



WCO Press Release

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

Brussels, 5 June 2011

As the international community celebrates World Environment Day 2011 with the theme “Forests at your Service” the Secretary General of the World Customs Organization, Kunio Mikuriya, calls upon Customs and timber trade regulating agencies to intensify their efforts to improve controls over the trade in international timber.

The world’s forests are under severe pressure from indiscriminate logging and the illegal trade in timber products. These questionable practices cause widespread environmental damage, cost governments billions of US dollars in lost revenue, enable corruption to flourish, and undermine the rule of law and good governance.

“Illegal trade in timber can retard sustainable development in some of the poorest countries in the world,” said Secretary General Mikuriya. “Consumer countries contribute to these problems by importing timber and wood products without ensuring that they are legally sourced,” he added.

In May 1998 the G8 launched its Action Programme on Forests, in response to illegal logging. Actions under the programme included assessments of the nature and extent of the international trade in illegally harvested timber, measures to improve market transparency, and assessments of the effectiveness of international measures to control illegal forest activities.

Customs are on the frontline at international borders and play an invaluable role in ensuring that timber shipments moving in the global trading system comply with national laws and international environmental undertakings such as the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Violations of Customs law can include export and import of banned tree species, timber traded in contravention of national bans, cross-border movements without a licence or other necessary documents, use of fraudulent documents, underestimation of volumes and tonnage, and misclassification of wood products and species.

Mikuriya noted that although some 200 tree species are covered by CITES the majority of other traded species are left unprotected and unregulated globally; hindering information exchange and cooperation between Customs administrations but acting as a spur for Customs to collaborate with their counterparts in other countries to implement effective trade controls.

This collaboration includes information-sharing on Customs and forest laws as well as export restrictions, intelligence-sharing on specific shipments, joint investigation of discrepancies in timber trade statistics, and cooperation to more effectively implement CITES.

Also, under the framework of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC), the WCO is coordinating the implementation of a project “Establishing a Network of Controlled Delivery Units for Forest Law Enforcement” aimed at combating the traffick in illicitly obtained forest products and mobilizing a collaborative network of enforcement agencies.

Despite current challenges, Customs has stepped up its efforts to monitor the trade and combat illicit trafficking of timber and its products. Recent examples of seizures include, 20 tons of red sandal wood at Huangpu seaport in China and 42 railway wagonloads of timber in the Indian city of Guwahati, but more needs to be done.

The WCO strongly urges its 177 Members to report all illegal seizures to the Customs Enforcement network (CEN) and make greater use of the WCO ENVIRONET system for the rapid exchange and dissemination of information relating to the illegal trade in timber.