
Pillage in the Democratic Republic of Congo certified in Uganda?

A UN mission has recently presented its report on the widespread exploitation of mining and forest resources in Congo (ex-Zaire) by forces of Rwanda and Uganda, in collaboration with Congolese opposition groups in the Eastern region of the country.

Among the different issues analysed in detail in the report, there is a special case study on the Ugandan-Thai forestry firm DARA Forest, which started to operate in the Ituri area in 1998. The company immediately requested a forest concession to the Congolese authorities, which was refused by the Kinshasa government. In spite of that, the company began its activities by buying wood to local loggers and that same year set up a sawmill at Mangina. By the year 2000 it already had a forest concession granted by the armed opposition group Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie-Mouvement de Libération.(RCD-ML)

Between 1998 and 2000, deforestation increased --particularly in Djugu, Mambassa, Beni, Komanda, Luna, Mont Moyo and Aboro-- as a result of large-scale unsustainable logging related to DARA Forest's activities.

Wood extracted from that region --occupied by the Ugandan army and the RCD-ML-- is transported to Uganda both for local use and for export. Given that the wood extracted from Congo pays no taxes at all, acajou wood from that country is much cheaper in Uganda than the same wood cut locally. Logs from Congo are later exported to Kenya, where important volumes are re-exported to countries in Asia, Europe and North America. The companies that purchase the undocumented DARA wood are mainly based in Belgium, China, Denmark, United States, Japan, Kenya and Switzerland.

In order to try to "legalize" its operations, DARA Forest signed a contract in May 2000 with SmartWood and the Rogue Institute for Ecology and Economy from Oregon, United States, aimed at obtaining certification for its wood. The plot consisted in certifying the Budongo forest in Uganda --for which DARA didn't even have a concession at the time-- and to use that certification to market the wood extracted illegally and unsustainably from Congo.

According to its own internal documentation, DARA Forest would then import logs from Congo, which would be processed at Namanve in Uganda together with the wood extracted from the certified forest in Uganda. In this way, its entire production would be marketed as FSC-certified wood. DARA's partners in this operation would be: DARA Europe GmbH from Germany, Shanton President Wood Supply Co. Ltd. from China, President Wood Supply Co. Ltd. of Thailand and DARA Tropical Hardwood, Portland (Oregon) from the USA. A neat operation which, after the UN mission report, will hopefully fail.

Article based on information from: Rapport du Groupe d'experts sur l'exploitation illégale des ressources naturelles et autres richesses de la République démocratique du Congo:

