

Linda McAvan MEP. Timber products.
European Parliament plenary session Strasbourg, July 6th 2010 (EN)

Mr President, it is very late now and I do not think I should distract us from the idea that this relates to one of the most important votes we will have this week in this Parliament. It is important for our citizens, judging by my postbag and the number of e-mails I have received. There is an online petition, which, about four hours ago, had 125 000 signatures – and the number is going up every minute – urging us to stick with this proposal tomorrow.

It is important for the climate, as everyone has mentioned, but I think, as the Commissioner has said, it is most important for the millions of people who live in the world's poorest countries and whose livelihoods are being destroyed by illegal logging. Let us take Madagascar, where 100 000 rosewood trees were illegally chopped down last year, each tree worth more than the average GDP in that country. No wonder illegal logging fuels criminality in Madagascar. The civil war in Liberia, mainly funded through illegal logging, killed 250 000 people. It fuelled the war in Cambodia in the 1990s and it is the enemy of democracy. Global Witness calculates that 15 tonnes of timber crosses from Burma to China every seven minutes, helping to prop up that despicable regime.

Illegal logging deprives millions of people of a better chance in life because billions of dollars are lost in tax revenues to governments. Human Rights Watch says that USD 2 billion have been lost in tax revenues in Indonesia. That is enough to provide basic health care for 100 million people in that country and is more than the entire health budget of that country.

So what we are doing today is a first step. It is not perfect, as the Commissioner has admitted, but it is a lot better than where we started off with a kind of voluntary code with which we would have due diligence. I would like to thank the Commissioner for going further than his predecessors. I would like to thank the Spanish Presidency for pushing for this agreement and I would like to thank Hilary Benn, the former UK Secretary of State, for sticking his ground in Council and pushing for a more ambitious agreement.

Tomorrow we will make a start. I think Satu Hassi and the shadows have done a very good job, but we have to maintain consumer pressure and public awareness. I hope the Commission will also play a role in doing that and in getting good enforcement of this very important new law.