



Illegal logging nets organized crime up to 100 billion dollars a year

A joint report produced by INTERPOL and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) highlights the extent of illegal logging and timber laundering activities by organized crime groups.

Below are examples of illegal activity:

- In 2008, Brazilian authorities said hackers working for illegal logging cartels in the Brazilian state of Pará gained access to transport and logging permits, enabling the theft of an estimated 1.7 million cubic metres of forest. A Brazilian federal prosecutor accused 107 companies, 30 ringleaders and some 200 individuals of involvement, and sued these companies for almost USD 1.1 billion.
- In 2009, another Brazilian federal prosecutor investigated a scam allegedly involving some 3,000 companies in the timber sector, where illegal timber was 'eco-certified' and exported to the US, Europe and Asia.
- In Indonesia, the number of logs allegedly produced through plantations increased from 3.7 million cubic metres in the year 2000 to more than 22 million in 2008. Estimates from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) suggested that less than half the plantations actually existed, reflecting a massive organized laundering operation.
- In Kalimantan, Indonesia, a bribe for a logging permit for around 20 km² costs between USD 25,000 and USD 30,000. Import-export discrepancies suggest as much as a threefold difference in claims between officially exported and actually imported timber between Kalimantan and Malaysia – suggesting massive tax fraud.
- In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), more than 200 rangers in the Virunga National Park, famous for its gorillas, have been killed over the last decade defending the park boundaries against militias operating a charcoal trade estimated at more than USD 28 million annually.
- In Uganda, the report describes incidences of military personnel escorting loggers through border check points from the DRC to bring high-value illegal timber onto local markets for sale.