

EU/Honduras Voluntary Partnership Agreement: forest law enforcement, governance and trade in timber products to the EU

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The Committee on International Trade adopted the report by Karin KARLSBRO (Renew, SE) on the draft Council decision on the conclusion of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Honduras on forest law enforcement, governance and trade in timber products to the European Union.

The committee responsible recommended that the European Parliament give its consent to the conclusion of the agreement.

The EU published its Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan in 2003. The plan aims to combat illegal logging around the world.

By entering Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) with timber producing third countries, the EU opens for imports of legally sourced timber and timber products to enter the Single Market. These agreements are binding trade agreements. They also contribute to better regulation and governance of the forest sector in the exporting country.

Honduras was the first Latin American country to initiate and successfully conclude negotiations for a VPA with the EU. These negotiations started in 2013 and were completed in 2018. Honduras is also the first VPA partner that has included indigenous peoples as a separate interest group at the negotiating table.

For the EU, this agreement is in line with its objectives under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, the Aichi Targets of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, and the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030. Within these frameworks, it is committed to, *inter alia*, encouraging sustainable forest management, combating deforestation and forest degradation and promoting sustainable development.

The Voluntary Partnership Agreement between the EU and Honduras:

- establishes the framework, institutions and systems for the timber legality assurance system for the FLEGT licensing scheme;
- sets out the framework for monitoring compliance and for independent evaluation of the system;
- includes a clear commitment by Honduras to develop legislation to ensure that timber imported in Honduras has been legally harvested in compliance with the applicable legislation in the country of harvest;
- establishes a mechanism for dialogue and cooperation between the EU and Honduras on the FLEGT licensing scheme, via a Joint Implementation Committee;
- establishes principles of stakeholder participation, social safeguards, accountability and transparency, and mechanisms for complaints on, monitoring of and reporting on implementation of the Agreement.

The Agreement makes provision for import controls at the EU's borders, as provided for in Regulation (EC) No 2173/2005 on the FLEGT licensing scheme and Regulation (EC) No 1024/2008 laying down detailed measures for implementing it.