

The UN Security Council and timber sanctions

A.G. Blundell, Chair, Panel of Experts on Liberia, UN Security Council
artblundell@yahoo.com

In 2003, the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on timber from Liberia because logging was fueling conflict in the region. Revenue was used to purchase arms, logging companies allegedly imported arms and laundered money, and their security forces violated human rights. In a review of the industry, not one company was found to operate within the law, \$64 million is owed in tax, and human rights and environmental regulations were routinely violated.¹ UN sanctions will be lifted once Liberia demonstrates control over the forests and that logging revenue is used for legitimate purposes that benefit all Liberians.

For the most part the timber sanctions have been effective. Because of the sanctions, logging companies did not reinvest after the war in 2003, and industrial logging has not resumed. However, the Transitional Government, comprised of the warring factions, displayed little political will to implement the reforms necessary to lift the sanctions. Newly elected President Sirleaf must overcome this resistance to change, including from former militia officers who have been elected to Congress.

Reform should be structured along the lines of the UN Development Programme's guidelines for good governance:

- Participatory, including civilian oversight;
- Transparent, including reporting production levels, taxes and fines paid;
- Accountable, including full audits of the government regulators;
- Enforcement and 'chain-of-custody' tracking of timber from stump to export, to ensure that illegal (conflict) timber does not enter the supply chain;
- Equitable, so that revenues also benefit rural populations;
- Implementation of Rule of Law.

International pressure also present challenges. Global reform, along the lines outlined, will be resisted by those who fear that reform will end the supply of cheap, illegal wood, and by those, including developed countries, that do not want to incur the cost of such reform for their own industry.

However, without reform, good governance is unlikely. Half of civil wars occur in countries that have seen peace. Often war resumes when combatants secure revenue from the exploitation of natural resources, such as timber.

In sanctioning timber, the UN Security Council implicitly recognized the role of the international community in fueling conflict in West Africa. Governments should insist on reform, and we, as consumers, should ensure that our purchasing does not undermine peace and security.

¹ UN Panel of Experts on Liberia Report, S/2005/745: un.org/Docs/sc/committees/Liberia3/Liberia3SelEng.htm