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TIMBER EXPORT SUSPENSION ELATES CEJ

Centre for Environment Justice - CEJ has welcomed the New Dawn Government's decision to suspend the issuance of Timber Export Permits. CEJ Head of Research and Studies Freeman Mubanga says the move will help control the extraction of the depleting natural resource. Mr. Mubanga states that the development will foster appropriate timber trading mechanisms that will increase revenue.

He says it is high time that Zambia takes forest accountability seriously to conserve and utilize timber sustainably. Mr. Mubanga notes that the disparity between timber exports and revenue is huge. He says Zambia has been exporting metric tonnes of timber of which the resulting revenues are highly questionable.

The CEJ Head of Research and Studies urges Government to take forest stock audits as a matter of national interest, going forward. He highlights that data available on forest utilization has been incomplete with figures missing for years. Mr. Mubanga adds that there is no clear distinction between indigenous timber and plantation timber. He says comparing figures for actual production with harvesting licenses has further revealed large gaps.

Mr. Mubanga stressed that FAO has estimated a production figure of 500,000 m³/ year, which is much higher than locally available figures. He says CEJ believes that now is the time for government to take an uncompromised step on the conservation of natural resource. Mr. Mubanga states that Government's decision is timely because of the current rate at which Zambia is losing out on its natural resources particularly the vulnerable forest resources.

He says substantial forest losses mainly attributed to charcoal production, clearing of large areas for farming and illegal logging have taken a huge toll on Zambia's timber trading potential on both local and international markets.

The CEJ Head of Research and Studies explain that inadequate forest stock audits have further contributed to poor management of natural resource reserves.

He says halting timber exports will promote accountability of the timber available both in the country and that being exported.