

**UNECE****United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

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UNECE region countries tackle illegal logging and trade of illegally derived forest products

Worldwide, illegal logging causes economic damage of \$15 billion annually through loss of revenues to governments, industries and forest owners according to the World Bank.

Representatives from 33 countries within the UNECE region of Europe, North America and of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and various representatives of international organizations assessed the role of illegal logging in the region last week in Geneva.

Some countries acknowledged relatively high volumes of illegal forest activities and highlighted the impact that this has on international wood markets further exacerbating the challenge of financing sustainable forest management. Countries within the UNECE region stated that illegal logging ranges from less than 1% of annual harvests to over 35%. The workshop found that illegal logging occurs in all participating countries, albeit to a minor extent in many. Nevertheless, the workshop called for concerted actions by governments, international organizations, trade and non-governmental organizations.

In addition to analyzing the extent, the UNECE Timber Committee and FAO European Forestry Commission workshop analyzed the causes and consequences. Some of the prevalent causes are:

- Dispersed nature of forest authorities over vast spaces
- Weak capacities and authorities granted to forest and law enforcement agencies
- Rural poverty
- Lack of alternative energy supply
- Criminal commercial enterprises linked to corruption, bribery and money-laundering

The consequences are far reaching, affecting governments, trade associations, forest industries, forest and industry workers, and international associations, and include:

- Yearly forest guards and workers lose their lives trying to control illegal activities
- Increased disregard for law, corruption, damage to governance and social cohesion
- Loss of biodiversity and damage to ecosystems
- Market distortion, unfair competition and reduced profitability of legal trade
- Weakened consumer confidence in wood products

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A number of recommendations came from the participants, including:

- Poverty reduction measure
- Call for improved documentation of forest products traded internationally
- Strengthen authorities ability to reject timber known to be illegally harvested
- Promote national and international cooperation
- Development of equitable and accepted forest ownership structures

The outputs of the workshop will be further discussed in the Joint session of the UNECE Timber Committee and FAO European Forestry Commission on 5-9 October 2004 in Geneva.

More details on the results of the meeting, national reports and abstracts of the state of illegal logging in 37 countries can be found at:

<http://www.unece.org/trade/timber/docs/sem/2004-1/sem-2004-1.htm>

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