

ACCRA DECLARATION ON COMBATTING ILLEGAL TRADE IN ROSEWOODS, TIMBER AND FOREST PRODUCTS IN WEST AFRICA

Accra, Ghana, 31 July 2019

We, the national forest agencies and customs representatives of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo; all being member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as well as Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and range States of wildlife species, timber and forest products threatened by international trade:

HAVING MET in Accra, Ghana on 29-31 July 2019 at the 1st policy dialogue workshop on strengthening the protection and conservation of rosewood in West Africa, including representation from ECOWAS, the African Union, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the CITES Secretariat, research institutions, civil society and private sector;

RECALLING the decisions made by West and Central African countries in the *Dakar Declaration on the Development of Subregional Wildlife Enforcement Collaboration* (Dakar, Senegal, 15-17 March 2016);

RECALLING FURTHER the recommendations made by ECOWAS member States at the *ECOWAS Meeting on the Development of a Coordinated Counter Wildlife Trafficking Response in West Africa* (Abuja, Nigeria, 2-4 July 2018), including to: “promote effective sub-regional cooperation and collaboration by supporting the development and adoption of a West Africa Strategy on Combating Wildlife Crime”; “establish a West Africa Network to Combat Wildlife Crime” and “create sustainable funding mechanisms” ensuring the implementation of this Strategy in the long term;

RECALLING the Rio+20 Declaration “The Future We Want” document, endorsed by the UN General Assembly, which “recognized the economic, social and environmental impacts of illicit trafficking in wildlife, where firm and strengthened action needs to be taken on both the supply and demand sides”;

SUPPORTIVE of the Africa Convention on Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (Maputo Convention 2003) and the African Union’s African Strategy on Combating Illegal Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora in Africa adopted in May 2015;

WELCOMING the development of a Forest and Natural Resources Management Framework by the Africa Union;

RECOGNIZING that timber trafficking is increasingly being considered a serious transnational organized crime and incrementally targets rosewood species in West Africa;

ALARMED by the rate at which rosewood tree species in particular and forests in general are receding today in West Africa and by the concomitant explosion of trafficking in timber and forest products, often involving extreme violence, implicating transnational organized criminal networks, undermining good governance and the rule of law, and contributing to insecurity;

CONCERNED that the use of violence against front-line officers has become a regular global phenomenon with officers protecting forests from illicit logging being injured or losing their lives against well-organized and heavily-armed timber trafficking syndicates;

ALSO CONCERNED that criminal syndicates are taking advantage of the growing legal trade between Africa and Asia, Europe, the United States and the Middle East to expand illegal logging and illegal trade, using West Africa as source, transit and exit point for rosewood species as well as other illegal timber and forest products;

RECOGNIZING the need to build synergy on mechanisms to curb illegal trade in timber and forest products between ECOWAS members States, and **EAGER** to jointly contribute to the implementation of the *ECOWAS Convergence Plan for the Sustainable Management and Conservation of Forest Ecosystems in West Africa*;

MINDFUL of the crucial importance of the development and implementation of the *West Africa Strategy on Combating Wildlife Crime*, the *West Africa Network to Combat Wildlife Crime*, and their associated funding mechanisms as regional actions directed towards curbing illegal trade in timber and forest products;

RECOMMEND that high-level decision-makers:

- i.) prioritize and continue supporting the development and implementation of the *West Africa Strategy on Combating Wildlife Crime*, the *West Africa Network to Combat Wildlife Crime*, and their associated funding mechanisms as regional actions directed towards curbing illegal trade in timber and forest products;
- ii.) categorize the fight against the illegal trade in timber and forest products as having the highest level of priority under the law, and review and amend existing national legislation and associated enforcement policies, as necessary and appropriate, so that offences connected to timber and forest products trafficking are treated as “serious crimes” as defined within the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), and so that sanctions are harmonized across the subregion;
- iii.) deploy necessary security and armed forces to support front-line officers in their efforts to combat illegal logging and illegal trade in timber and forest products;
- iv.) request that ECOWAS launch a high-level dialogue with transit and consumer countries, and explore the development of bilateral and regional initiatives, with a view to agree on joint actions to be carried out to eliminate supply, demand, and trade in the illegal timber in West Africa;
- v.) include the issue of curtailing timber and forest products trafficking as a priority agenda item in any upcoming high-level summits between Africa and China, Japan, India, Vietnam, the European Union, the United States of America, or the Middle East.

URGE ECOWAS member States to:

- i.) promote cooperation among their national forest, customs, and other enforcement and security agencies in information and intelligence sharing related to illegal trade of timber and forest products across the region,
- ii.) at the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP 18) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora:
 - support the adoption of CoP18 Prop. 53 submitted by Ivory Coast and the European Union to recommend an expansion of the scope of the annotation for *Pericopsis elata* (currently #5) to include plywood and transformed wood;
 - support the adoption of the Task Force on illegal trade in specimens of CITES-listed tree species as proposed in document CoP18 Doc. 32
 - support the adoption of the Guidance for Making Legal Acquisition of Findings as proposed in document CoP18 DoC 39;
 - support the adoption of Due Diligence by CITES Parties and Obligations of Importing Countries as proposed in the document CoP 18 DoC 40;
- iii.) take note of the findings of the *Threat Assessment Report on Illegal Wildlife Trade in West and Central Africa* available as Annex 4 to document CoP18 Doc 34, and to actively pursue the implementation of the decisions and recommendations agreed on this matter at CoP18,
- iv.) strengthen the capacity of local communities to fight against illegal trade in timber and forest products and promote the development of alternative livelihoods when appropriate.

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ENCOURAGE financial and technical partners, donors and all interested stakeholders to prioritize and continue supporting:

- i.) the development and implementation of the *West Africa Strategy on Combating Wildlife Crime*, the *West Africa Network to Combat Wildlife Crime*, and their associated funding mechanisms;
- ii.) scientific research and capacity building to ensure that ECOWAS member countries can present a strong scientific basis for issuing non-detriment findings in compliance with CITES;
- iii.) the development of resources facilitating the identification of timber in trade as well as promoting the capacity of the frontline officers of forestry, Security and Defence Forces;

- iv.) the provision of basic equipment to ensure that all ECOWAS member States have the capacity to unload or scan timber containers in trade to verify the contents;
- v.) further research in illegal trade in timber to enhance information availability, policy formulation and decision-making across the region.

ENCOURAGE the African Union, the CITES community, development partners, United Nations agencies, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, civil society, and media, to prioritize support for the implementation of the recommendations of this Declaration whenever appropriate and by all means available.

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