



The Lao Negotiation Team and the European Commission in Brussels conducted their 4th video conference on 30 October 2017. Attendees in Laos included Leo Faber, EU Ambassador to Lao PDR as well as Khamphout Phandanouvong, Director General of Department of Forest Inspection, Sousath Sayakoummane, Director General of Department of Forestry, Manohack Rasachack, Director General of Department of Industry and Handicraft and Thongsavanh Souliyamath, President of Lao Wood Processing Association.

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4th Video Conference Negotiation Session

On the 30th of October, the Lao FLEGT Negotiation Team joined at the EU Delegation to Lao PDR in Vientiane to meet by video-conference with EU FLEGT negotiators in Brussels. This negotiation session was intended to update both sides on the progress of preparing for the next face-to-face negotiation expected to occur in early 2018.

After giving an overview of ongoing policy revisions relevant to FLEGT in Laos and hearing an update from the EU on the progress of FLEGT in other countries, the Lao FLEGT team then presented the progress of updating the existing Timber Legality Definition (TLD) Standards. The remaining legality standards, including those for confiscated and imported timber, had not yet been drafted and will be presented in January after development by the Lao Thematic Expert Groups. The Lao side also explained that the standard for Village Use Forest timber maybe included in the VPA in terms of supply chain control and verification rather than as a standard of legality, as the timber from Village Use Forests is not legal for commercial use.

The parties also saw a presentation on the Land Concession Inventory shared by Dr. Phommy Inthichack of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. He explained that the work being done with the support of the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) to collect and assess the information on land concessions throughout the country will soon benefit the FLEGT work both in demonstrating the scale of the concession-related forest conversion and in contributing to the development of mechanisms for verifying and monitoring forest conversion areas.

The two sides both acknowledged that the Lao team had put significant effort into moving the VPA process forward, and agreed to a face-to-face negotiation session in late February or early March of 2018. The face-to-face will be held in Laos, and will include representatives of all stakeholders, including private sector and civil society.

Check out FLEGTlaos.com

You can download:

- The Minute of Joint Expert Meeting 1 on 24-25 April 2017 ([English](#))
- The Minute of Technical Working Group on 27-28 April 2017 ([English](#))
- The Presentation on "Remote Sensing Tools for Monitoring of Conversion Areas in a future Timber Legality Assurance System for Lao PDR" ([English](#))

Video-conference Negotiation Co-Chairs:

EU: Mr Luca Perez, Policy Officer, Directorate-General for Environment, European Commission

Lao: Mr. Sousath Sayakoummane, Director General, Department of Forestry
Mr. Khamphout Phandanouvong, Director General, Department of Forest Inspection
Mr. Manohack Rasachack, Director General of the Department of Industry and Handicraft

Illegal Logging on the Rise in Cambodia

In May 2017, investigations uncovered widespread illegal logging operations in eastern Cambodian national parks. The investigation report detailed the importation of unlicensed timber into the Central Highlands of Vietnam, undermining Cambodia's log export ban. More than 300,000 cubic meters of logs were smuggled out of Cambodia since November 2016.

In response to the report and international concerns, the Vietnamese government announced that it would look

Illegal Logging on the Rise in Cambodia (Cont.)

into the issue of the illicit trade, which was also discussed with the EU during the final VPA negotiations in May 2017. While no further details on the case have been released yet, Vietnam continues to call for greater efforts to protect forests. Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, chairing a national conference on forest management on October 14, reportedly urged relevant authorities to comply with the government's orders and to take firm action against individuals and companies responsible for forest destruction. According to the EU Delegation to Vietnam, the government of Vietnam also committed in the framework the VPA process to adding legislation that would strengthen checks on timber imports. With Vietnamese timber product exports estimated to hit US\$8 billion this year, the global importance of the nation's wood processing industry and the need for effective implementation of the VPA become evident. It is now up to the Vietnamese government to devise solutions and long-term strategies that work towards its goal of creating clean timber certificates for wood manufacturers by 2021.

Sources:

- Environmental Investigation Agency (2017). Repeat Offender: Vietnam's persistent trade in illegal timber. London: EIA. Retrieved from <https://eia-international.org/wp-content/uploads/Repeat-Offender.pdf>.
- Tatarski, M. (2017, May 31). Vietnam pledges to investigate massive illegal logging violations as international pressure grows. Mongabay. Retrieved from <https://news.mongabay.com/2017/05/vietnam-pledges-to-investigate-massive-illegal-logging-violations-as-international-pressure-grows/>.

Lao Civil Society Learns about Indonesia's FLEGT VPA

In September 2017, five members of the Lao FLEGT civil society took a short study tour to Indonesia to gain an understanding of the Indonesian FLEGT VPA in hopes that the lessons learned there might be successfully applied in the Lao context. The Indonesian Timber Legality Assurance System, known there as SVLK (Indonesian for TLAS), is the first FLEGT system to send licensed legal timber to the EU markets.

The five participants on the Indonesian study tour represented the five Lao Non-Profit Associations (NPAs) that make up the FLEGT Civil Society Core Committee selected by the FLEGT Civil Society Organization (CSO) Network. The tour was funded with support from WWF Laos and the FAO FLEGT Programme and hosted by WWF Indonesia.

The Lao CSO members took one week on the study tour, spending time in Jakarta, Bogor, and Ponorogo; meeting with government, private sector, civil society and a village-level Forest Management Units (FMUs). They learned that Indonesian CSOs played a strong role in the development of the VPA and SVLK and continue to participate in the implementation of the SVLK system through supporting local community-based FMUs and small-holder timber plantations; as well as through ensuring compliance with the SVLK laws and licensing requirements as Independent Monitors.

The most significant impression gained during the study tour was the strong spirit of cooperation and sense of ownership of sustainable forest management and legal timber trade governance by the Indonesian government, private sector, and civil society. All stakeholders there pointed out that strong participation by the FLEGT partners increased the integrity and trustworthiness of the VPA and SVLK.

The final visit for Lao CSOs was to the Village-level Forestry Management Unit (FMU), Enga Mulyo, and the local NGO, PERSEPSI, that supports them. Enga Mulyo is SVLK licensed and FSC certified to provide legal timber grown by villagers in small plantations. The Lao CSOs felt that a similar model would work in the Lao context, and have discussed proposing such a solution among the Lao FLEGT stakeholders and support organizations.



Group photo of representative members of the Lao FLEGT CSO, with staff from WWF Laos and Indonesia, and the Indonesian CSO.

1st FLEGT VPA Negotiation between Thailand and EU

Thailand and the European Union (EU) have held their first negotiations towards a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) to improve forest governance and promote trade in legal timber. The negotiations took place on 29 and 30 June 2017 and focused, among other things, on the development of a draft timber legality definition (TLD) and a VPA roadmap until March 2018. Technical work aspects such as TLD field testing and supply chain control were further refined during three Ad-Hoc Working Group meetings organized by the Thai-EU FLEGT Secretariat Office (TEFSO) in July, August and September 2017.

If you want to stay updated on the Thai-EU FLEGT process, you can sign up for the TEFSO newsletter: <http://tefso.org/en/category/newsletter-en/>.

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