

Case Study: The Trade in Illegal Mahogany

Concern is growing at Greenpeace International about the problems caused by the trade in illegal mahogany. In the Brazilian Amazon, mahogany trees have been cut down and transported overseas to the USA, UK and Europe, where the wood is used to make expensive furniture and other items. It has often been exported using forged documentation that identifies the logs as cedorana instead. A stash of mahogany timber worth US\$7 million was found in 2001, which led to the prohibition of mahogany exports, but it appears that the trade continues to go on. There is concern not only with the felling of so many trees but also with the destruction of wide areas of the Amazonian rainforest which occurs in the process. Mahogany is now an endangered species of timber that could face extinction if governments do not act to protect it. Nicaragua and Guatemala have proposed that mahogany should be controlled by the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and pressure is being put upon the Brazil to comply with this. Greenpeace are playing an active part in this campaign, asking people to write to the Brazilian President to request the listing of mahogany as an endangered species.

<http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/news/our-role-in-stopping-the-illeg>

Questions:

1. How can we understand the illegal trade in mahogany as a global phenomenon?
2. Why do you think Western countries place such a high value on this material?
3. How might strategies of 'sustainable development' be employed to protect the Amazonian rainforests?
4. In defining this trade as one that affects the whole earth, what kind of universal rights and values do the protesters appeal to?
5. How have Greenpeace used the global media to raise awareness and motivate people to take political action?