

**Global Witness**

**Independent Observer in Support of the**

**Application of the Law in the Cameroon**

**Forestry Sector**

**Independent Report No. 000En**

**Location: Yawanda, Sanaga Maritime**

**Date: 26 to 27 June 2001**

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# **1 Introduction**

On 21 June 2001, at a meeting with the Minister of Environment and Forests (MINEF), the World Bank suggested that an urgent mission should be undertaken in Sanaga-Maritime. The Central Control Unit (CCU) proposed that a team currently working in the coastal area should take up the brief because they were already in the region. The Bank underlined the importance of the case and presented the Minister with a copy of a letter dated 1st June 2001, from Robert Lacey (World Bank), asking MINEF to investigate a case reported by the youth association of the village of Yawanda on 28th January 2000.

Prior to this meeting, Global Witness had spent 3 days preparing maps and documents in the MINEF building because the CCU, the Forestry Directorate and partners/funders had agreed that a mission should go into the Southern region, as a matter of priority. Indeed, there were reports of illegal extraction taking place.

Global Witness was notified at 4pm on the Friday that the mission plans had been modified and that the following Thursday the team would go to Yawanda instead of going to the South. We regret that a change of plan and the resultant delay left a very limited amount of time in which to prepare maps for the mission, especially because the MINEF building is closed at weekends. Neither Global Witness nor the CCU could obtain maps of the logging operations to be visited before departure. Equally we regret that despite the relative importance of the case, the team already in the coastal area had not themselves looked into the case, the initial report on which had been made 18 months earlier.

The first mission for the project thus went to Yawanda rather than to the South, where illegal logging was allegedly taking place. As in the case of all our earlier missions, information on the mission's target zones were sent to the companies concerned before we left. We are concerned that the diversion of the first mission to Yawanda did not facilitate the gathering of substantial evidence from the Southern region following the 3 days of preparation by Global Witness.

## **2 Outcome of the field mission**

Date of mission: **26 to 27 June 2001**

Title: **Authorisation to salvage logs 027**

Company: **Panagiotis Marelis**

2 inspection missions were carried out in Yawanda and conclusions cover: official proof of breaches by the Panagiotis Marelis company; evaluation of the area exploited illegally; and proposals for damages and interest. Other observations made by Global Witness relate to:

### **2.1 Validity of the certificate**

The nature of an Authorisation to salvage logs (ARB) implies that a certain operations (Sale of Standing Volume, Forest Management Units, plantation, company works, etc...) had left a number of felled trees in the forest. As mentioned above the goal of an Authorisation to salvage logs is to provide a profitable means of clearing this

timber. This system has however led to significant abuses. Before Government measures on these titles which made them illegal, they were used in a similar way to logging titles. Some Authorisations to salvage logs were granted in zones where trees were sometimes still standing.

In the case of Panagiotis Marelis and ARB 27, no previous operation seems to have existed in the zone that could have justified the assignment of a salvage operation. According to the villagers, no felled trees were there before the assignment of the certificate, which led them to doubt the validity of the certificate. This suspicion was reinforced by the official publication of valid logging titles in the Cameroon Tribune on 11 December 1999; it did not include ARB 27. This led villagers to write a letter to the Minister of Forestry and to the World Bank. The villagers noted that they had requested a copy of the official boundaries from the company but had not managed to obtain any map or description.

## **2.2 Non-existent or poor resurfacing of the road**

According to villagers, logs removed from the forest carried the brand ARB 22 and Yawanda residents, doubting the validity of the certificate, blocked the road in order to prevent continued extraction. The company contacted the Sub-Prefect and 2 policemen were sent to calm the most militant villagers. Tensions grew as a result, as the population called on Panagiotis Marelis, by way of compensation, to repair the road and the church, and to build a school and a football pitch. In March 2000, the company presented a certificate with the new brand of ARB 27. Because of heavy rain the Panagiotis company had to suspend its activities and promised to carry out works on its return. On that return, the company was accompanied by 8 policemen, who beat up/mistreated/bullied those villagers who resisted. Extraction thus went ahead without the resurfacing of the road (specified in the law binding field book), or any other works.

The resurfacing of the road was provided for by the Panagiotis Marelis company's field book. According to the villagers, not only was this work not carried out, but the state of the road had got substantially worse due to the repeated passage of Panagiotis Marelis loggers along it. If the company had resurfaced the road and it then deteriorated after the company left, this would prove it had been poorly resurfaced. The very bad state of the road is confirmed by the fact that the radiator of the CCU vehicle was broken during the first visit, and by photographs of the new Global Witness vehicle during the 2<sup>nd</sup> visit, after a difficult passage along the road.

## **3 Recommendations**

Recommendations were made in the 2 joint CCU/Global Witness official reports. Other recommendations:

It is advisable that the Panagiotis Marelis company, at its own expense, should resurface the road so that it is adequate for long-term use. Alternatively, another fund, supplementing the damages and interest for illegal extraction proposed by the official reports, could be created. This fund should correspond to the total cost of works necessary, to be paid for by Panagiotis Marelis.

## 4 Appendices

Photographs of the Global Witness vehicle with 800 kilometres on the clock, after travelling the road to Yawanda.

