

Speech by H.E. Juma Al Kait

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H.E. Dr. Thani Al Zeyoudi, UAE Minister of Climate Change and Environment,

H.E. Estelle Ondo, Gabon Minister of Forest Economy, Fishing and Environment,

Stakeholders of the Forestry Industry,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Good Morning.

I would like to express my pleasure at speaking before such a distinguished audience today on the legal aspects of logging and the global efforts being exerted to ensure that legally traded timber products meet the new requirements of the global market.

This is an excellent topic to discuss at the 20th edition of the ATIBT Forum.

My Friends,

Over the past years several international efforts aimed at achieving environmental sustainability have resulted in highly positive outcomes. Many countries have joined global initiatives to curtail and eradicate illegal logging by imposing strict policies and regulations on the importation of timber and related products based on sound legal principles.

The US, for one, amended the Lacey Act in 2008 to include a wider variety of prohibited plants and plant products and further emphasize that every transport and trade of timber to the US should meet all statutory and state regulations in the US as well those of the exporting country.

The EU, **on the other hand, enforced a Due Diligence System alongside EU Timber Regulations in March** 2013. The European bloc already had a 'Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade' (or FLEGT) action plan in place then.

As for Japan, it has implemented the "Green Konyuho" or "Goho Wood" system to ensure that government procures legal timber that came from legal sources.

Distinguished Guests,

The United Arab Emirates, as you are aware, is a regional and global trading hub which enjoys numerous business advantages.

With its strategic location at the crossroads of the East and the West, the UAE is ideally positioned to service and access a diverse range of markets spanning the Middle East, North and South Africa, the Asia Pacific, and the CIS.

Moreover, the UAE has world-class infrastructure, provides easy access to qualified manpower, and offers convenient air connections, making it an extremely well-connected and business-friendly destination.

This has naturally contributed towards making the UAE a hub for the trade of timber and wood products, many which are direct imports into the UAE, with others passing through as re-exports to the country's ports and Free and Industrial Zones.

Just to give you a clearer idea of the UAE's involvement in this important trade through figures, according to the International Trade Centre, the UAE ranked among the world's top 30 timber and wood importers in 2015.

In 2015, the UAE imported USD 1.33 billion worth of timber and wood products, while our re-exports stood at USD 250.2 million.

During the first nine months of 2016, we imported USD ⁹²⁰~~919.7~~ million worth of timber and wood products, and re-exported USD 147.4 million.

Our major trading partners for this commodity include China, Malaysia, Romania, Germany, Thailand, Oman, and Austria.

In 2015, global timber imports dropped 10 percent from the previous year to USD 132 billion. However, over the past five years the timber trade has grown at an average of 3 per cent and is estimated to have been worth USD 138 billion in 2016.

With this steady growth in mind as well as its serious ramifications on the environment and the sustainability of the industry if logging and trade laws are not strictly enforced, the UAE is fully committed to ensuring that all timber and wood products traded domestically and internationally are legal and certified.

I look forward to the valuable information and insights we will gain on the legalities of timber logging and trade during today's seminar. I hope that the different stakeholders taking part in this event will leave with a full awareness of the strong commitment of the UAE and its GCC partners towards upholding laws on logging and the trade of wood and wood products. We highly appreciate your cooperation in improving the legal aspects of timber trade across the Middle East, especially in developing mechanisms for better endorsement and traceability of sources.

Through your help, we will move closer towards our goal of ensuring that all timber traded in and through the region are legal and coming from legal sources as well as handled in accordance with the requirements of the global markets.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

I hope that we will use this valuable opportunity to fully recognize and support the timber legality system which will play an invaluable role in supporting the sustainability of our forests around the world.

I welcome you all to Dubai and hope that you have an enjoyable stay.

Thank you.