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FACILITATING LEGAL TIMBER TRADE IN UPCOMING ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY: LAO PDR HOSTS ASEAN TRAINING WORKSHOP ON THE ASSURANCE OF TIMBER LEGALITY

(For immediate release)

Vientiane, 22 October 2014: The ASEAN Secretariat, the Government of Lao PDR and the EU FLEGT Facility hosted by the European Forest Institute (EFI) are co-organising a three-day training workshop on timber legality assurance. About 70 participants, including high ranking delegates, from eight ASEAN Member States, the European Union (EU) and India arrived in Vientiane today to attend the event. The meeting aims to enhance capacity, exchange experiences and increase collaboration among agencies and stakeholder groups in Southeast Asia that are working on timber legality.

Timber markets worldwide are increasingly responding to the problem of illegal timber and associated trade, due to growing consumer demand for legal timber products. Consumer markets such as the EU, the US and Australia have developed regulations to make it an offence to place illegal timber on their markets. A large proportion of timber and timber products from ASEAN countries is exported to these consumer markets.

‘Timber producing and processing countries in ASEAN are all connected through their timber supply chains,’ said Dian Sukmajaya, Senior Officer on Forestry of the Agriculture Industries and Natural Resources Division, the ASEAN Secretariat.

‘Timber products destined for markets with legality requirements often use timber harvested from one ASEAN country and get processed in another. This makes cooperation between the ASEAN Member States on this issue ever more important. At the same time these timber legality frameworks will also facilitate meeting the growing wood products demand within the ASEAN region. This initiative is relevant to the effort in enhancing competitiveness of ASEAN forest products and to gain global market access for the benefit of people in the region.’

Five ASEAN Member States are engaged in Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) processes with the EU, one is implementing and four are or are about to start negotiations. They are Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. VPAs are trade agreements between the EU and timber producing countries which aim to stop illegal logging and its associated trade. The partnerships ensure that only legal timber products enter the EU market, promote good forest governance and law enforcement in the producing countries and take into account social and broader environmental considerations.



‘Lao PDR is working to strengthen forest governance in the country,’ said Mr. Thongphat Vongmany, Director General of Department of Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. ‘The FLEGT VPA is one of the avenues that can contribute to this. Good governance of the forest sector will allow us to further develop opportunities for wood processing in the country, add value to our products, create employment opportunities in the forest sector and open a wider range of export markets. Once the FLEGT VPA is fully operational, timber products from Lao PDR will be in full compliance with the EU Timber Regulation which prohibits placement of illegal timber on the EU market. It may also help us to gain easier access to other markets such as the USA and Australia.’

‘The FLEGT VPA process contributes to better forest governance.’ said Mr. Stefan Schleuning, Head of Development Co-operation of the EU Delegation to Lao PDR. ‘It supports the development of a licensing system for timber products, creates and supports multi-stakeholder consultations and moves a country towards sustainable forest management. All of these contribute to securing the long-term use of the forest resources in Laos.’

In November 2009, the concept of timber legality assurance gained high profile in Asia when the ASEAN Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry endorsed a reference framework for timber legality called the *ASEAN Criteria and Indicators for Legality of Timber*.

‘Implementing timber legality assurance is essential to ensure good forest management and responsible timber trade,’ said Dr. Alexander Hinrichs, the facilitator of the workshop and Asia co-teamleader at the EU FLEGT Facility. ‘The EU has worked bilaterally with a number of ASEAN Member States in recent years on this topic. Sharing experience among ASEAN Member States will help to further develop and integrate ASEAN’s forest sector by improving performance, ensuring access to international markets, and promoting governance within individual Member States and throughout the ASEAN community.’

This training workshop is the fourth of its kind. It follows workshops in Hanoi, Vietnam in 2010, Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia in 2011 and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2013. Those workshops explored options for increasing timber legality in the Mekong region. They also provided a forum for exchanging lessons learned when developing timber legality assurance systems through FLEGT VPA processes. Being the host of the fourth event, Laos’ involvement is timely as it advances its own FLEGT VPA process.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

In 2003 the EU published a Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) action plan to help combat illegal logging in countries from which it imported timber. A key element of the FLEGT Action Plan is a voluntary scheme to ensure that only legally harvested timber is imported into the EU from countries agreeing to take part in this scheme. The internal EU legal framework for this scheme is a Regulation adopted in December 2005, and a 2008 Implementing Regulation, allowing for the control of the entry of timber to the EU from countries entering into bilateral FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) with the EU.

A key element of a FLEGT VPA is the development and implementation of a timber legality assurance system (TLAS) which comprises a national timber legality definition, a system of supply chain controls, procedures for timber legality and supply chain verification, a FLEGT licensing scheme; and independent auditing of the entire system.

Once agreed, the VPAs include commitments and action from both parties to halt trade in illegal timber, notably with a license scheme to verify the legality of timber exported to the EU. The agreements also promote better enforcement of forest law and promote an inclusive approach involving civil society and the private sector. Laos is one of the countries that has started to negotiate such an agreement with the European Union, with assistance from the GIZ project *Support to the Lao EU-FLEGT process* (ProFLEGT).

ProFLEGT is a joint initiative of the Lao Government and the German Development Cooperation. It is working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (through the FLEGT Standing Office under the supervision of the Department of Forest Inspection, DOFI), Ministry of Industry and Commerce, and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, as well as other Government agencies, civil society organisations, academia and timber processing industry.

The FLEGT Standing Office under DOFI will organize a multi-stakeholder meeting in November this year to enhance the understanding among Lao stakeholders on the approach towards defining timber legality, including enhancing the understanding on what the timber legality definition will look like.

For further information on ASEAN Forest Policy:

<http://www.asean.org/>

For further information on the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade initiative:

http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/9interventionareas/environment/forest/forestry_intro_en.cfm

www.euflegt.efi.int

For further information on understanding timber flows and control in Lao PDR:

<http://www.euflegt.efi.int/publications/-/document/25520>