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News Release

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G8 ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT MINISTERS AGREE ACTION ON ILLEGAL LOGGING AND PUT CLIMATE CHANGE IN AFRICA ON AGENDA FOR G8 HEADS

The world's richest nations agreed today to implement measures to tackle climate change in Africa and illegal logging.

Margaret Beckett, UK Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Hilary Benn, UK Secretary of State for International Development agreed actions where G8 members could make a real difference to tackle illegal logging and addressed the impact of climate change on Africa's development. This came out of the first-ever meeting of G8 Environment and Development Ministers, held in Derbyshire under the UK Government's Presidency of the Group of Eight Countries.

On the impact of climate change on Africa, Ministers:

- noted that African countries are particularly vulnerable to climate variability and climate change and, like many developing countries, are already experiencing more dangerous climate effects.
- discussed the urgent need to assist Africa to reduce vulnerability by building resilience to climate variability and by developing capacity to adapt to climate change

- committed to supporting the need for an effective international response to build scientific capacity and integrate measures to address the impact of climate change in international development assistance and national development plans.

Margaret Beckett said:

'It is disturbing that scientists tell us that climate change will mean Africa can expect more frequent droughts and more serious floods. This will severely affect farming, health and infrastructure, undermining efforts to tackle Africa's poverty. Our discussions today represent a significant step forward in tackling the growing problem of climate change and will help to save lives. I am particularly encouraged by the growing engagement of development and finance Ministers in recognising the impact of climate change, this greatest of global threats.'

In reaching their conclusions, Ministers discussed a specially commissioned report, '***Climate proofing Africa***' which outlined what little is known about the impact of climate change on development and poverty in Africa; the weaknesses of the African network for observing the climate; the lack of scientific and technical capacity; and what more needs to be done to help "climate proof" Africa's development.

Mrs Beckett added:

'Today the UK announced that we are committing a further £100K towards regional predictions of climate change for Africa and £400K over the next three years towards a new multi-country initiative on advancing knowledge, capacity and networks in support of climate change in Africa.

The priority for Africa must be to reduce its vulnerability to existing extremes of climate and to prepare it for longer-term effects in future. This means helping Africa to build its climate monitoring capacity and improving the way we manage climate risks in development.'

On illegal logging, Ministers agreed to tackle both the supply of and demand for illegal timber by:

- taking steps to halt the import and marketing of illegally logged timber, for example through border control and voluntary bilateral agreements;
- doing more to support developing countries' own efforts to enforce forest law and improve governance;
- using government procurement to ensure that governments do not contribute to the problem of illegal logging; and
- reviewing progress on these commitments next year.

Hilary Benn said:

'This is a very important agreement. Illegal logging is a problem shared by those producing and exporting timber and timber products and those that import them. Tackling illegal logging will enable the poorest countries to manage their forests better, reduce poverty and protect natural resources. It does not make sense to give development assistance on the one hand while importing cheap illegal timber on the other. The UK is also delighted today with the support shown by our G8 partners to practical action, so that we can try to improve people's livelihoods and stop further damage to the environment.'

Ministers discussed how G8 members could support timber producing and exporting countries to implement domestic reforms. They also discussed how G8 countries must ensure that, as major importers of timber, their own policies supported good practice.

Ministers agreed to look at what action they could take to prevent illegally logged timber from entering their markets including preventing the import of illegally logged timber through voluntary partnership agreements with timber producing countries.

Ministers also looked at what governments could do as consumers of timber and timber products, particularly implementing or extending public procurement policies that discriminate against illegally logged timber.

Hilary Benn added:

'Attacking poverty and managing the environment are key goals of the UK international development programme. Forests play an important role in meeting those goals – but illegal logging directly undermines them. The UK central government has already set an example by seeking to buy timber only from legal sources – and today DEFRA is announcing over half a million pounds over three years, to extend guidance on legal timber procurement to the wider public sector, and to share our knowledge on procurement with the G8 and other countries.

We are also going to support producer countries, particularly those in west and central Africa. Today DEFRA is also granting £1 million for forestry biodiversity projects under the Darwin Initiative. We will continue to support the innovative EU scheme that will deny access to EU markets for illegally harvested timber.

Ministers also welcomed the recently published Commission for Africa Report, and discussed proposals to reform the humanitarian aid process and the importance of biodiversity in sustainable livelihoods.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The UK has the Presidency of the Group of Eight Countries (G8) in 2005. The G8 Environment and Development Ministerial was the first time that G8 Environment and Development Ministers have met. It was held on 17 and 18 March at Breadsall Priory, Derbyshire.
2. Africa and Climate Change are the two key issues that the Prime Minister Tony Blair has highlighted for the G8 and EU Presidencies that the UK will chair in 2005.
3. The report 'Climate Proofing Africa' is available on the DfID website: www.dfid.gov.uk
4. The G8 Action Programme on Forests, which reported in 2002, put the issue of illegal logging on the international agenda. Governments, the private sector and NGOs now have a much better understanding of the development and environmental implications of illegal logging. They have also gained experience of implementing reforms. More on illegal logging can be found on www.illegal-logging.info
5. The EU's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan, centres on a licensing system for legal timber exported from partner countries.
6. In July 2000, the Government made a commitment that its central departments and their executive agencies would seek to purchase their timber and timber products from legal and sustainable sources. Since then the Government has commissioned research and advice on implementing this policy, undertaken consultation with stakeholders, raised the awareness of central departments, promoted the policy to the wider public sector, published guidance and commenced the development of a central point of expertise on timber (CPET).
7. The Sustainable Development in Government Reports provide an indication of the progress being made by central departments in England. The Third Annual Report 2004 reveals that certified products accounted for 71% of the money spent on construction timber and 78% of the money spent on manufactured timber products during the financial year 2003/4. In addition to that, much of the uncertified timber purchased was supplied with some evidence of legal and sustainable sources.
8. The CPET concept is a one-stop shop for public sector buyers and their suppliers to get expert advice and guidance on purchasing timber from legal and sustainable sources. It will help departments accelerate progress on implementing the policy, persuade consumers outside central Government to adopt similar policies, push more producers and suppliers into engagement, and convince doubters that the policy is viable.

9. The Darwin Initiative is funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Since its launch in 1992, it has committed over £35 million to over 300 projects in more than 100 countries. These new forest projects are just some of those which will be announced shortly – totally about £7 million of funding. Projects are selected on their potential to build capacity for biodiversity conservation in the host country and sustain long-term benefits.
10. Over the past 13 years, the UK Government and the UN Development Programme have funded the UK Met Office Hadley Centre to produce and distribute a regional climate model that can be run on desktop or laptop computers so that it can be used in any part of the world to generate detailed climate change scenarios.
11. Such regional climate models give better predictions of climate change than global climate models especially for changes in extremes. The model has been used widely in the developing world including in Africa. We will build on our successful collaborations with African nations by funding this new project.
12. This brings together UK climate expertise from the Hadley Centre, Tyndall Centre and the Stockholm Environment Institute, and through the University of Cape Town's Climate Research Group will support regional climate assessments in twelve African nations, and work with a number of pan-African bodies.

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Quotes from NGOs on G8.

Illanga Itoua of Greenpeace said:

'Illegal logging must be tackled legislatively through public procurement. The G8 countries can do much to put this policy into practice rapidly. It is important to ensure that laws in producing countries are equitable. If they are not fair, they should be reformed.'

Patrick Alley of Global Witness said:

'This is an essential first step towards sustainability'.

Dr Benito Muller of the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies said:

'It is extremely important to have joint ministerials to tackle the particular complexities of climate change, including the involvement of civil societies. It is time to become coherent on this issue.'

Other NGOs jointly added:

'We want to work in partnership with the G8 to solve the problem of illegal logging. Together we can make it ancient history.'

'We believe that action on illegal logging is a shared responsibility of consumer and producer countries.'

Andy Robey of the Timber Trade Federation said:

'The UK timber trade only wants to trade in legal timber and it recognises the need to control illegal timber import. We call on other key markets and traders in the EU, US, Japan and China to join our efforts to buy only verified legal timber.'