



PRESS RELEASE

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Illegal logging and wood energy: UNECE Timber Committee discusses policy issues of the day

Geneva, 14 October 2003 - At its annual session, the UNECE Timber Committee discussed two of the most complex and topical policy issues facing the forest and timber sector:

- wood energy policy, in a forum organized with the cooperation of the UNECE Committee on Sustainable Energy, and
- forest law enforcement and governance (how to reduce illegal logging and other illegal forest related activities).

Wood energy:

"Biomass is one of the renewable energies with the greatest potential for expansion, and wood is by far the largest component of biomass energy" says Kit Prins, Chief of the UNECE Timber Branch. "Wood energy is already widely used and is available on a sustainable basis, for relatively modest investment, all over the UNECE region. Wood energy not only provides heat and light, but also income and employment, and contributes to carbon sequestration in the context of climate change. In most areas, with the prevailing structure of energy prices, wood energy is at present not economically competitive with fossil fuels. However, several regional initiatives have demonstrated the feasibility of significantly increasing the volume of wood used for energy. The development of a market for wood energy represents a significant opportunity to raise the income of forest owners, whose economic viability is threatened in many areas, often arising from a lack of local demand, and in general to promote rural development. Governments should create supportive economic and technical conditions for an expansion of the production and use of wood energy, in the context of broader policy frameworks, for renewable energies and for the forest and timber sector, taking account of the legitimate interests of all stakeholders, including some wood-using industries who would face increased competition for their raw material supplies."

Illegal logging:

On this sensitive topic, Prins stated that the Committee was well aware of the significant damage done by illegal logging not only to forests, but also to government revenue and authority. Those who manage their own forests and industries in a responsible and law abiding way also suffer through loss of market share to unfair competitors and through the damage to the image of forest products as a whole. This is not only a problem for tropical forests, but it occurs in the UNECE region as well (although its extent is not well known). The Committee wholeheartedly supports the measures being prepared at international and national levels to combat this danger, notably by strengthening institutions (e.g. police, customs, forest services) in the affected countries, and by combating trade in the products of these activities. However, there is an urgent need to clarify further the nature and extent of the problem and to share experience in dealing with it. The Committee will consider how, working in partnership with other organizations, it can contribute in this respect.

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