

Statement Community Rights Network (former Africa Community Rights Network) on FLEGT and REDD

Brussels 9 October 2012

During the Community Rights Network (CRN) meetings from 3 till 10 October in Brussels, the participants of the African Community Rights Network met with colleagues from South East Asia and Honduras, all involved in negotiating or implementing a FLEGT VPA agreement, and agreed to broaden their network to become the Community Rights Network and share lessons concerning the FLEGT process ongoing in each country. They further confirmed their commitment to ensure that their work at national level strengthens the rights of communities and that national processes like FLEGT contribute to furthering these rights.

Participants agreed that the FLEGT VPA process has delivered better NGO coordination and coherence at national and regional level; strengthened civil society capacity; and improved relations between different stakeholder groups such as NGOs, the private sector and the government. By creating space for civil society to be the independent monitor in some countries, notably Indonesia, the process has further strengthened and acknowledged the role of civil society in improving forest governance. By ensuring direct representation of communities in the VPA negotiation process, notably in Liberia, communities have been empowered and are now asserting their rights.

The FLEGT VPA process has also triggered a host of legal reform processes in all the countries that have signed a VPA. Ghana has a new Forest and Wildlife Policy, the Republic of Congo has adopted a new law on Indigenous Peoples' rights; Liberia adopted a new Chain Saw Regulation and in Indonesia NGOs and communities were confirmed as independent forest monitors in the TLAS regulation. There have also been some signs of improvement in transparency and access to information.

Participants therefore call upon the EU and its Member States to continue backing and financing the FLEGT VPA process to ensure the achievement of more concrete results for forest governance.

There are, however, concerns about the progress of implementation of the VPAs. In most countries that have signed a VPA, implementation is slow or stalled. Participants have called upon the EU to take all appropriate measures to ensure VPA implementation continues at a reasonable speed and that key demands of civil society actors are being met. Participants specifically call on their governments and the EU to ensure that legal reform processes remain inclusive and focus on strengthening community tenure rights, such as tree tenure reforms in Ghana and land reforms in Cameroon and Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo and Liberia. Civil society is committed to play an active role in VPA implementation.

There are also concerns related to the growing export of illegal timber to China and India. Although all VPAs will ensure export of only FLEGT licensed timber products to all countries, participants call upon the EU to continue negotiating with China and India to ensure they also put laws in place to control the import of illegally sourced timber.

It is becoming increasingly evident that VPA successes in many countries risk being undermined by the REDD process because both processes run parallel and the REDD process has not been as inclusive and participatory as the VPA process. The UN requires REDD processes to 'respect the knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and members of local communities' and to have 'the full effective participation of relevant stakeholders, in particular indigenous peoples and local communities'. This is not happening. Participants therefore call on donors to ensure that the effective and inclusive implementation approach used in the VPA process will become the standard. Participants also insist that the national REDD process should be more participative and focus on recognition of rights of local communities.

There is also concern from civil society about the effect the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR) will have on the VPA process. The Community Rights Network hopes for a rigorous implementation of the EUTR by all 27 Member States so that illegally sourced timber will be excluded from the EU market and more countries will develop a VPA with the EU.

The participants commit to continue to share information, to discuss joint strategies and to move forward to ensure that the rights of communities to land, territories and resources will be fully respected.

End