MEDIA RELEASE

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EIA's 'Rosewood Racket' Report Prompts International Probe into Nigeria-China Timber Trafficking

Washington, DC – This week, in response to the dire rosewood crisis in West Africa and particularly in Nigeria, the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) informed its 183 member countries of exceptional control measures. From now on, all "kosso" rosewood permits issued by Nigeria, the world's largest exporter of rosewood over the past years, will have to be verified by the Secretariat of the Convention and a special CITES mission will soon be sent to the country.

In November 2017, the Washington, DC-based Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) released the Rosewood Racket report, the result of a two-year undercover investigation following the corrupt timber trade from the fragile forests of Nigeria to high-end furniture boutiques in China. Triggered by skyrocketing Chinese demand, over a billion US dollars' worth of rosewood has been illegally exported from Nigeria between 2015 and 2017. Part of it had been laundered by traffickers through a sophisticated scheme that involved approximately 3,000 questionable CITES permits officially issued by Nigerian authorities. With these permits in hand, traffickers smuggled over 1.5 million logs to the Chinese market – the equivalent of three Empire State buildings. This happened despite environmental protection policies adopted by Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Environment.

Alerted by EIA's report and evidence, the CITES Standing Committee discussed the Nigerian rosewood trafficking crisis during its meeting in Geneva last month. The Committee took a decision that was validated by the Secretariat and officially communicated to all Parties of the Convention – including almost all member states of the United Nations – on January 15, 2018.

While acknowledging the mechanism of cooperation established between Nigeria and China, the official notification formally requests that the Parties to the CITES Convention "*not accept any CITES permit or certificate for Pterocarpus erinaceus issued by Nigeria unless its authenticity has been confirmed by the Secretariat.*" This represents a remarkable step under the Convention in order to better control the trade in this commercially threatened species and avoid massive fraud. Furthermore, in response to Nigeria's invitation, the CITES Secretariat will conduct an official inquiry – a "technical mission" – in the country. The investigation will focus on the key elements of what has been a monumental laundering machine for illegally harvested or exported rosewood logs: suspect issuance of thousands of CITES

permits, lack of coordination between the Ministry of Environment and Customs, and the general opacity of the process.

EIA Executive Director Alexander von Bismarck said: “Now that the problem of the illegal rosewood trade between Nigeria and China has been formally acknowledged under CITES and exceptional measures have been agreed, we hope that all the parties involved will come together to end what is most likely one of the largest forest crimes of this century.”

Millions of rosewood logs were harvested and exported illegally from Nigeria when Amina J. Mohammed, the current Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nation, was Minister of Environment.

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Access the full report in English (high resolution): here.

Access the full report in English (low resolution): here.

Access the executive summary in English: here.

Access the executive summary in Mandarin: here

Watch the video in English: here.

Read the animated webpage: here.