PRESS RELEASE

LAO GOVERNMENT MAKES FINAL PREPARATION FOR FLEGT NEGOTIATION: INITIATIVE FOR IMPROVED FOREST GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

(For immediate release)

Vientiane, 15 December 2015: The Government of Lao PDR embarks on preparing for the negotiation of a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) with the European Union in 2016, in the framework of the EU’s Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT), through a 3-day technical meeting. This is part of the Government initiative to ensure improved forest governance and sustainable forest management in Laos. This “Technical Session on FLEGT in Lao PDR”, to be held between 15 and 17 December 2015, is being jointly organised by the Department of Forest Inspection, EU Delegation to Laos, EU FLEGT Facility hosted by the European Forest Institute (EFI), the GIZ project Support to the Lao EU-FLEGT Process (ProFLEGT) and WWF.

“The call for this Technical Session aims to explain and share details with EU regarding the Lao Government’s objectives for a VPA process as well as anticipated benefits and challenges, and how it relates to other national initiatives in the forest and timber protection sector, prior to engaging the first VPA negotiation with EU,” said Mr. Chansone Senebouattalath, Vice Minister of Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and Vice Chief Negotiator for the VPA negotiations. “We are also keen to share our thinking on communication for FLEGT to inform and engage stakeholders in the process, as stakeholder participation is the key requirement from the EU on FLEGTVPA,” he added.

“The EU welcomes the decision by the Government of Lao PDR to engage in official negotiations on a FLEGT VPA and the mobilisation of relevant stakeholders in preparing for this” said Mr. Michel Goffin, EU Charge’ d’ Affaires to Lao PDR. “The EU is confident that the investment made in the preparatory process has already contributed to the process of building good understanding and widespread support for the VPA process amongst Lao stakeholders. It will be crucial to ensure the participatory nature of future negotiations,” he added.

“Lao PDR is working towards strengthening forest governance in the country,” said Mr. Khamphout Phandanouvong, Director General of Department of Forest Inspection, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. “The FLEGT VPA is a main avenue contributing to this. Good governance of the forest sector will allow us to maintain our forests for future generations, further develop opportunities for wood processing in the country, add value to our products, create employment opportunities in the forest sector and open a wider range of export markets. Once the FLEGT VPA is fully operational, timber products from Lao PDR will be in full compliance with the EU Timber Regulation which promotes placement of legal timber on the EU market and its
trading partners’. Lao companies will also gain easier access to other markets such as ASEAN, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Japan,” he added.

Over the past years, the EU and Laos have engaged in a constructive collaboration and dialogue on the FLEGT Action Plan and the EU and its Member States have been providing the Government and other stakeholders representing the private sector and civil society with information and technical assistance to prepare for VPA negotiations.

During the technical meeting the Lao delegation will share progress related to FLEGT VPA in Laos, particularly in relation to the political and technical level structures, involvement of stakeholders in the process including both central and provincial level, development of timber legality definition, apart from the process and steps involved in launching VPA negotiations.

As part of the Action Plan on Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) to combat illegal logging globally, the European Union (EU) is concluding Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPA) with timber producing countries. A VPA is an international trade agreement to reduce illegal wood harvesting and promote legal timber trade.

Laos has started to negotiate such an agreement with the EU, with assistance from the GIZ project Support to the Lao EU-FLEGT process (ProFLEGT).

ProFLEGT is a joint initiative of the Lao Government and the German Development Cooperation. It is working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (through the FLEGT Standing Office under the supervision of the Department of Forest Inspection, DOFI), Ministry of Industry and Commerce, and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, as well as other Government agencies, civil society organisations, academia and timber processing industry.

In Laos, WWF is working with the Department of Forest Inspection (DoFI) to implement its FLEGT project in support of the Lao EU-FLEGT process in the two pilot provinces (Khammoane and Attapeu provinces). WWF takes a solutions-oriented, integrated and local to global approach that seeks synergies with relevant stakeholders to influence drivers of deforestation and degradation.
NOTES FOR EDITORS
In 2003 the EU published a Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) action plan to help combat illegal logging in countries from which it imported timber. A key element of the FLEGT Action Plan is a voluntary scheme to ensure that only legally harvested timber is imported into the EU from countries agreeing to take part in this scheme. The internal EU legal framework for this scheme is a Regulation adopted in December 2005, and a 2008 Implementing Regulation, allowing for the control of the entry of timber to the EU from countries entering into bilateral FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) with the EU.

A key element of a FLEGT VPA is the development and implementation of a timber legality assurance system (TLAS) which comprises a national timber legality definition, a system of supply chain controls, procedures for timber legality and supply chain verification, a FLEGT licensing scheme; and independent auditing of the entire system.

Once agreed, the VPAs include commitments and action from both parties to halt trade in illegal timber, notably with a license scheme to verify the legality of timber exported to the EU. The agreements also promote better enforcement of forest law and promote an inclusive approach involving civil society and the private sector.

For further information on Lao EU-FLEGT Process: http://flegtlao.com/

For further information on ASEAN Forest Policy: http://www.asean.org/

For further information on the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade initiative: http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/9interventionareas/environment/forest/forestry_intro_en.cfm
www.euflegt.efi.int

For further reading on the European Timber Market and the EU Timber Regulation: http://www.cbi.eu/market-information/timber-products/eutr-guide

For further information on understanding timber flows and control in Lao PDR: http://www.euflegt.efi.int/publications/-/document/25520

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