

**Joint Statement on a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) on
Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) between
Ghana and the European Community**

1. The Honourable Andrews Adjei-Yeboah, Deputy Minister (responsible for forestry) visited the European Commission and discussed opportunities and challenges for Ghana's timber trade with Europe. In particular, their discussion focused on the informal consultations to date with stakeholders as well as between Ghana and the European Community on prospects for a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) within the framework of the EU Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan. This statement was agreed with Commissioner Louis Michel, responsible for Development, and Commissioner Stavros Dimas, responsible for Environment. It highlights progress made to date and brings discussions to a formal stage of negotiations, with the aim of concluding a VPA.
2. The EU adopted its FLEGT Action Plan in 2003, in recognition of the increasing public concern with the social, economic and environmental consequences of illegal logging and related trade worldwide. A key element of the Action Plan is a proposal to establish bilateral VPAs between the European Community and timber-producing countries. These will ensure that only legally-sourced timber products are imported into the EU from these partner countries.
3. In 2003 at the Africa Ministerial Conference on forest law enforcement and governance, the Government of Ghana indicated, the intention to "*Work in Collaboration with other initiatives such as the EU FLEGT Action Plan*" to bring illegal logging under control and continue working towards good governance programmes as well as strengthening the technical capacity of the forestry sector.
4. The EU is the largest importer of Ghana's timber products. It shares Ghana's objectives of protecting and sustainably managing its forests and ensuring that all timber it exports originates from legal and sustainable sources. In line with this objective, Ghana also intends to address the problem of illegal logging to supply the domestic market through the VPA process. The European Community notes the efforts

made by Ghana in reforming its forest sector and implementing sustainable forest management. In this context, the development of Ghana's Verification of Legal Timber Programme (VLTP), which incorporates a chain of custody system, is indicative of its determination to eliminate illegal timber from its timber trade.

5. A VPA will be legally binding on both parties once negotiations are completed. When fully operational, it will assure buyers in the EU that they can purchase Ghana's timber products with confidence.
6. The informal consultations to date have resulted in a common understanding on the major issues that will need to be addressed in negotiations. The modalities and structures for formal negotiations will now be put in place.
7. Ghana and the European Community recognize the complexities of the issues involved in negotiation of a VPA. Whilst it is agreed that the system developed must be simple and pragmatic, the process for verification of legality and the chain-of-custody must be sufficiently robust to ensure its credibility. It is agreed that systems developed to assure legality must build on what already exists. The issue of cost in relation to the expected benefits will also be borne in mind so as to ensure long term sustainability. One important aim of the VPA will be to help Ghana maintain and secure markets and to promote verified legal timber supported by the VPAs. This aligns with Ghana's objective of ensuring sustainable forest management.
8. Ghana and the European Community recognise the contribution of Ghana's domestic timber market in the socio-economic life of forest communities as well as in the provision of industrial timber for local purposes. Considering this immense contribution of the domestic market and at the same time the challenge it poses to sustainable forest management, it is agreed that in the development of new systems and structures equal importance is attached to ensuring legality on the local market.
9. Ghana has highlighted the importance of establishing a level playing field for its legal timber products. In this regard Ghana appreciates the progress made by EU Member States in introducing public procurement policies for legal and sustainable timber.

10. Taking the above considerations into account, Ghana and the European Community have agreed with immediate effect to commence formal negotiations, with the objective of concluding a VPA by November, 2007.
11. We anticipate that the conclusion and effective implementation of the VPA will contribute to the sustainable management of Ghana's forests.