



Position of the Platform on Forests and Communities on the proposals of the European Union and the United Kingdom on imported deforestation policy

From 1 to 2 October 2020, the Platform for Forests and Communities, women leaders, representatives of indigenous communities and traditional authorities met in Yaoundé, Cameroon, as part of their participation in the public consultation opened by the European Union and the United Kingdom for the implementation of their policy and legislation on imported deforestation.

After a thorough analysis of the EU priorities and the UK proposals, the participants formulated the following position, to be forwarded to the EU and the UK Government, the participants:

- Welcome the initiative of the European Union and the United Kingdom as a recognition of the urgent need for forest protection and of the role of current models of production of certain agricultural raw materials for export in accelerating deforestation in forest countries;
- Agree that it is important to look beyond agricultural raw materials to different levels of the value chain to ensure that bans also apply to finished products containing agricultural raw materials resulting from deforestation;
- Note that this is a new instrument for regulating investors, which acts on demand in two of the main consumer markets, geographically and historically close to the forest countries of Africa, and which complements the administrative regulation exercised by the host country of the investment, which has so far proved to be deficient;
- Support the prospect of a dialogue between the European Union, the United Kingdom on the one hand, and the Government of Cameroon on the other hand, in the search for a long-term solution to the fight against deforestation, in particular by assisting in the reform of forestry and land tenure legislation, and by putting in place a more efficient land and resource management system;

However, the participants suggest that particular attention be paid to the following issues:

1. Respect for Human Rights in the processes of access to land and production

The participants ask :

- a. Zero tolerance for this criterion, with the aim of imposing on companies a behaviour respectful of human rights in all phases of their activity. Particular attention should be paid to respect for the rights of environmental activists and land rights, and the rights of minority social groups (women, indigenous communities).

- b. Consideration of workers' rights, which should extend to their working conditions, health and safety on sites, and the reduction/prohibition of toxic inputs.
- c. Respect for women's rights in concessions, particularly with regard to access to land and resources necessary to ensure food security for families and communities: in many cases, the creation of plantations deprives communities of living space and exposes them to structural poverty;
- d. Preventing the risk of the disappearance of the lifestyles and cultures of local and indigenous communities, and their displacement, due to the disappearance or degradation of their land as a result of the establishment of agro-industries;
- e. The establishment of grievance mechanisms in companies, and the publication of monitoring activities;

2. Concerning the material scope of the measures

We suggest that the measures envisaged should also extend to the following areas:

- a. The financial sector, to ensure that funding agencies (and not only companies directly involved in production) also contribute through their funding decisions to the effort to combat deforestation in the production processes of agricultural commodities
- b. Prevention of corruption in all stages of the process of accessing land rights and managing plantations. Participants noted that corruption can undermine the fulfilment of legal and contractual obligations and lead to actions detrimental to the state, local and indigenous communities and the environment;

3. Concerning the focus on the respect of legality

The participants call on the European Union and the United Kingdom to :

- a. Go beyond the objectives of respecting legality in production processes and integrating **sustainability** criteria into their system: Cameroon's legislation, like that of all Central African forest countries, remains very weak on essential points such as large-scale land allocation procedures, land use planning to improve cohabitation between forest areas and non-forest projects carried out in the forest area (agro-industries, but also mining, major infrastructure works, etc.).), recognition of the rights of local and indigenous communities, equitable benefit sharing, redress for those affected by the investment, etc.
- b. Focus on legality alone will lead the EU and the UK to continue to support production processes that comply with legislation but are unsustainable and detrimental to the maintenance of forest cover;
- c. Encourage producer countries to systematise the obligation to use the Free Prior Informed Consent of communities at all stages of the production process.

4. Concerning the geographical scope of the measures

Although the Participants understand that the European Union and the United Kingdom cannot determine the content of legislation in producer countries or in other

markets for products that may contribute to deforestation, they encourage both entities to support legislative processes aimed at achieving sustainability in the production of agricultural raw materials in forest countries in order to prevent deforestation. They also note that this will create a levelled playing field and prevent producers from turning to markets other than those of the European Union and the United Kingdom by perpetuating unsustainable production processes.

5. Prevention of adverse effects

Many small producers sell raw or processed products in the UK or the EU, either directly or through projects set up to help them access these markets. Participants request that :

- a. The measures envisaged should not be detrimental to these small producers, as access to these markets is crucial to their livelihoods.
- b. Support mechanisms for improving market access for small producers be put in place to help them meet the criteria established by the European Union and the United Kingdom.