures such as the jaguar and home to many Indian cultures who depend upon the forest to provide the means for their traditional way of life.

Following Greenpeace's investigations in the Amazon, death threats were made against Greenpeace's Amazon campaigner, Paulo Adario. Coming hard on the heels of the murder of the Brazilian environmental and Indian rights activist Dema Federicci, who worked closely with Greenpeace in Pará. The Federal Government is now providing 24-hour police protection for Paulo.

However, Greenpeace will not be silenced by such intimidation. The Greenpeace report, *Partners in mahogany crime*, details our on-the-ground investigations, names the key players, and exposes how the continued international trade in mahogany drives the destruction of the Amazon.

Ibama – Brazil's Federal Environment Agency – is now calling together with Greenpeace for an immediate across-the-board moratorium on the trade within Brazil, covering both the logging in the forest as well as all sale and export of mahogany.

Given the illegalities at the heart of the Brazilian mahogany trade, the only solid guarantee that timber is not from illegal sources is through independent certification of forest management and the chain of custody from the certified forest to the consumer. Today, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) provides the only independent certification system that has global acceptance in the marketplace.

To support the Brazilian Government in this unprecedented step to halt the trade in illegal mahogany and protect the Amazon, Greenpeace UK calls for immediate action from those linked with the trade in the UK:

- **Manufacturers and retailers:** immediately withdraw from sale all products manufactured from Brazilian mahogany
- **Timber importers, traders and agents:** immediately withdraw from sale all Brazilian mahogany timber and timber products
- **UK Government:** seize all Brazilian mahogany timber and timber products currently held in or destined for UK ports

'This illegal mahogany logging is a clear example of the failure of the UK Government to act to protect the world's ancient forests.' said John Sauven, Greenpeace UK Campaign Director. *'As a first step to ensure the future of the Amazon, the UK Government should seize all Brazilian mahogany in UK ports, and companies should withdraw all mahogany from timber-yards and retail outlets.'*