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For immediate release: 21 April 2010

Global Witness welcomes Dutch court decision to retry timber baron Guus Kouwenhoven for crimes committed during Liberian war

The Dutch Supreme Court has overturned a 2008 ruling by the Court of Appeal which cleared businessman Guus Kouwenhoven of charges of involvement in illegal arms deals and war crimes during the civil war in Liberia between 2000 and 2003. The Court of Appeal will now have to re-examine the case and bring a new judgment.

Global Witness, which first documented the involvement of Kouwenhoven in illegal logging and arms trafficking in its 2001 report, *Taylor Made*, welcomed the court's decision.

The 2008 ruling by the Court of Appeal had overturned an 8 year prison sentence for arms trafficking handed down by the Court of First Instance in 2006. Global Witness testified on both occasions, after securing a groundbreaking right to keep their sources confidential. Evidence from Global Witness investigations and reports was used by the Dutch prosecutors.

Kouwenhoven was head of the Oriental Timber Corporation (OTC) during the regime of President Charles Taylor, who waged a brutal war against the people of Liberia and Sierra Leone, funded largely through the sale of diamonds and illegal logging.

OTC, also known also as 'Old Taylor's Children' or 'Only Taylor Chops', was the most notorious logging company in the country and dominated the Liberian timber industry with 1.6 million hectares of concessions.

UN experts and eyewitnesses interviewed by Global Witness reported that it was active in organising weapons shipments, and that its own security personnel blurred with Taylor's armed forces and took part in military activities for the Liberian government. OTC money facilitated arms purchases.

In April 2003, President Taylor's spokesperson, Vaani Paasewe, confirmed this in a media interview: *"It is true that, as Global Witness has said in its report, revenues from Liberia's logging industry had been used to import weapons recently despite the UN arms embargo..."*

A 2000 UN Expert Panel Report on Sierra Leone referred to Kouwenhoven as a "...member of President [Charles] Taylor's inner circle" and "responsible for the logistical aspects of many of the arms deals [with the RUF]." In 2001 the UN Expert Panel Report on Liberia referred to him as "...one of the most influential businessmen in Liberia".

Kouwenhoven was placed on UN travel ban list in 2001 and in July 2003 sanctions on timber were put in place, on the grounds that timber was being traded by rebel and government forces in exchange for arms.

Patrick Alley, Director of Global Witness, said: "Charles Taylor's regime depended on revenues from the timber industry. OTC's operations in Liberia were illegal and under Kouwenhoven they paid large sums both directly to known arms dealers and into Charles Taylor's personal bank account, thereby supporting his brutal regime. The war in Liberia cost over 250,000 lives. No one who played a role in perpetuating this conflict should go unpunished."

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