



PRESS RELEASE

**Anti illegal logging operation in Papua cuts flow of logs,
but timber elite untouched**

12th May 2005, Jakarta: As an unprecedented enforcement operation against illegal logging in Papua Province draws to a close, the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) and Telapak today urged the Indonesian government to increase its efforts to apprehend the influential bosses responsible for massive timber theft.

“The Last Frontier” report published by EIA and Telapak in February exposed the world’s largest timber smuggling racket, estimated to be worth around one billion dollars a year in merbau logs from Papua to China. Indonesia has had a log export ban in place since 2001.

In response the Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono launched a huge crackdown – Operation Hutan Lestari II – led by the national police and supported by the military. As of 2nd May the operation is reported to have netted 173 suspects and seized over 385,000 m³ of logs. It has also affected the market for merbau timber, with shortages and price rises reported in both Indonesia and China.

Speaking in Jakarta today Telapak’s Forest Campaigner M. Yayat Afianto said “Although we recognise the operation has had an immediate affect on reducing illegal logging, the operation will be ineffective if the major criminal networks are not broken. The government is well aware of some of the politicians and top officials in Papua and Jakarta behind illegal logging yet we see no evidence of them being investigated.”

Even during the government’s crackdown EIA/Telapak have monitored some shipments of merbau logs escaping to China without being seized by the Chinese authorities. The Chinese response has been unsupportive. “It is vital that Indonesia uses existing international agreements immediately to co-opt Chinese support to close down this illegal trade” said Julian Newman, Head of Forests Campaign at EIA.

“We urgently call on the Government of Indonesia to place merbau logs and sawn timber on Appendix 3 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species to provide the legal mechanisms for all countries to seize illegal merbau shipments.”

The NGOs expressed hope that this operation is only a first step and marks a turning point in the fight against illegal logging in Indonesia. They pledged to work with their network to monitor the government follow-up to the operation including prosecutions and auctions of seized timber. “If the timber mafia are effectively removed it will give a

chance to the people of Papua to benefit from their own natural resources” said M Yayat Afianto.

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Editor's Notes

- Over 70 per cent of Indonesia's original frontier forests have been lost.
- Indonesia has the world's worst deforestation rate, with an area the size of Switzerland being lost every year.
- Indonesia's Papua Province forms the western part of the island of New Guinea. With intact forest cover at around 70 per cent, New Guinea contains the last substantial tracts of undisturbed forest in the Asia-Pacific region.
- The government of Indonesia banned the export of all logs in October 2001.
- Under Chinese customs law it is an offence to falsely declare the origin of imports.
- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) is signed by most countries including China, Indonesia and all others relevant to the trade in merbau.
- China's log imports have risen from one million cubic metres in 1997 to 16 million cubic metres in 2002.
- In December 2002, the governments of Indonesia and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding to combat illegal trade in forest products.
- EIA is an independent environmental non-profit group based in London and Washington DC. More information at www.eia-international.org
- Telapak is an independent environmental non-profit group based in Bogor, Indonesia. More information at www.telapak.org .