

## Groupe SEFAC destroying Cameroon's ancient forests

### Cameroon's Forest of the Great Apes

**"[We recommend that SEFAC be] severely sanctioned for all the forest infractions observed, to force this firm to abandon the 'creaming' of the forest it has always practised."** MINEF (Cameroon's Environment and Forestry Ministry) reporting on its visit to SEFAC's concession UFA 10-012, December 1999<sup>1</sup>

The lowland rainforest of Cameroon forms part of Africa's stunning Forest of the Great Apes. One of the world's last remaining strongholds of species such as lowland gorillas, chimpanzees and forest elephants, this forest supports thousands of species of plants and animals and is home to around 12 million forest-dependent people. But today their future is under threat, as illegal and destructive logging companies encroach deeper and deeper into this fragile forest.<sup>2</sup>

In recent years a number of official reports published by the Cameroonian government and the World Bank have revealed the dominant nature of illegal activities within Cameroon's logging industry<sup>3</sup> – activities that cost the Cameroonian government millions of dollars each year in lost revenue.<sup>4</sup> In the last three years, numerous timber companies have been fined for illegal practices such as tax evasion, logging outside legal boundaries, logging after permits have expired, cutting undersized trees and logging in unallocated concession areas.<sup>5</sup>



July 2001: new logging road in East Cameroon

One of the main factors in driving this corrupt, destructive and economically inefficient industry is the demand from the international marketplace – the importing nations who choose to ignore what is going on in the forest and just carry on with business as usual.

### Groupe SEFAC

One of several Italian forestry companies operating in Cameroon,<sup>7</sup> Groupe SEFAC is guilty of major violations of local forestry legislation and an arrogant disregard for the rights of local people. SEFAC (Société d'Exploitations Forestières et Agricoles du Cameroun) has been sanctioned repeatedly for illegal logging. Yet the Cameroonian government, the donor community and the governments of importing nations have failed to tackle this serious problem. Meanwhile European timber importers continue to buy SEFAC's timber, fully conscious of the company's activities.

Throughout the world ancient forests are in crisis. Some 80% of the world's original ancient forest cover is already gone; illegal and destructive logging poses the single greatest threat to what remains.

The uncontrolled international trade in ancient forest products fuels this destruction. As part of its campaign to protect what is left of the world's ancient forests, Greenpeace is carrying out investigations into logging companies involved in illegal, destructive and abusive activities and is calling on consumers, trading partners and governments around the world to stop their role in driving this unscrupulous industry.

**"A disastrous partnership of loggers and hunters in the Congo basin...[means that] in as little as ten years... the world's second biggest tropical forest could be emptied of large mammals; and Africa's great apes – gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos – could become extinct."**

*The Economist*, 12 January 2002



July 2000, Leixoes, Portugal – SEBAC sawn timber

### Company profile

Groupe SEFAC, a subsidiary of family-owned Vasto Legno SpA based in Milan, includes the companies SEFAC-Industrie, SEBAC-Industrie<sup>8</sup> and La Filière Bois.<sup>9</sup> Chief Executive Officer Ennio Dajelli heads the group, which is based in Douala.

SEFAC has been present in Eastern Cameroon, on the border of the Central African Republic, since 1974. Together the group's component companies control a forest area of 388,000 hectares. Its two sawmills in Libongo and Bela have a total processing capacity of some 160,000m<sup>3</sup> of timber per year.<sup>10</sup>

Table 1: Companies within the Groupe SEFAC

Company	Description
Société d'Exploitations Forestières et Agricoles du Cameroun (SEFAC) / SEFAC-Industrie	Wood originating from SEFAC's three East province concessions – totalling 184,410ha <sup>11</sup> – may not be enough to supply its large sawmill in Libongo. <sup>12</sup> To run at full capacity would require either overcutting concessions, buying from third parties or obtaining short-term licences such as ventes de coupes.
Société d'Exploitations des Bois d'Afrique Centrale (SEBAC) / SEBAC-Industrie	In 1997, BOTAC was awarded the 88,796ha UFA 10-009. But after a lengthy legal battle SEBAC apparently won control of the concession in March 2000. <sup>13</sup>
La Filière Bois	La Filière Bois is allegedly controlled by Emmanuel Fochivé, who sat on the inter-ministerial commission responsible for awarding Forest Management Units (UFAs) in July 2000. <sup>14</sup> In June 2001, the company made the winning – and only – bid for 114,379ha UFA 10-064. <sup>15</sup>

Groupe SEFAC logging operations are located in forest areas of high conservation value, with some of its concessions adjacent to the Lobéké protected area. Despite company claims to have been at the forefront of sustainable exploitation for decades,<sup>16</sup> this group of companies disrupts the livelihoods of many forest-dependent communities and poses a serious threat to remaining populations of threatened animals such as forest elephants, lowland gorillas and chimpanzees.

### Environmental destruction and social conflict

In the spring of 1997 SEBAC cut a road terminating in the village of Mboy II on the border of the Central African Republic. The roadwork involved the destruction of two houses and damage to the coffee crops of 22 villagers. Although the houses were reconstructed several months later, controversy over compensation payments continued. A collective letter of complaint from the village addressed to the company was met by a death threat.<sup>17</sup>

In May 1998, 35 villagers from the village of Bela were imprisoned after peacefully demonstrating against SEFAC.<sup>18</sup>

### Groupe SEFAC and the bushmeat trade

The poaching of bushmeat – including endangered species like chimpanzees, forest elephants and gorillas – is widespread in Cameroon and is particularly common where logging roads open up previously inaccessible forest. To some extent the meat is used to feed the loggers, but much of it is taken out – usually on logging trucks – to sell on the black market in Cameroon's cities.<sup>19</sup> Passing through some of the last areas where large herds of forest elephants still remain in the region, the logging roads opened by SEBAC between Libongo and Mboy are proving a particular threat. A 1998 study of poaching in the region described the amount of bushmeat available as “simply unbelievable”.<sup>20</sup>

**“[SEFAC engaged in]... anarchic and illegal logging without the least consideration for the allocated cutblock boundaries.”**

*MINEF reporting on its visit to SEFAC's concession UFA 10-012, December 1999<sup>6</sup>*



*April 2001, Ravenna – Filière Bois timber*

**“The route Koumela-Libongo and Libongo-SEBAC-Mboy are the areas of predilection of the poachers ... Hunting elephants in the zone is very common, as it's there that one still finds the largest herds in the region.”**

*L Zouya-Mimbang, Les Circuits de Commercialisation des Produits de Chasse dans le Sud-est Cameroun, 1998*



Environmental destruction and illegal logging

Evidence compiled by Greenpeace reveals that SEFAC's companies have been found logging illegally on a number of occasions by MINEF (Cameroon's Environment and Forestry Ministry).

Table 2: Some of SEFAC's recent illegal logging activities

UFA (Forest Management Area)	Illegal activity
10-008 (SEBAC)	Between 1999 and 2000: SEBAC is known to have been logging in UFA 10-008 – a concession that had not been allocated at that time <sup>21</sup>
10-009 (SEBAC)	December 1999: MINEF recommends an exemplary sanction against SEFAC/SEBAC for the illicit harvesting of 15,000m3 in its ex-licence 1825 (now UFA 10-009); SEBAC had continued to log in the area during a legal dispute with the company BOTAC that had been awarded this concession in 1997 <sup>22</sup>
10-010 (SEFAC)	Between 1999 and 2000: SEFAC is known to have been logging in UFA 10-010 – a concession that had not been allocated at that time <sup>23</sup>
10-012 (SEFAC)	March 2000: SEFAC is fined 4 million CFA (US\$5,000) and its operations suspended for three months for logging outside of an allocated cutblock and for failing to mark the boundaries of the cutblock <sup>24</sup>

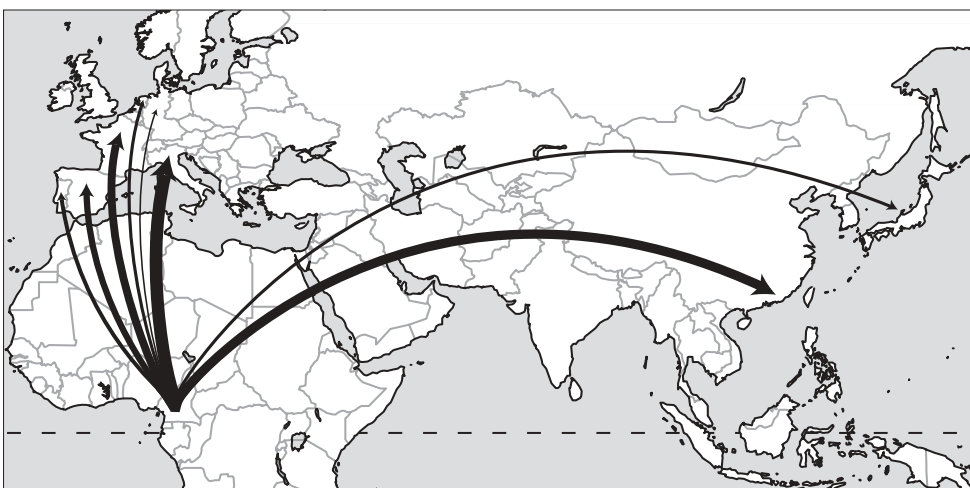
Over the last two years SEFAC/SEBAC has been fined – and temporarily suspended from logging – for its involvement in illegal forest practices. In July 2000, SEFAC was disqualified from the public auction of forest concessions for “serious wrongdoings in its forestry activities”.<sup>25</sup> However, the overall cost of these sanctions has been very low and in 2001 SEFAC successfully rejoined the public allocation process.

In practice therefore, the Cameroonian government has done too little to curb the group's illegal and destructive forest activities. Meanwhile, as importing nations and companies ignore this company's forest crimes, Groupe SEFAC's timber continues to flood the international market.



July 2000, Nantes, France – SEBAC logs in the port

European imports driving destruction



The international market for Cameroon's timber

French and other European timber companies traditionally dominated the logging industry in this region's forests, which once stretched across Africa from Senegal to Uganda.<sup>26</sup> But with the

extensive destruction of the rainforests in West Africa (especially the Ivory Coast, Ghana and Nigeria), coupled with growing world demand for tropical timber, many logging companies from elsewhere have also turned their attention to the ancient forests of Cameroon.

Nevertheless, Europe has remained a strong player in driving this industry and its destruction of the last intact ancient forests of eastern Cameroon. While sources of trade data vary considerably, recent figures show that the EU is currently responsible for a minimum of 52% of Cameroon's annual exports.<sup>27</sup> According to these sources the most significant EU importer is Italy (19.9%) followed by Spain (14%), France (9.8%) and Portugal (5.6%).<sup>28</sup>

Despite a series of Greenpeace activities highlighting the illegal and destructive activities of SEFAC and other companies involved in the international timber trade,<sup>29</sup> significant volumes of SEFAC's timber have recently been located in Italy, France, UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland and Spain.

Any company buying from Groupe SEFAC should therefore be aware that by buying from SEFAC it is contributing to ancient forest destruction in Cameroon.



2001, Oxford UK – SEFAC timber at Timbmet, Europe's largest independent importer of hardwoods



Cameroon's logging industry is dominated by illegalities – to the cost of the forest

## Greenpeace call for action

Groupe SEFAC's logging companies have been implicated in illegal and destructive logging and its role in causing social conflict has been exposed. In the run up to the United Nations' forthcoming Ancient Forest Summit,<sup>30</sup> Rio +10<sup>31</sup> and beyond, Greenpeace is urging governments of all importing countries to immediately stop their role in the destruction of Cameroon's forests by committing to the following principles:

- **stop the destruction**  
by stopping any further industrial activities in intact ancient forest until responsible plans for forest conservation and sustainable use have been agreed.
- **clean up the timber trade**  
by ensuring that timber is produced and traded in a legal and ecologically responsible way;  
by refusing to trade with companies known to be operating illegally or destructively;  
and by demanding that all wood and wood products entering national ports must come from legal and well-managed forest operations according to high social and ecological standards.<sup>32</sup>
- **come up with the money**  
by providing at least US\$15 billion each year to pay for forest conservation and sustainable development.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> MINEF (1999a).
- <sup>2</sup> WRI/WWF (2000).
- <sup>3</sup> MINEF (1999a; 1999b); Milol and Pierre (2000); Durrieu de Madron and Ngaha (2000).
- <sup>4</sup> Milol and Pierre (2000).
- <sup>5</sup> MINEF (2000a; 2001); Faure (2000).
- <sup>6</sup> MINEF (1999a)
- <sup>7</sup> Other Italian forest sector companies in Cameroon include Alpi-Grumcam, Patrice Bois, Fipcam and Placam.
- <sup>8</sup> Legal notices announcing the new names of SEFAC and SEBAC respectively. Source: Cameroon Tribune (2001a).
- <sup>9</sup> Company announcement in Cameroon Tribune (2001b).
- <sup>4</sup> Carret (1999).
- <sup>11</sup> In 1997 SEFAC was awarded 62,597-ha UFA 10-012. In June 2000 two UFAs were added: 10-008 (60,053-ha) and 10-010 (61,760-ha). MINEF (1999a); Cameroon Tribune (2001c).
- <sup>12</sup> WWF (2000).
- <sup>13</sup> Pers. comm with MINEF officials. SEBAC signed a provisional agreement with MINEF on March 2000.
- <sup>14</sup> CIACF (2000).
- <sup>15</sup> Cameroon Tribune (2001c).
- <sup>16</sup> A 1999 advertisement in the Cameroon Tribune claimed that the firm has been in the avant-garde of sustainable exploitation for 31 years. Cameroon Tribune (1999).
- <sup>17</sup> Agir Ici and Survie (2000).
- <sup>18</sup> La Nouvelle Expression (1998).
- <sup>19</sup> WSPA (1995; 2000); Ape Alliance (1998).
- <sup>20</sup> Zouya-Mimbang (1998). In the same year a survey funded by the German Development Agence GTZ discovered no less than 21 illegally held guns on SEFAC's Libongo concession Source: Ndo nkoumou, Heinze (1999).
- <sup>21</sup> Auzel et al (2001).
- <sup>22</sup> MINEF (1999a).
- <sup>23</sup> Auzel et al (2001).
- <sup>24</sup> Cameroon Tribune (2000a).
- <sup>25</sup> Cameroon Tribune (2000b).
- <sup>26</sup> Van Dorp (1995); Debroux and Karsenty (1998); both cited in Greenpeace International (1999).
- <sup>27</sup> Figures vary from 52% (ITTO 2000) to 83% (figures cited in Forests Monitor 2001).
- <sup>28</sup> ITTO (2000) Additional markets include China and Hong Kong (10.8%) and Japan (1.3%).
- <sup>29</sup> Including an action in Italy in April 2000 and a series of Greenpeace publications.
- <sup>30</sup> The Ancient Forest Summit is the 6th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. It will be held in April 2002, in The Hague, The Netherlands and will have a mandate to agree a ten-year programme on forests in preparation for Rio +10, which will take place in Johannesburg in August/September 2002.
- <sup>31</sup> Rio +10 is the United Nations' World Summit on Sustainable Development, which will take place in Johannesburg in August/September 2002.
- <sup>32</sup> The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is currently the only international certification and labelling system that uses globally endorsed ecological performance standards, ensures a traceable chain-of-custody from production to final consumption and brings together a broad range of environmental, social and economic stakeholder interests.

### References:

- Agir Ici / Survie (2000). Le silence de la forêt: Réseaux, mafias et filières bois au Cameroun. Agir Ici/ Survie, Paris.
- Ape Alliance (1998). The African bushmeat trade: a recipe of extinction.
- Auzel P, Feteke F, Fomete T, Nguiffo AS (2001). Impact de l'exploitation forestière illégale sur la fiscalité, sur l'aménagement et sur le développement local: cas de l'UFA 10-030 dans l'arrondissement de Messok, Province de l'Est Cameroun. Study prepared by Forests Monitor, Dutch Committee for IUCN and DFID - UK Department for International Development.
- Cameroon Tribune (1999). La SEFAC au service du développement locale. 26 March 1999.
- Cameroon Tribune (2000a). MINEF Communiqué. 24 March 2000.
- Cameroon Tribune (2000b). MINEF Communiqué. 12 July 2000.
- Cameroon Tribune (2001a). Legal notices. 23 February 2001.
- Cameroon Tribune (2001b). Company announcement. 7 September 2001.
- Cameroon Tribune (2001c). MINEF Communiqué. 19 July 2001.
- Carret J-C (1999). Industrialisation de la filière bois au Cameroun CERNA 4 June 1999 .
- CIACF (2000) Procès verbal de la Commission Interministérielle d'Attribution des Concessions Forestières. Session de Juin 2000. 28 June 2000.
- Durrieu de Madron L and Ngaha J (2000). Revue Technique des Concessions Forestières. République du Cameroun. Comité technique de Suivi des Programmes. Rapport Version 4. 24 July 2000.
- Faure JJ, Njampiep J (2000). Etude sur le secteur informel. Rapport provisoire. CTS. MINEFI.
- Forests Monitor (2001). Sold Down the River: the need to control transnational forestry corporations: a European case study.
- Greenpeace International (1999). Buying Destruction: A Greenpeace report for corporate consumers of forest products.
- ITTO (2000). Year 2000 Review (tables 2.1-2.4). [www.itto.or.jp](http://www.itto.or.jp)
- La Nouvelle Expression (1998). Un forestier italien sème le désordre à l'est. 21 September 1998.
- Milol AC, Pierre J-M (2000). Impact de la fiscalité décentralisée sur le développement local et les pratiques d'utilisation des ressources forestières au Cameroun. Rapport final. January 2000.
- MINEF (1999a). Rapport de la Mission d'Evaluation des Progrès Réalisés sur les Concessions Forestières (UFA) attribuées en 1997 dans la Province de l'Est.
- MINEF (1999b). Rapport de la Mission d'Evaluation des Progrès Réalisés sur les Concessions Forestières (UFA) attribuées en 1997 dans la province du Centre et Sud. Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Cameroon.
- MINEF (2000). Communiqué. MINEF. 15 March 2000 Footnote 4.
- MINEF (2001). Communiqué. MINEF. 22 March 2001.
- Ndo Nkoumou JC, Heinze M (1999). Enquete préliminaire sur les armes à feu au sud-est Cameroun. GTZ.
- WSPA (1995). Slaughter of the Apes: how the tropical timber industry is devouring Africa's great apes. Eds: Pearce J, Ammann K. World Society for the Protection of Animals.
- WSPA (2000). Bushmeat - Africa's conservation crisis. Eds: Pearce J, Ammann K. World Society for the Protection of Animals.
- WWF (2000). Unpublished report: Rapport d'activités de Yann Petrucci (Janvier 1999-Janvier 2000) et perspectives.
- Zouya-Mimbang L (1998). Les Circuits de Commercialisation des Produits de Chasse dans le Sud-est Cameroun. GTZ.