
[Liberia: Danish firm DLH violates its own principles on wood purchasing](#)

Environmental and human rights organizations have recently sent an open letter to Danish timber trade corporation Dalhoff Larsen & Horneman A/S (DLH Group), calling it to stop dealing with Liberian logging companies which, besides being responsible for the serious process of deforestation that has been occurring during the last decade in Liberia, have been also found involved --according to a United Nations report-- in a number of illegal activities both in Liberia and in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

The forests of Liberia constitute one of last remaining blocks of closed canopy tropical rainforest, a vital part of the Upper Guinea Forest of West Africa and one of the most threatened biodiversity hotspots in the world. These forests, which contain over 2000 species of plants, of which 240 are valuable timber species, have been devastated during the past decade as the result of the greed of international logging companies that invaded the country, coupled with the attitude of the Liberian government, that promotes their activities. As a result, the livelihoods of rural communities are now further threatened, as deforestation has separated portions of rainforest, while the activities of the logging companies have caused the destruction of houses, crops and sacred forests. (see further details in WRM bulletins 44 and 45).

The UN report provides abundant evidence about the interrelationship between the timber industry and a number of illegal activities. Two of the major timber companies are Oriental Timber Company (OTC) and the Royal Timber Corporation (RTC) and both are commercially related with DLH.

Some of the illegal activities detailed in the UN report are linked to Gus van Kouwenhoven, a member of President Taylor's inner circle and "responsible for the logistical aspects of many of the arms deals." Van Kouwenhoven is directly involved in RTC and OTC (as general manager in the former and chairman in the latter) and through OTC he "organizes the transfer of weaponry from Monrovia into Sierra Leone". The report also states that "van Kouwenhoven, linked to Liberia's timber industry, provides a large amount of unrecorded extrabudgetary income to President Taylor for unspecified purposes." Incredibly enough, van Kouwenhoven is also on the board of the Liberian Forestry Development Authority (FDA), the government body assigned to monitor and document forest practices and exports.

The timber industry has not only been involved in illegal arms and diamond's trafficking but has also, according to the United Nations report, supported Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF), that together with a group of military overthrew the country's elected President in May 1997. The report found "unequivocal and overwhelming evidence" that Liberia has been actively supporting the RUF at all levels and that roads built and maintained for timber extraction are also conveniently used for weapons movement within Liberia, and for the onward shipment of weapons to Sierra Leone.

The above findings should be sufficient to make DLH revise its purchasing policy in Liberia, particularly because the company claims to have "a good knowledge of the origin (raw material) of the timber products traded." In this case, there are two possibilities: either the company does not have this good knowledge or it knows and does not care. In both cases, it would be violating its own

stated principles. If it is true that for DLH “the existence of sustainably managed forests is a long-term commercial prerequisite” and if the company truly feels that it “has a public role to play in the preservation of world forests”, then it should act accordingly and dissociate itself from logging in Liberia and embrace the UN report's recommendation of establishing “a temporary embargo on Liberian timber exports, until Liberia demonstrates convincingly that it is no longer involved in the trafficking of arms to, or diamonds from, Sierra Leone.