

Text N°8: **Organized Crime and Tropical Deforestation**

With more than 80 percent of Earth's forests already destroyed, saving the planet's natural forests has become a prime environmental issue with activists seeking out the main sources of deforestation. The United Nations Environment Program recently released an alarming report indicating organized crime is responsible for 50 to 90 percent of illegal logging in tropical countries in the Amazon basin, Central Africa and South East Asia.

The UNEP released "Green Carbon: Black Trade" in association with international police organization Interpol. The illegal timber trade, which accounts for 15 to 30 percent of the logging industry, is estimated to net between \$30 million and \$100 billion per year. Taking into account the many concealment techniques used by the cartels, the report found that illegal logging rates are on the rise. "Illegal logging is not on the decline, rather it is becoming more advanced as cartels become better organized," the authors wrote in the report's preface.

Yet import and export records cannot be trusted as a complete record of legal logging, as organized crime units often forge permits, hack trade databases and even bribe officials to transport the timber. "What we're shocked about is the sheer scale of timber that goes unaccounted for," report author Christian Nelleman told *New Scientist*.

Since the practice is so profitable, criminal organizations will likely continue their illegal deforestation efforts at the expense of the environment and indigenous populations. The report calls for the creation of an internationally coordinated enforcement unit to curb the practice. Without an organized effort between countries, cartels could evade authorities, moving their base of operations from one location to the next, the report concludes. "As long as the profits in illegal logging remain high and the risks of getting caught are very low, there is little incentive to abandon illegal practices," the authors wrote in the report.

Though the immediate effects of deforestation are well-documented – mainly natural forests disappearing – the long-term repercussions for the planet could be severe. Carbon emissions, as a result of deforestation, have been confirmed to play a critical role in climate change.

**Sara Gates, *The Huffington Post*, October 03<sup>rd</sup>, 2012.**