
[Africa: Civil Society Participation in the Forest Law Enforcement and Governance process](#)

The Ministerial meeting in the Africa Forest Law Enforcement and Governance process is scheduled to take place in Brazzaville, Congo April 1-4th, 2003. Government delegates as well as representatives from the timber industry, multilateral and bilateral organisations, and civil society are expected to take part in the meeting where a Ministerial declaration will be drafted. The following briefly introduces the FLEG process, then moves on to discuss civil society participation in the upcoming Ministerial.

The FLEG process is the outcome of a number of consultations, conferences and national initiatives organised by multilateral and bilateral institutions that focused on combating the threat posed to forests by illegal logging and trade, corruption and poaching. The G-8 group of industrialised countries launched an Action Program on Forests in 1998, and this motivated the partnership between the World Bank, the UK department for International Development and the US Department of State which led to the focus on forest law enforcement in East Asia and later in Africa.

The FLEG East Asia Ministerial Conference took place in Bali, Indonesia in September 2002. The conference brought together nearly 150 participants from 20 countries. Government representatives from Cambodia, China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam were present. Representatives from the US, the UK, Ghana, Japan and the Republic of Congo were also in attendance. A number of international organisations and NGOs participated, including FAO, ITTO, CIFOR, the World Resources Institute, Global Witness, the Environmental Investigation Agency and WWF. Indonesian in-country NGOs such as AMAN, Telapak, WALHI also participated.

The declaration that resulted from the Ministerial Conference contained a number of commitments to tackle the problem of illegal logging and was received with enthusiasm by many. The momentum created by the Bali declaration was the impetus to start a FLEG process in Africa (AFLEG), which is being co-ordinated by the World Bank, sponsored by the governments of the United Kingdom, France and the United States.

According to the organisers, the AFLEG process will be different from the Asian predecessor in a number of ways. First, the AFLEG process has not had the same type of build-up as the process in East Asia had. Second, there will be more countries involved in the process --all African governments will be invited-- making the range of issues on the agenda broad.

To ensure that the AFLEG process is credible and effective, there must be meaningful civil society participation. A small number of Indonesian NGOs were involved in the Asian process, and, whilst this helped contribute to the positive declaration that resulted, Indonesian NGOs still felt that participation was not properly addressed and that they were brought into the process at a late stage. Moreover, there was a lack of civil society participation from, for example, Vietnam and Thailand.

It is of key importance that African NGOs participate in the AFLEG process to share their knowledge of the realities on the ground, especially with respect to how illegal and unsustainable logging

impacts on forest-dependent peoples' livelihoods. Unfortunately there was little time before the preparatory meeting in Brazzaville between the 18-20th of June, and little information about the AFLEG process was made available to NGOs, in particular African ones. It is hoped that more information will be available to civil society in the months leading up to the Ministerial meeting.

Civil society participation must be meaningful, and it is expected that the hosts of the Ministerial will give civil society representatives the opportunity to influence and have direct input into the drafting of the Ministerial Declaration, which will be the main output of the meeting. Two initiatives are underway to encourage and facilitate civil society participation in the AFLEG process.

Forests Monitor is working to facilitate a greater level of participation at the Ministerial conference and have joined forces with the Rainforest Foundation UK and the Centre pour l'Environnement et Developpement (Cameroon) to achieve this. A preparatory workshop will bring together 18 civil society representatives from Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon and Central African Republic to discuss the AFLEG process, and to select 8 representatives who will attend the Ministerial Conference. The groups will have time to discuss the main issues surrounding forest law enforcement and governance as well as to prepare lobbying strategies for the Ministerial meeting. The outcome of the self selection process, as well as proceedings from the workshop will be available from the AFLEG section of Forests Monitor's website: <http://www.forestsmonitor.org>

The IUCN has just been awarded a grant to undertake a similar facilitation project for civil society groups in West, eastern and southern Africa to participate in the AFLEG process. IUCN will be hosting regional workshops, where a self selection process will take place to elect representatives to attend the Ministerial conference in April. Groups from West, eastern or southern Africa who are interested should contact their regional IUCN office, or Forests Monitor who will forward any indications of interest to the IUCN organisers.

By: Forests Monitor, e-mail: mail@forestsmonitor.org . Please visit Forests Monitor's website to find out more about the AFLEG process and civil society participation in this process. You'll also find links to other relevant sites.