

Letter to the Editor - Sunday, 22 November 2009

### Daylight robbery played out in Paris

Letter to the editor

I was there in Paris on Wednesday 18 November 2009. It's a day I will never forget.

What I saw and heard was scandalous, it sickened me. I sat in awe as one by one the players painted a picture of human rights abuse on a grand scale. And no, I am not referring to the World Cup play-off between Ireland and France. Beside this, the football controversy pales into insignificance.

I was there to witness and support the press announcement of the lodgement of a complaint by Global Witness before a French Public Prosecutor against one of the world's leading timber and wood products wholesalers. The complaint graphically spelled out that, during the civil war in Liberia from 2000-2003, Dalhoff, Larsen and Horneman (DLH), knowingly bought vast quantities of 'conflict' timber from unscrupulous Liberian companies that provided support to Charles Taylor's brutal regime and sold it on to other timber traders across Europe.

By importing timber from forest concessions operated by unscrupulous and corrupt logging companies, the French arm of DLH stands accused of the handling of and profiting from goods obtained from logging concessions operating illegally and in an environmentally destructive manner.

EU countries still imports large quantities of illegally logged timber and wood-based products with complete impunity. European states need to implement legislation in order to stop this scandal and judges need to come down hard on any proven illegal behaviour.

Ireland is a significant player in this field as an estimated 60% of all tropical timber used in this country is deemed to be of illegal origin. Just Forests are calling for a National Timber Procurement Policy to be put in place immediately in order to stop this destructive practice. We want the selling and profiting from illegal timber to be an offence and severely punished under Irish law.

It's an astonishing fact that an area of rainforest the size of Croke Park disappears every second. That's 86,400 Croke Park pitches of rainforest destroyed every day, or over 31 million Croke Park pitches of rainforest lost every year. Illegal logging is often seen as one of the driving forces. It's time to play fair and give people in developing countries a fair deal and fair price for their forest resources.

Just like football, there are certain 'rules', 'caps' and 'goals' we must abide by and obey if we are to deal effectively with biodiversity decline and abject poverty and avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Ensuring our timber needs comes from responsibly-managed forests is part of the solution. I urge your readers to be as passionate about affording people in developing countries 'fair play' as they are about the outcome of last week's football match in Paris.

Yours sincerely,  
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