Africa: NGO statement at Ministerial Meeting on illegal logging

The following statement was issued by a number of African NGOs (see below) present at the African Forest Law Enforcement and Governance Ministerial Planning Meeting held in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo on June 18 - 21, 2002:

"There is little doubt that forest crimes is pervasive and causing enormous damage to the environment and the economy as well as hurting the poor the most. Almost everywhere, forest resources are under the threat of criminal activities by unscrupulous loggers, traders, and corrupt government officials.

We, the local NGOs present at this meeting, consider it not only necessary, but appropriate, to take a clear position --dwelling on our experiences and from an NGO perspective-- on the issue (illegal logging) under discussion. Therefore, in addition to the points already raised and to put some of the points raised into a much more focused and issue specific context, we hereby present the following points for consideration:

Problems / Issues

1. Unhindered trade in “Conflict Timber” --during armed conflicts, non-state actors (rebel groups/ factions) engage in granting concessions and/ or engage in logging activities strictly to finance their war efforts
- international/ regional governments have shown a high degree of indifference to these issues

2. Lack of transparency
- lack of mechanisms for independent forest monitoring activities by NGOs and local/ indigenous communities

3. Inadequate support to NGOs for independent monitoring
- capacity building
- financial support

4. Developed countries support to multinationals engaged in illegal logging in producer countries (Africa)

Action Points

- Regional governments and the international community to impose a ban on trade in conflict timber

- Governments operate/ manage the forest sector in a transparent manner, i.e from negotiating concessions agreements through to trade in forest products

- Donor and international community to integrate conditionalities directed at addressing illegal logging and other forest crimes, in aid/ grant negotiations

- Governments to adopt legislations that allow/ provide for the effective involvement of local communities in forest management and for the free operation of NGOs

- Donor community encourage and support independent monitoring, of logging activities, by NGOs and local/ indigenous communities

- Developed countries halt support to (their national companies) engaged in illegal logging in Africa as well as impose a ban on the importation of forest products from 'unmanaged' forests".

Statement presented by: Save My Future (SAMFU) Foundation, Liberia, Friends of the Nation, Ghana, Centre l'Environnement et le Développement (CED), Cameroun, Comité Consultatif des ONG de Conservation et de l'Environnement (CCOCE), Congo, Conseil Provincial des ONG de Kinshasa, Congo/ Kinshasa, Comité de liaison des ONG du Congo (CLONG – Congo), Congo