



## Chainsaw criminal CIBEC

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*CIBEC sawmill in Douala. © Greenpeace/Verbelen*

### Executive summary

In 2001 and 2002, the Cameroon logging company CIBEC, controlled by Dutch businessman Jacco Ravenhorst, carried out a large scale illegal logging operation in the rainforest of south-west Cameroon. CIBEC's logging operations caused economic losses to the Cameroon government and local communities and created social conflicts and forest destruction.

CED (Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement) and Greenpeace visited the area logged by CIBEC in December 2002.

The Netherlands is the main market for CIBEC timber; it is thus very likely that CIBEC's illegal timber has been laundered into the Netherlands' legal timber trade. One of the main timber species that CIBEC exports to the Netherlands is azobé, a very durable hardwood, popular in the Netherlands and throughout Europe for marine constructions and railroad ties.

In the Netherlands, timber trader Hupkes is marketing CIBEC timber on the Dutch and European market. In the past years, Greenpeace already criticised Hupkes for trading timber from Hazim, a Cameroon company involved in large-scale illegal logging, and from OTC, a Liberian company linked to illegal arms trafficking.

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## **CED and Greenpeace call on:**

- the Cameroon government - to impose fines on CIBEC that reflect the scale of their illegal logging operation. The Cameroon government should also ensure that CIBEC compensates the village community of Bessoungkang for the financial losses this illegal logging operation has caused and that CIBEC fulfils its promises for investments in social infrastructure for the community of Bessoungkang. The Cameroon government should also verify whether or not the timber volumes logged by CIBEC in the community forest Ndissa-Ekeb in the Southwest province are exceeding the legal limits.
- Hupkes - to organise an audit of all its suppliers and immediately stop all business relations with companies involved in illegal logging operations and/or illegal arms trade. Hupkes should seek guarantees that its suppliers are trading in legal timber that comes from well-managed forestry operations.
- The Dutch government and other Hupkes customers – to stop buying from Hupkes until Hupkes stops buying timber from companies involved in illegal logging, and stops buying from known criminals.
- Governments - to adopt green procurement policies. Governments should only buy timber from legal forestry operations, which are certified at least to the standards demanded by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).
- The Cameroon and Dutch governments and the European Union – to strengthen legislation against illegal logging and the trade in illegal timber, and make sure these laws are fully enforced.

## **CIBEC & SETBC: A DUTCH-CAMEROON CONSPIRACY**

### **CIBEC: a Dutch logger in Cameroon's rainforest**

CIBEC (Compagnie Industrielle et commerciale des Bois Exotiques) has been active in Cameroon since 1998.<sup>1</sup> The firm's director is Dutch businessman Jacob Willem ("Jacco") Ravenhorst.

CIBEC is specialised in the production of azobé, a species highly prized in the Netherlands for marine construction, and throughout Europe, for the fabrication of railroad ties. It operates a sawmill with a 24,000 m<sup>3</sup> input capacity in the industrial zone of Bonabéri near the port of Douala.

CIBEC currently has no valid cutting permit of its own. In the last two years, CIBEC's sawmill was supplied by timber from "wood removal permits"<sup>2</sup> logged by CIBEC but issued to its business partner SETBC. These permits have been misused to organise large scale illegal logging operations (see below).

Since last year, CIBEC is also logging azobé on an industrial scale in the community forest of Ndissa-Ekeb in the south west province in partnership with the local association NDECUDA. CED/Greenpeace researchers saw signs of a large scale industrial logging operation. It has to be verified whether or not the timber volumes logged in this community forest are exceeding the legal limits of this community forestry operation.

#### **notes**

<sup>1</sup> Announcement of CIBEC's operating license "agrément" in Journal Officiel de la République du Cameroun (1998) 15 November 1998. Arrêté 91-CAB-PM.

<sup>2</sup> "Wood removal permit" as translation of Autorisation Spéciale d'Évacuation de Bois (ASEB). This permit gives the right to evacuate already logged wood from the forest.

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## SETBC: an ex-member of parliament in the logging business

CIBEC's partner SETBC (Société d'Exploitation et Transformation du Bois Camerounais) is controlled by an ex-(ruling party) member of parliament from Douala, Emmanuel Dooh Priso. SETBC had three "wood removal permits" (VEP 0960, VEP 1086, and VEP 1087) that were used by CIBEC as a cover for its illegal logging operation in Bessoungkang (see below).

In the past 3 years, SETBC also controlled various other short term cutting permits that have resulted in rainforest destruction and illegal logging<sup>3</sup>. In November 2000 an internal MINEF report revealed that whilst SETBC had declared cutting 6,778 m<sup>3</sup> of wood on its salvage permit ARB-267, the company reported not having evacuated a single log.<sup>4</sup> In March 2001, SETBC was charged with filing fraudulent documents and fined, provisionally, 1.5 million FCFA (€ 2250).<sup>5</sup> Also, SETBC currently holds two vente de coupe cutting permits in the Centre province<sup>6</sup>.

It is unclear to CED and Greenpeace whether timber from these other SETBC cutting permits is also processed in CIBEC's sawmill as an unknown amount of SETBC's timber is also sold to other timber companies.

## CIBEC and SETBC: illegal logging of Bessoungkang's rainforest

The communities of Bessoungkang and Kounang (Dibombari arrondissement, Moungo département – Littoral Province) have been victims of destructive logging operations in their region for more than two decades. Loggers have repeatedly used a strategy of divide-and-conquer in the area to carry off the local forest's most valuable wood species while turning villagers against one another. Industrial logging certainly did not bring development to Bessoungkang. Today, Bessoungkang still lacks electricity and running water; it has neither a school nor a functioning infirmary.

On January 22, 2001, MINEF authorised SETBC to evacuate 972 m<sup>3</sup> of abandoned logs in the Bessoungkang area with a wood removal permit<sup>7</sup>. The operation was to end no later than March 21, 2001. SETBC made an agreement with CIBEC who would carry out this operation. On April 29, 2001, CIBEC's director Jacco Ravenhorst held a meeting with the villagers of Bessoungkang. During the meeting villagers expressed their anger that they were being "consulted" only after 16 logging trucks had already taken logs out of the forest. CIBEC promised to realise a number of development projects that would benefit the Bessoungkang community.<sup>8</sup>

### CIBEC promised to invest in:

- the electrification of the village,
- the construction of a school,
- the construction of a bridge to make access to the Mbombo district possible,
- payment to the community of 1000 FCFA for each m<sup>3</sup> of timber taken out of the forest.

By May 2001, with CIBEC's logging activities in Bessoungkang in full swing, villagers soon realised fraudulent activities were taking place and promises being broken. Rather than removing abandoned logs from this forest, CIBEC was carrying out an industrial logging operation, producing far more timber than the 972 m<sup>3</sup> stipulated in their "wood removal permit".



SETBC timber from rainforest destruction is widely traded on the European market. SETBC logs from salvage permit ARB-038 sold to French logging company Rougier. © Greenpeace

### notes

<sup>3</sup> SETBC was allocated three "salvage permits" (ARB's - récupérations) in 1999. These are permits to cut trees in areas where a predetermined development project requires the clearing of a fixed surface area or cases in which trees already felled (or destroyed) have been left to rot in the forest. Salvage permits have been almost universally abused and were officially suspended by MINEF in July 1999.

<sup>4</sup> MINEF (2000) Délégation départementale de l'Environnement et des forêts du Dja et Lobo rapport annuel d'activités. Exercice 1999/2000. November 2000. MINEF is Cameroon's Ministry of Environment and Forests.

<sup>5</sup> MINEF (2001) Communiqué 31/RCI/MINEF/DPS/BPC dated 11/03/2001, published in Cameroon Tribune June 5, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> VC 09-04-44 and VC 09-04-56 – both issued in January 2001. A Vente de Coupe is a short-term cutting license of a maximum of 2500 hectares for which no management plan is required. Ventes de Coupe are often a door opener for illegal logging – the 2500 ha legal cutting permit is often used to cut in a much larger area.

<sup>7</sup> MINEF décision nr. 1176 (Vente aux Enchères Public, VEP nr. 0960) 22-01-2001.

<sup>8</sup> Report (PV) of the meeting of April 29, 2001 between villagers of Bessoungkang and CIBEC.

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Villagers decided to defend their rights and put up a fight. Eugène Nkwack Ekombo, president of the commission to manage and protect the village's interests, notified the provincial delegate of the Ministry of Environment & Forestry:

*“By Decision 1176/L/MINEF/DPEF/LT/SPF/BEIF of January 22, 2001, you authorized the firm SETBC to evacuate 972 cubic meters of felled wood abandoned in the forest of Bessoungkang-Kounang; this decision stipulated that the operation was to end March 21, 2001 [...]. As no logging has taken place in this particular zone for several decades, the principle of removal of felled wood seems to us bogus: if wood is to be “salvaged” who’s the logger who cut it?” [...] Instead of wood removal what we’re seeing here is classic logging [...] in violation of the above-cited decision [...]. Worse, instead of 972 m3, we estimate that the volume already felled is more than 8,000 m3, CIBEC having refused to provide us with the documents [...] indicating the exact volume.”<sup>9</sup>*



Log with ASEB/NEP number 1086. CIBEC used its business partner's permits to evacuate wood (ASEB/NEP 1086) as a cover for its illegal logging operation. © Greenpeace

On June 22, 2001, the commission to manage and protect the village's interests succeeded in obtaining a meeting with CIBEC at its headquarters, at which it was promised the requested documents regarding the timber volume the company had cut. A week later, however, CIBEC changed its mind: the commission was informed it had no authority to intervene in the affair. In an immediate response to CIBEC's attitude, Mr. Nkwack Ekombo, the president of the commission, wrote a new letter to MINEF on June 29, 2001, in which he announced that the community would “provisionally stop the fraudulent logging operations of SETBC and its acolyte CIBEC, pending a resolution to the problem.”

In July 2001, MINEF's provincial control brigade<sup>10</sup> visited the Bessoungkang forest, and officially suspended all logging there, seizing an unspecified amount of wood.<sup>11</sup> In September MINEF's Central control unit reported that SETBC / CIBEC had been using transport documents that were often undated and lacked serial numbers.<sup>12</sup> In January 2002, the Minister of forestry Sylvestre Naah Ondoua himself addressed a letter to CIBEC director Ravenhorst. Stating that he attaches “great importance” to the “effective implementation” of the firm's April 2001 commitments to community development, he ordered Ravenhorst to provide him in person with all documents relating to the volume of wood evacuated from Bessoungkang and to the payments made to village elites.<sup>13</sup>

### notes

<sup>9</sup> Letter from Communauté Bessoungkang to the délégué provincial de l'Environnement et des forêts du Littoral. June 29, 2001. A July 23, 2001 infraction report issued by the Littoral province control brigade (see below) refers to an excess volume of 1,000 m3. (Cited in Global Witness (2002) Report nr. 24)

<sup>10</sup> Which had collected the testimony of villagers on July 9, 2001. Procès verbal des déclarations des représentants de la communauté Bessoungkang.

<sup>11</sup> Notification d'arrêt de chantier du titre VEP 0960 Z1 SETBC localisé à Bessoungkang. July 23, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Global Witness (2002).

<sup>13</sup> Letter from MINEF minister to M. le directeur de la Société CIBEC Nr. 462/N/MINEF/DF/CFC/CFS. January 9, 2002.

## CIBEC/SETBC: Repeat offenders

Whatever hopes may have been raised in the village were soon dashed. In February 2002 SETBC / CIBEC loggers reappeared. This time the commission contacted the Minister directly: “We, the Bessoungkang community are surprised to have come into possession of a letter dated January 31, 2002 [...] by which the firm SETBC claims to have received from you notification of the results of public auction 1086/AP/MINEF/CAB/UCC of December 26, 2001. In this letter the firm is said to have won a stock of abandoned logs fraudulently exploited in the locality of Kounang-Bessoungkang.<sup>14</sup>

As if this were not enough, the zone CIBEC/SETBC intended to log was situated within the forest set aside by the village for a community forest. This constitutes a clear violation of Cameroon’s 1994 Forestry Law.<sup>15</sup>

Just as in 2001, CIBEC / SETBC tried to buy off the community with hollow promises. The loggers committed themselves again to the realisation of four development projects:

- the construction of two bridges,
- the termination of construction of a community-built school,
- the furnishing of 200 wood poles for village electrification,
- the financing of a management plan for the prospective community forest.<sup>16</sup>

Shortly thereafter logging trucks started hauling wood, again - exactly as if no promises had been made. Angry villagers immobilised two of the trucks by force. But the loggers quickly overcame this resistance, by putting in place an “alternative” village commission with which it succeeded in “negotiating” the right to remove more than three times the volume “authorized” by the Ministerial letter (876 m3) in question.<sup>17</sup> For the more company-friendly commission a simple SETBC / CIBEC handshake sufficed: “The Bessoungkang community authorises CIBEC / SETBC to evacuate the wood in question as of today.”<sup>18</sup> It was CIBEC itself that was to be in charge of “verifying” the volume of wood evacuated. Local authorities were nowhere to be found.<sup>19</sup>

Between February 2002 and summer 2002, CIBEC again organised a large scale logging operation in the Bessoungkang area in violation of its wood removal permit that only authorised CIBEC/SETBC to remove 876 m3 of already cut timber from the forest.

August 10-12, 2002, Global Witness, the independent observer to the Cameroon forestry sector, visited the Bessoungkang area together with MINEF’s Central Control Unit. Global Witness confirmed CIBEC’s illegal logging and mentioned that large volumes of abandoned logs were still present in the forest.

Global Witness expressed concern that the timber stocks in Bessoungkang for which SETBC/CIBEC had received a wood removal permit were nowhere mentioned on the government list of all wood auctions. MINEF’s Central Control Unit (UCC) representative Mr. Kingué claimed that the Bessoungkang timber was mentioned in an annex list to the public auctions of 26-12-2001. Despite repeated requests, UCC failed to hand over a copy of the annex list.

Global Witness also highlighted the fraudulent use of CIBEC’s timber transport documents: documents were undated and did not carry a serial number, a clear breach of the Cameroon forest law.

## notes

<sup>14</sup> Letter from Communauté Bessoungkang to MINEF Minister. February 15, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Bubinga (2002) “Pillage peu honorable dans une forêt communautaire.” May 2002. Letter from GIC Bessoungkang to Forestry Minister, November 9, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Résolutions adoptées par la communauté Bessoungkang sur la vente aux enchères publiques des bois au profit de la CIBEC. February 17, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> In a April 3, 2002 letter to the Minister, the head of the Yaoundé office of the British department for International Development (DFID) refers to the evacuation of 3,000 m3 more than the allegedly authorized amount. (DFID (2002) Letter SM/corr/0480 -02.)

<sup>18</sup> Procès verbal de la réunion de concertation entre les sociétés SETBC - CIBEC et la communauté Bessoungkang, February 26, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> L’Indépendant (2002) “Des négriers narguent le Ministre Naah Ondoa,” April 10, 2002.

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CED and Greenpeace visited the area in December 2002. At that time, the Cameroon authorities had not yet carried out a full inventory of the scale of CIBEC's extensive logging operations. CED and Greenpeace visited several wide logging roads and numerous skidding tracks clearly indicating that several thousand cubic metres of timber have been illegally cut in this forest.

Remarkably, CIBEC/SETBC have still not been fined for this illegal logging operation and none of the social infrastructure projects promised by CIBEC have been realised. Villagers told CED and Greenpeace that CIBEC had contacted a local environmental NGO to "facilitate" between them and the villagers. So far this has not resulted in any specific solutions for the community of Bessoungkang.

### Box 1 - 'Public' auctions of confiscated wood: laundering dirty logs

The seizure and resale of wood per public auction has often been used by Cameroonian authorities in collusion with loggers as a strategy for laundering illegally cut timber. In 2001 and again in 2002, authorisations to remove wood allegedly won in auction served as a pretext for CIBEC to enter the forest of Bessoungkang.

Such practices have repeatedly been denounced in World Bank reports about the Cameroon forestry sector: The wood confiscated in the course of recent control operations is being sold in local auctions. These sales take place in the absence of precise, strictly-implemented rules and risk becoming the new device for covering illegal logging. The [Bank] mission recommends that MINEF suspend all new auctioning of confiscated wood, publish precise auction guidelines, and centralise sales during a transitional period to render them easier to verify.<sup>20</sup>

The Bank was no doubt aware that the winners of these auctions had a way of turning out to be the same illegal loggers whose confiscated wood was now on offer; as it was aware that according to Cameroonian law 12% of all winning bids went to the local administration."<sup>21</sup>

In a response to abuses of this auction system, the Minister issued formal directions in December 2000 that the loggers responsible for seized wood be excluded from winning it back in auctions.<sup>22</sup> A month later, the Minister outlawed all future auctions.<sup>23</sup> But two months later, the same Minister announced the country's largest auction of seized wood ever — of 73,000 cubic meters of logs.<sup>24</sup> Insiders must have had a decisive advantage: prospective bidders had exactly two business days from the date of publication of the public notice to submit their offers — and the notice failed to indicate the species of the wood available.

#### notes

<sup>20</sup> World Bank (2000) Composantes forêts du CAS III. Mission de suivi 14-29 Octobre 2000.

<sup>21</sup> Loi 94-1 du 20 janvier 1994 portant régime des forêts, de la faune et de la pêche. Article 149. See also Le Bois national (2001), February 24, 2001, p. 10: "Recently, the World Bank has been trying to put an end to auctions of confiscated wood coming from illegal cutting — where the guilty offenders are curiously nowhere to be found." (CED/Greenpeace translation)

<sup>22</sup> MINEF (2000) Lettre circulaire #4668/LC/MINEF/CAB.-relative aux conditions de vente des produits saisis. December 19, 2000.

<sup>23</sup> MINEF (2001) Lettre circulaire #0399/LC/MINEF/CAB portant interdiction des opérations de vente aux enchères, d'enlèvement et de transport des bois frauduleusement abattus en forêt. January 30, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> MINEF (2001) Avis au public, Cameroon Tribune. April 4, 2001.

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## Hupkes and CIBEC: marketing illegal timber in Europe

### Box 2 - Is this timber legally produced

Once CIBEC sawn timber arrives on the European market, it is impossible for the customer to verify its legality of CIBEC timber. Logs from legal and illegal sources are easily mixed and could be processed together in CIBEC's sawmill in Douala and exported to the Netherlands and the rest of Europe.



CIBEC timber in the log yard of the Dutch timber trader Hupkes. © GP

The Dutch timber trader Hupkes is marketing CIBEC's timber onto the European market.

Hupkes is located in Dieren, the Netherlands. The company dates from 1918, and has grown to a company with three sawmills with a capacity of 20,000 m<sup>3</sup> per year since then. Specialised in marine construction, one of the main species used is azobé.

On its website, Hupkes says it “produces different wood species in West-Africa, in a sustainable and responsible manner. The well-educated foresters, working for Hupkes, comply with all forestry regulations.” It is likely that the production in Africa mentioned by Hupkes refers to CIBEC's logging operations.

So far, Hupkes has been denying CIBEC's involvement in illegal logging in Cameroon. In January 2003, a meeting took place between the director of Hupkes, Mr. Borghart, Jacco Ravenhorst of CIBEC, Friends of the Earth Netherlands (Milieudefensie), and WWF Netherlands. At this meeting, Hupkes said he had proof that CIBEC operates legally. Until today, Milieudefensie has not received the promised documents. Other customers of CIBEC timber include azobé bridge builder Ackermann, Bade und Co in Bremen, Germany.

It is not the first time that Hupkes has been linked to companies involved in illegal logging operations. Previous Greenpeace investigations highlighted Hupkes buying from the notorious logging company Hazim, Cameroon's most heavily-fined forest offender<sup>25</sup>, as well as from the destructive Oriental Timber Company (OTC), notorious for its involvement in Liberia's illegal arms traffic and for causing major social conflicts.<sup>26</sup>

Other customers of CIBEC timber include azobé bridge builder Ackermann, Bade und Co in Bremen, Germany.



Timber of the notorious logging company Hazim in the Hupkes log yard. ©GP

#### notes

<sup>25</sup> See: Greenpeace, March 2002. Hazim: plundering Cameroon's ancient forests.

<sup>26</sup> See: Global Witness, March 2003. The Usual Suspects. Liberia's Weapons and Mercenaries in Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. Global Witness, September 2001. Taylor-made. The Pivotal Role of Liberia's Forests in Regional Conflict. Global Witness, September 2002. Logging Off. How the Liberian Timber Industry Fuels Liberia's Humanitarian Disaster and Threatens Sierra Leone. SAMFU Foundation, September 2002. Plunder. The Silent Destruction of Liberian's Rainforests.

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