

PNG FOREST INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION (PNGFIA)

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Environmental NGOs critiques of forestry fail to withstand critical review. Time to support PNG national interests – Forest industry leader.

Port Moresby – The Executive Officer of the PNG Forest Industries Association (PNGFIA), Mr Bob Tate, today called on environmental NGOs to work with forestry companies to build the capacity of PNG's tropical forest and commodity industries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to boost the PNG economy.

He was speaking on the release of a review of a report published by the Centre for Environmental Law (CELCOR) entitled "Bulldozing Progress: Human Rights Abuses and Corruption in Papua New Guinea's Large-Scale Logging Industry".

Mr. Tate said the CELCOR report made wide ranging criticisms of the forest industry. He said they included allegations there had been sexual abuse of employees, that the timber industry collaborated with police in the shooting of villagers and that the industry at large had engendered gun running and human trafficking.

"The review examines every allegation in detail and finds that most extreme allegations have little or no substantiation and the general allegations do not stand scrutiny," said Mr. Tate.

"The report is on the PNGFIA website so anyone can see the facts for themselves," said Mr. Tate.

Mr. Tate said the report had been used to try to damage the interests of PNG timber industry.

CELCOR used the report to try to trigger an investigation by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) into allegations timber companies in PNG had engaged in human rights abuses, said Mr. Tate.

The Australian Conservation Foundation, which co-authored the report, used it pressure the ANZ Bank to cease providing financial services to the PNG timber industry and to support the request for the OECD investigation.

"Given the lack of substantiation for the allegations, it is not surprising that campaign signally failed," said Mr. Tate. "The review reveals that ANZ did not respond to the blandishments and the Australian Treasury ruled that there was no case to respond to the corruption allegations under OECD rules."

Mr. Tate said that despite this, CELCOR was still campaigning against the forestry industry in PNG inside and outside PNG. He said its NGO counterparts in Australia and Europe were lobbying governments to ban imports of PNG timber. "They seem to have little regard for the impact of their activities on PNG's rural poor," Mr Tate added.

“The PNG Forest Industries Association calls on CELCOR to act to protect the thousands of Papua New Guineans employed in the timber industry and to cease trying to damage exports of timber and jobs,” said Mr. Tate.

He said it was also time to stop the constant references to the Malaysian owners of large PNG timber businesses.

“This type of innuendo is totally out of place in a country like PNG where ethnicity is a very sensitive issue, as recent events have shown,” he added

Mr. Tate said it was disappointing to learn that the funding for the CELCOR report was provided by Caritas Australia, a Catholic relief agency. Mr. Tate also observed that ICCO, a Dutch organization which had spun off from Dutch protestant churches, funded CELCOR.

“I wonder if these organizations know how their money is being used.” concluded Mr. Tate.

Background

The report “CELCOR’s anti-forestry campaign in Papua New Guinea” was prepared by international consultants, ITS Global. The full text is available on the website of the PNGFIA – www.fiapng.com.pg

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