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Press release

Malagasy government's decree for precious wood export will unleash further environmental pillaging

Recently Madagascar's transitional government issued two contradictory decrees: first, the exploitation of all precious woods was made illegal, but then a second allowed the export of hundreds of shipping containers packed with this illegally harvested wood.

Madagascar's forests have long suffered from the abusive exploitation of precious woods, most particularly rosewoods and ebonies, but the country's recent political problems have resulted in a dramatic increase in their exploitation. This activity now represents a serious threat to those who rely on the forest for goods and services and for the country's rich, unique and highly endangered flora and fauna.

Precious woods are being extracted from forests by roving and sometimes violent gangs of lumbermen and sold to a few powerful businessmen for export. Madagascar has 47 species of rosewood and over 100 ebony species that occur nowhere else, and their exploitation is pushing some to the brink of extinction. Those exploiting the trees are also trapping endangered lemurs for food, and the forests themselves are being degraded as trees are felled, processed and dragged to adjacent rivers or roads for transport to the coast. No forest that contains precious woods is safe, and the country's most prestigious nature reserves and favoured tourist destinations, such as the Marojejy and Masoala World Heritage Sites and the Mananara Biosphere Reserve, have been the focus of intensive exploitation. Currently thousands of rosewood and ebony logs, none of them legally exploited, are stored in Madagascar's east coast ports, Vohémar, Antalaha, and Toamasina. The most recent decree will allow their export and surely encourage a further wave of environmental pillaging.

Malagasy civil society, conservation and development organisations and the international community are united in lamenting the issue of the most recent decree, in fearing its consequences and in questioning its legitimacy. Consumers of rosewood and ebony products are asked to check their origin, and boycott those made of Malagasy wood.

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CAS California Academy of Science

CI Conservation International

DWCT Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust

EAZA European Association of Zoos and Aquaria

ICTE Institute for the Conservation of Tropical Environments

MBG Missouri Botanical Garden

MFG Madagascar Fauna Group

The Field Museum, Chicago

Dr Claire Kremen, University of California, Berkeley

Dean Keith Gilless, University of California, Berkeley

Robert Douglas Stone, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

WAZA World Association of Zoos and Aquariums

WCS Wildlife Conservation Society

WWF World Wide Fund for Nature

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