

GREENPEACE

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PLUNDERING CAMEROON'S RAINFORESTS: A case-study on illegal logging by the Lebanese logging company Hazim



© Action against the import of SFH-logs in the Spanish port of Vigo. August 2000.
Greenpeace Spain / Pedro Armestre

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Photo: SFH illegal log road in UFA 08-003 (02/07/00)
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1) Hazim in the Cameroonian forestry sector: booming business

Hazim (SFH)¹ is a Lebanese logging company active in Cameroon since the early 80s. In 1998-1999 Hazim was the fifth largest concession holder in Cameroon. Their own concessions of 157.000 hectares represent some 4 % of the total concession area for 1998 – 1999². But Hazim is also logging other concessions as a subcontractor and is logging illegally in various concessions. All these activities combined make Hazim one of the largest timber exporters of Cameroon.

In a 1999 MINEF-sponsored report on the Cameroonian wood processing sector, the French economist Jean-Christophe Carret wrote about Hazim³ (own translation):

"Hazim is the Lebanese consul in Cameroun. His trajectory is remarkable: he started forestry activities in Cameroon in the early 80s. In the 90s he did become the largest log exporter of Cameroon. Before 1994, Hazim did not have any sawmill in Cameroon, despite legislation imposing 60 % local procession of the produced timber".

¹ Société Forestière Hazim (SFH), Société Forestière Hazim Scierie (SFHS), Société Forestière Hazim-Ngambé Tikar (SFH-NT), Société Forestière Hazim Scierie-Lomié (SFHS-L).

² Global Forest Watch Cameroon, p. 24.

³ Carret / Cerna, p. 44-45 (draft report).

"Sa trajectoire est remarquable. Au début des années 80, il s'est lancé dans l'exploitation forestière. Dans les années 90, il est devenu le plus gros exportateur de grumes. Avant 1994, et ce malgré la réglementation qui imposait un taux de transformation de 60 %, il ne possédait aucune usine de transformation de bois. Cinq ans plus tard, il possède quatre usines: trois scieries, dont une est encore en construction, les deux autres étant équipées de séchoirs, et une usine de déroulage. Pour construire les trois premières, il s'est associé avec des transformateurs étrangers: Perarnau, un scieur espagnol qui lui achetait des grumes pour la scierie de Bonabérie, un des frères Fuzer (Sandro), un scieur Italien installé en Côte d'Ivoire, pour la scierie de Ngambé Tikar et Zangherri, un industriel italien du déroulage qui lui achetait des grumes d'ayous, pour ib-cam, l'usine de déroulage de Bojongo, un quartier de Douala. Seul Fuzer est toujours partenaire dans la scierie de Ngambé-Tikar. Les deux autres on revendu leurs parts.



Photo: SFH sawn lumber in a UK port / July 2000.
©Greenpeace

(2) Hazim’s wood processing plants in Cameroon

In the last 5 years Hazim has constructed three wood processing plants, and a fourth one was reported to be “almost finalised” in 1999.

Wood processing units constructed by Hazim since 1994, fully operational at the end of 1998. (Carret, p. 45)

Factory Name	Shareholders	Location	Investment (in billion CFA)
SFHS	Hazim-(Perarnau)	Bonabéri (Douala)	1.9
IB-Cam	Hazim-(Zangherri)	Bonabéri (Douala)	2.5
SFH-NT	Hazim-Fuzer	Ngambé-Tikar	1.9
SFHS-L	Hazim-?	Lomié	?
Total			6.3 billion CFA + ?

Estimates on the capacity of these sawmills vary from one source to another but total capacity must be between 150.000 – 200.000 m3 / year.

According to Carret (June 1999), the Spanish Perarnau and the Italian industrialist Zangherri have now sold their part in Hazim’s wood processing units. The Italian business man, Sandro Fuzer, is still a partner of Hazim for the sawmill of Ngambé-Tikar (Carret, p. 46).

Constructing a sawmill near a World Heritage Site

A fourth sawmill of Hazim was reported to be almost operational near the city of Lomié. The brothers Decolvenaere, of Belgian origin, sold part of their sawmill equipment to Hazim. The establishment of this sawmill is controversial as it is almost at the border of the Dja reserve, a World Heritage Site. (Carret, p. 47).

It was in 1998 that Hazim decided to build a sawmill one kilometre outside of Lomié. It was accorded a site occupied by a Baka village of 200 inhabitants. It was only when Hazim's bulldozers turned up in this Baka village and destroyed large parts of their village that these unfortunate people realised what was going on. Some of their houses and graveyards of the Baka's ancestors were bulldozed.... The company told the Baka's that they would get new, more beautiful houses alongside the road. But in the end, after Hazim's bulldozers had gained a moment of international attention, Hazim agreed to find another spot for his factory. The sawmill Carret refers to as "*encore en construction*" is now almost operational a few kilometers from the border of the Dja World Heritage reserve....

In the november 1997 auction of new UFA's⁴ (concessions) Hazim obtained no concession in the vicinity of Lomié. But the winner of a concession (UFA 10-029) of 46.922 hectares just east of the Dja reserve was an entity called "*the Société Forestière de Dja et de la Boumba (SFDB)*". SFDB and SFH signed a partnership agreement; SFH exploits this concession on behalf of SFDB⁵. (cf. 3.4.2) That SFDB's bid was ninth highest and ranked only tenth in technical qualifications made it no less attractive to the interministerial commission charged with the allocation of the UFAs to the highest bidder. Concession 10-029 belongs to the secretary general of defence (SFDB).

(3) Hazim: illegal logging in impunity ?

Over the years, Hazim has built a serious reputation for violating all kind of forestry laws. In many areas, Hazim's logging operations did create social conflicts and environmental havoc. Loss of economic revenues for the Cameroonian government due to this illegal activities must be very high but have never been calculated.

In this report, Greenpeace has compiled some recent evidence on illegal logging activities by Hazim - indicating that Hazim is involved in illegal logging activities on a massive scale. This report does not pretend to be a comprehensive overview of Hazim's illegal logging activities. A complete understanding of the scale of Hazim's (illegal) forestry activities (logging, transport, trading) would require an in depth analysis of the company's activities and inspections of all forestry operations in which Hazim is involved.

This report provides evidence of Hazim's illegal logging activities in:

- its' own concession UFA 08-003
- two concessions (UFA 10-057 and 10-029) were Hazim acts as a subcontractor
- two concessions (UFA 10-030 and 10-047) were Hazim is logging without any legal rights

⁴ UFA = Unité Forestière d'Aménagement. A concession that should be managed over a rotation period of 15 years – with a possibility for renewal after that date. Each year, only a particular part (assiette de coupe) of the UFA gets a license to be exploited.

⁵ MINEF, east province inspection report. December 99. p. 33.

3.1. ILLEGAL LOGGING IN HAZIM'S OWN CONCESSION (UFA 08-003)

In 1997, SFH achieved a new concession (UFA 08-003, 53.160 hectares) in the Ngambé Tikar area⁶ (Mbam & Kim department). Upto now, SFH got one logging licence (assiette de coupe n° 17) – thus allowing only exploitation in a limited part of the concession. But in december 1999, an inspection team from the ministry of forestry (MINEF) inspected this concession. SFH was found to be “*logging anarchically outside the licenced cutblock of the concession*”⁷. Untill december 1999, SFH was only granted a licence to log in one cutblock⁸ but was found operating far outside this area. In december 1999 SFH was fined 10.000.000 F CFA.

As recent as june 2000 (june 15th 2000), a government inspection team (accompanied by two independent observers) returned for a new inspection of this concession. The concession is located between two rivers so access possibilities are rather limited. In the northern area, the concession can only accessed via the Ngambé-Malantouen road. But the only cut block (AC n° 17), currently licensed to SFH is located in the southern part of the concession. To create access to this cut block, SFH constructed a road starting from the northern part of the concession (starting from an area called “*Bianko*” that crosses the entire concession to its southern limit).

When the inspection team attempted to enter the concession by car , they had to face many difficulties. The company had bulldozed a tree that blockaded the access road. A bridge over the river Ngou was also deliberately destroyed to further hamper full access to the concession. But the inspection returned to the concession by light motorbikes that they were able to carry over the obstacles that SFH had created for them.

When the team finally entered the concession – they revealed large scaling logging by Hazim in numerous cut blocks of the concession that were not licensed for logging yet. Hazim was logging outside the boundaries of cut block n°17. SFH was also found logging in cut blocks n°s 6,11,12,13,14,15,17. These cut blocks are all located along the access road. – none of these cut blocks were already allowed for logging (except AC n°17) (as a company is supposed to “*manage*” such a concession over a longer period of at least 15 years (the concession is than renewable for another 15 years). The team concluded that Hazim was currently exploiting major areas of its concession that were not allowed for logging.

⁶ Arrondissement Ngambé-Tikar, département Mbam & Kim.

⁷ MINEF-report on field inspection in South and Centre provinces. December 1999. p.3.

⁸ Assiette de Coupe n° 17. (MINEF-report on south & centre province, dec. 99).



Photo: Broken bridge: preventing access to SFH-concession
UFA 08-003 / © Global Witness / june 2000

3.2. Hazim logging illegally in concession (UFA 10-047) of Mr. Mponengang

Hazim was also found to be logging illegally in a concession belonging to another company. Concession 10-047 was allocated in 1997 to mr. Mponengang. This 125.700 hectares concession is located in the area Lomié-Messamena-Abong/Mbang (Haut-Nyong Department, East Province). This concession borders the Dja reserve, a UNESCO listed World Heritage Site where the European Ecofac programme is running an important programme to assist with the management of the Dja reserve.

A MINEF-team inspected the concession in december 1999 but classified it as « *inactive* ». The MINEF-report (dec '99) mentioned that a partnership between mr. Mponengang and a Dutch Investment Group was about to be finalised.

In 1997, a special logging permit (« *Un permis de récupération* ») of 6900 hectares was allocated to the company E.T.D. (Eloungou Toua Désiré) in the vicinity of Echou. This logging licence of ETD is located next to concession UFA 10-047. The récupération license was allocated to the company E.T.D. under the condition that they had to rehabilitate a bridge. This in itself was in fact a rather questionable deal as E.T.D. would have to rehabilitate the bridge anyway as it is along the only access road to the licensed logging area. Since more than a year, the récupération licence and the agreement of E.T.D. have allowed the company Nadja – E.G.M (= Groupe Hazim) to log in complete impunity in the interior of concession 10-047.

This illegal logging operation was suspended in early june 2000 by a mission of the central control unit of MINEF, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry.

The GPS measurements taken during inspection missions indicated that the illegal logging activities in this concession already covered some 15.000 ha. An inspection team followed the illegal logging roads inside the concession for more than 10 km !

If UFA 10-047 would have been properly managed, 15.000 hectares would equal more than 4 years of exploitation – representing 500 million FCFA on taxes (« *redevance de superficie* ») to distribute between the state, Messamena village and adjacent villages.

Since the illegal logging activities were stopped, some 120 logs remain seized in a logyard inside the concession. These logs will be sold through a special licence to recuperate abandoned logs (« *recupération de bois abandonnés* »). It is feared that this licence could open the door again for more illegal logging inside this concession

3.3. LARGE SCALE ILLEGAL LOGGING IN AN UNALLOCATED CONCESSION (UFA 10-030)

Researchers from the NGO Global Witness and the chief of the Central Control Unit of MINEF intended to inspect UFA 10-029 on 26th of June 2000. They accessed the concession just beyond the town of MESSOK near Lomié, the concession road was plotted on GPS and the team observed extremely heavy log truck traffic, eight fully loaded trucks in a 15 minute sample period, although the traffic slackened after that. But, this road did NOT in fact, access UFA 10-029, but the neighbouring unallocated UFA 10-030! SFH were operating in this UFA on a massive scale, completely illegally. There was a network of very large, wide but poorly constructed log roads. Global Witness observed 3 large bulldozers belonging to SFH one of these blocked the team's path both entering and exiting the UFA. Another was being used to push the log trucks up one of the roads as the wet conditions prevented the truck managing alone.



Photo: SFH bulldozer blockading access to illegal logging road in concession UFA 10-030. © Global Witness - June 2000.

Some illegally felled logs were stored at 3°10'.086N, 14°14'.767E. Loaded log trucks were transporting logs from another road through a road junction at 3°09'.816N, 14°14'.512E. Both these points are around 6 km inside UFA 10-030, the illegal access road from Messok was over 30 km long. It would be obvious to any official in Messok that this activity was illegal, but so far the government officials did not take any action against this large scale illegal activity.

3.4. Hazim logs illegally as a subcontractor

3.4.1. Concession (UFA 10-057) of mr. Gustave Mbeng

During an inspection in the port of Nordenham-Germany (july 20th 2000), Greenpeace found some 20 logs of Hazim from UFA10-057. Similar SFH logs of UFA 10-057 were also seen in the logyard⁹ of the Belgian timber company Coplac, a daughter company of the Swiss-german group Danzer. UFA 10-057 belongs to mr Gustave Mbeng. But the indication of the SFH logo on logs coming from this concession seem to indicate that SFH is logging here as a subcontractor for mr. Mbeng.



Photo: SFH-log (bottom right) from UFA 10-057 stored at the Coplac-sawmill in Belgium
© Greenpeace Belgium / june 2000

This 32.293 hectares concession is located in the Kadey-department, east province. An inspection team of the Cameroonian government inspected the concession in December 1999. The government report indicates that the concession is of poor value and completely exhausted of high value timber stocks.

⁹ It is also worth noting that in the Coplac-logyard - logs were found of the company SEBC, a Thanry subsidiary in Cameroon that was recently found to be involved in large scale illegal logging. The SEBC logging operations were described by the cameroonian authorities as *"anarchic"* and *"without the least respect for the logging area"*. SEBC was described as a flagrant example of a company violating all kind of forestry laws. The Cameroonian government warned that the type of forest (mis)management as practised by SEBC is *"putting at stake the entire forest policiess to promote sustainable forestry management in Cameroon"*.

This concession had previously already been exploited by other logging companies: SFID and SOTREF¹⁰. Since the allocation of the concession in 1997, two cutblocks¹¹ have been approved for exploitation in the concession; AC n° 2 in 1998-1999 and AC n°3 in 1999-2000. The government inspection team revealed that none of the conditions to (legally) exploit this concession were fulfilled (no management plan, no forest inventory, no provisional management plan for the first 5 years etc ..)¹². The Ministry of Environment & Forestry (MINEF) concluded that, due to non-respect for the prescribed legal conditions to operate this concession – Gustave Mbeng would be excluded from participation in the next round of concession allocation per public auction¹³. It is yet unclear what the legal status is of the logs that Hazim has been logging in this concession (as a matter of urgency it needs to be clarified whether or not the logs come from an approved cutblock (eg AC n°2 or AC n°3) – a field inspection in this area is highly recommended. But the fact that none of legal conditions to exploit this concession were fulfilled, more than two years after the concession has been allocated, clearly indicate that the current logging operations by Hazim can by no means be regarded as a sustainable operation....

3.4.2. The SFDB-concession / UFA 10-029

MINEF¹⁴ inspected SFDB's¹⁵ concession in december 1999 (UFA 10-029, 46.922 hectares) and found several illegal activities. The boundaries of the concession were not demarcated nor was the licenced cutblock where actual logging was going on. MINEF noted that SFH was logging undersized trees. MINEF noted that the SFDB still had no global management plan – more than two years after they obtained the concession. But logging has started in the meantime. Also lacking were the first 5-year management plan¹⁶ and the annual forest inventories¹⁷ for the area that is logged in that specific year. SFDB was fined 11.000.000 F CFA.

¹⁰ SFID belongs to the French group Rougier, SOTREF is owned by the brothers Decolvenaere (of Belgian origin)

¹¹ licenced cutblocks = assiettes de coupe octroyées

¹² MINEF, dec-1999. Rapport de la mission d'évaluation des progrès réalisées sur les concessions forestières (UFA) attribuées en 1997 dans la province de l'est. p. 28

¹³ The Cameroon Tribune, march 24th 2000.

¹⁴ MINEF = Ministère de l'Environnement et des Forêts. (The Cameroonian ministry of forestry)

¹⁵ SFDB - Société Forestière de Dja et de la Boumba.

¹⁶ "Premier plan de gestion quinquennal"

¹⁷ L'Inventaire annuel d'exploitation sur les superficies à couvrir chaque année.



Photo: SFH logs with the marking of UFA 10-029, Villa Garcia / Spain (July 2000) / ©Greenpeace

(4) Time to act on Hazim!

The key findings of some of the most recent field inspection were recently presented (first week of July) at the highest level in the Ministry of Forestry and at the donor community (The World Bank and DFID-UK). After a major debate, the public auction round to allocate new concessions was delayed for yet another 5 days. It was decided to exclude Hazim from participating in this public auction process to prevent them from obtaining a new concession¹⁸. It is yet unclear how Hazim will be fined for the major illegal activities that were discovered by the end of last month.

¹⁸ The Cameroon Tribune, July 12th 2000.

(4) Europe is buying Hazim's illegal timber !



Photo: SFH logs in the French port of Dunquerque - July 2000.
© Greenpeace / K. Lowyck

A lot of European countries are importers of Hazim's timber. In the last couple of months, Greenpeace noted the arrival of Hazim timber in various European ports including Spain, UK, France, Belgium & Germany. Greenpeace is contacting customers of Hazim in various countries to inform them about Hazim's illegal operations in Cameroon and urge them to stop buying from a company with such a criminal record.

(5) Stop illegal logging in Cameroon

Greenpeace believes it is unacceptable that European timber importers keep buying timber from a company as Hazim with such a bad social and environmental record that blatantly operates in disrespect of the law. Greenpeace hopes the European timber industry will express concern over the rampant illegal logging activities in Cameroon.

In Spain two major tropical timber importers, Maderas Iglesias and Maderas Redondo contacted Hazim's agent in Spain to announce that they would no longer be buying from Hazim. A third company, Maderas Zumlava has contacted Greenpeace to get more information on the illegal logging activities in Cameroon before they decide on next steps. The Spanish timber importers federation and the Spanish Ministry of Environment are currently discussing with Greenpeace on next steps. They intend to contact the Cameroonian authorities to express strong concerns over the amount of illegal logging in Cameroon.

MINISTÈRE DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT
ET DES FORÊTS

REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN
Paix - Travail - Patrie

DIRECTION DES FORÊTS

SDAFF

SN

Yaoundé, le 25 AOÛT 2000
2 8 8 0
N°...../AMINEF/DF/SDAFF/SN

ATTESTATION DE REGULARITE DES ACTIVITES D'EXPLOITATION FORESTIERE

Le Ministre de l'environnement et des Forêts soussigné, atteste que les bois exportés par la Société Forestière HAZIM et COMPAGNIE (SFH & Cie) depuis le 1^{er} Juillet 2000 sont d'origine camerounaise et ont été exploités dans des titres d'exploitation forestière régulièrement délivrés par le Ministère de l'Environnement et des Forêts.

Ces bois ont fait l'objet de contrôle à différents niveaux notamment aux chantiers d'exploitation en vue de s'assurer du respect des normes d'exploitation réglementaires et aux ports d'embarquement pour s'assurer de l'exactitude des spécifications, de la provenance des bois et de la régularité des titres.

En outre, dans le cadre de l'exécution du Plan d'Action d'Urgence élaboré avec le concours de différents partenaires tant nationaux qu'internationaux en matière de conservation et de gestion durable des écosystèmes forestiers, les bois frauduleusement exploités sont régulièrement saisis et vendus aux enchères publiques sans préjudice des amendes payées par les opérateurs économiques reconnus coupables des infractions à la réglementation forestière en vigueur.

En foi de quoi la présente attestation est établie et délivrée à l'intéressée pour servir et valoir ce que de droit.-

Le Ministre de l'Environnement
et des Forêts
Sylvain NAAH NDONGA

In Belgium, two major importers of tropical timber wrote to Hazim to ask for clarifications about the information about illegal logging activities as provided by Greenpeace. Hazim did not respond directly to these letters but, interestingly, the Belgian timber importers got a letter back from the Cameroonian Minister for

Environment and Forestry stating that all Hazim's timber that has been exported since the first of July 2000 was logged in a "regular" way.

Hazim is a very strong example of the scale of illegal logging in Cameroon but, unfortunately it's only a case study. In the last 10 months, several government reports made it blatantly clear that illegal logging is widespread in Cameroon and that numerous European companies are also deeply involved in it. Recent government reports revealed that several large European companies including the French RC Coron, SIBAF (Bolloré), Thanry¹⁹ subsidiaries (SAB, SEBC and CFC), the Italian SEFAC (Vasto-Legno) and the Cameroonian companies COFA and MMG (with the Dutch company Wyma as a partner) were all found to be logging illegally!! Additional Greenpeace-research indicates that the French logging company Rougier (SFID) is also involved in recent illegal logging activities.

But the illegal logging is certainly not restricted to the large forest concessions (UFA's) only. A recent study²⁰ financed by the World Bank reveals that the Cameroonian government is losing millions of dollars due to fraudulent practices and illegal logging. The least regulated type of logging licence, the *Vente de Coupe*²¹, is in fact currently the most prevalent. In 1998-1999, ventes de coupes accounted for almost 200.000 of the 350.000 hectares of forest allocated for cutting in that period. The study indicates that in some areas up to 90 per cent of these logging licences are operated illegally. Harvesters were found to be logging without a licence, overlogging the designated area, logging far beyond the defined boundaries of the licence and logging after the licence had expired. While most of these cutting licences are owned by Cameroonian nationals, they are commonly subcontracted to foreign logging companies, which then export the majority of this illegally harvested timber.

Greenpeace is extremely concerned about the scale of illegal logging in Cameroon. More than half of Cameroon's timber ends up in EU-countries, yet consumers and governments seem to be unaware of the large scale illegal logging in Cameroon and the social and environmental effects of these destructive operations.

The donor community (The World Bank & DFID, UK Department for International Development) is currently in a dialogue with the Cameroonian government to determine how best to improve monitoring capacity on the ground as a primary tool to curb illegal logging. Discussions are on their way to establish a monitoring body in which both (an) NGO(s) would work together with the Cameroonian government (MINEF) to inspect forestry operations. The Belgian federation of tropical timber importers did send a letter to the Cameroonian Ministry of Environment and Forests in which the idea of establishing an independent monitoring agency in Cameroon is supported.

¹⁹ The Cameroonian subsidiaries of Thanry (SAB, CFC, SEBC, J Prenant, Propalm and CIBC) are said to be taken over now by Chinese investors.

²⁰ Milol AC, Pierre J-M (2000).

²¹ Vente de Coupe (VC) – a short term licence of a maximum of 2500 hectares. The least regulated type of logging permit. The ventes de coupes are even rarely depicted on government maps.

Greenpeace believes it will be absolutely crucial that this monitoring body consist of highly competent and experienced people, that the monitoring body can act independently, gets full access to all relevant government documents and has a clear mandate to inspect all forestry operations in the field.

Greenpeace urges European governments and the timber importers federations in the European countries :

- To publicly express concern over the scale of illegal and destructive logging in Cameroon
- To contact the Cameroonian government and express full support for the idea to establish an independent monitoring body to control forestry operations in Cameroon.

Stopping illegal logging and corruption in the forestry sector is a first vital step on the long path to sustainable forestry . It is not too late for Cameroon to organize a more sustainable forest management that respects the environment and the people depending on the forest. But it seems like all attempts to promote sustainable forestry in Cameroon have failed so far. Illegal logging seems to be escalating in many areas in Cameroon.

Unless these current developments can be halted immediately, the people of Cameroon will rapidly lose their most precious natural resource, their tropical rainforests, with very little economic benefits in return.

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