

PRESS RELEASE

1st Meeting of the Joint Monitoring and Review Mechanism of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement

Accra, Ghana, January 29, 2010

In November 2009, Ghana became the first timber-producing country to sign a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA or Agreement) with the European Union (EU). The VPA aims to ensure that only timber from legal sources is exported from Ghana to the EU market. In addition to establishing essential elements of a licensing scheme, the Agreement is underpinned by a wide range of policy and legal reforms that will engender good governance, transparency, and accountability in the forestry sector of Ghana. To ensure the effective implementation of the VPA, the Agreement establishes a Joint Monitoring and Review Mechanism (JMIRM), a body that will conduct periodic reviews of VPA implementation.

From the 27 - 29th January 2010, Ghana hosted the first Joint Monitoring and Review Mechanism meeting in Accra. The JMIRM is established under the Agreement to facilitate the implementation of the VPA; provide recommendations for capacity building; and assess the social, economic, and environmental impacts of the Agreement. As envisaged under the Agreement and agreed by the parties, the JMIRM will meet at least once a year to discuss the status of implementation. The JMIRM is co-chaired by the Minister of Lands and Natural Resources (MLNR), the Honourable Collins Dauda and Mr. Luis Riera, Director, DG Development, Brussels and sets up a joint secretariat to be hosted by the EU Delegation in Accra and the Forestry Commission.

During the meeting, the parties discussed a set of procedures to guide the conduct of JMIRM business and an Action Plan for 2010. The Action Plan sets forth specific activities, among others, drafting and endorsement of rules of procedures, the development of a communications strategy and steps either party will undertake to promote trade and the FLEGT license. In addition to these activities, the JMIRM will produce annual public reports reviewing the effectiveness of actions taken under the agreement.

During the meeting, Ghana provided an update on the implementation status highlighting progress on the piloting stage of its wood tracking system, a vital component of the Legality Assurance System (LAS) under the VPA. The Legality Assurance System establishes institutional and procedural arrangements to verify the legal origin of timber through a verification and licensing scheme for all commercial timber products including those destined for international and domestic markets. The update also demonstrated Ghana's progress in developing institutional arrangements to effectively manage the LAS.

The Minister of Lands and Natural Resources, the Honorable Collins Dauda, pledged Ghana's political support and commitment to the successful implementation of the VPA. He indicated that Ghana entered into the VPA with the EU "not only because of the opportunities to maintain Ghana's share of the European timber market but also because of the governance opportunities that the initiative presented" to the forestry sector in particular and Ghana as a whole. The Minister underscored the necessity to build "the necessary synergies with other initiatives like REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation)" as well as of government initiative on plantation development.

Mr. Luis Riera, Director of DG Development, Brussels congratulated Ghana for paving the way as the first country to conclude a VPA with the European Commission. He encouraged Ghana to build upon and continue the participatory approach it had established during the negotiation stage through further multi-stakeholder involvement. In support of the EU's commitment to forest governance in Ghana, Mr. Riera referred to ongoing discussions to provide additional resources for the forestry sector.

The next meeting of the JMRM will be held in Accra in October 2010 following an assessment of Ghana's wood tracking system pilot.