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## Cameroon: Forestry Group Rougier accused in French Tribunal

On 22 March 2002, Master Council William Bourdon placed civil charges in the hands of Investigating Magistrates of Paris filed in the name of seven Cameroonian villagers condemning criminal destruction of property, forgery and the utilization of forgery, fraud, possession of stolen goods, and corruption of officials against both directors of the Doumé Affiliated Forestry Company (SFID) group and the Cameroonian Legal Society, as well as their mother corporation ROUGIER S.A.

These charges are the result of in-depth, on-site investigation by Friends of the Earth-France and SHERPA. The charges condemn what is essentially summarized as the illicit pillaging of forest resources to the detriment of Cameroonian populations, offenses which have motivated Friends of the Earth-France to form a private party in the suit.

For the villagers, these charges present the opportunity to see those responsible for the infractions committed identified and brought to justice, as well as the opportunity to be compensated for these offenses. They expect the French justice to guarantee an independent and impartial judge in this case. The local situation is corrupt as a result of the power of the forestry companies to deprive them of this fundamental right.

In the charges, the plaintiffs expect to advocate the fact that the Rougier S.A. Group, taking the clear overlapping and interdependence between the two entities into account, must be considered an accomplice to the acts committed by its affiliate SFID, as well as the associated French directors.

These charges against the ROUGIER S.A. group and its directors before French Tribunals constitute a first case for Friends of the Earth-France and SHERPA, and make clear the fact that an extraterritorial act on the part of private entities does not systematically guarantee impunity to these entities. Friends of the Earth-France and SHERPA, in cooperation with foreign associations, will continue their partnership through a network of foreign legal advocates to, upon the realization of a feasibility study, envision further initiatives both in France and elsewhere.

By: Frédéric Castell Friends of the Earth-France