

## **HUMAN RIGHTS DUE DILIGENCE (HRDD) AND RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS CONDUCT IN THE EU: In Connection to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)**

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FSC rests on three pillars: the social chamber, the economic chamber and the environment chamber. Together, the chambers create standards and rules for the system.

FSC has two important standards among many: first the Forest Management Standard and second the Chain of Custody.

The reason that it is important to understand this is that this is the way that the big players guarantee the origin of their timber; this is done through the standard Chain of Custody standard. In all simplicity, it can be explained as a standard that guarantee the origin of the wood, that the wood comes from a FSC managed forest. This is in line with examining the legal origin of the products as demanded as conditions in the EU's timber regulation.

Unfortunately, the FSC Chain of Custody standard lacks proper regulations concerning workers' rights in the industry. In the Forest Management Standard, there are better conditions.

BWI (Building and Wood Workers' International) and the social chamber have motioned on this for years, and right now it looks like the FSC board will incorporate ILO 8 in the Chain of Custody by the 2/5 2021. This is an enormous victory for the global unions within the forest sectors.

Still, this is not sufficient for a certification to be acceptable as a HRDD approved tool, one example is that IKEA buys over one million cubic meters of wood from Belarus. As known, this is the last dictatorship in Europe, and there is a lack of free trade unions in Belarus. If a company can trade FSC certified timber from Belarus and still claim that they have done a stable HRDD analysis, that answers the question of whether HRDD is reached through certification systems like FSC.

The question is also, whether EU timber regulation can be considered fulfilled with the help of these certification systems. The latest that was on the agenda in Europe was wood from the Ukrainian Carpathians that was harvested illegally and then FSC stamped and sold according to Ukraine's official paper as certified and legal timber.

### **Does the system work?**

My conclusion is that the certification systems that companies use cannot be accepted as responsible Due Diligence - it is a good tool but not enough. FSC does a lot of good. Forests are being protected, and so are workers in this system, but it is not enough.

We know that violations of workers' rights are common, we know that imported timber from Brazil and parts of Asia to the EU is illegal, and even if the wood is certified that doesn't mean that workers rights are protected.

But it is still a good tool, and with proper trade union monitoring and external revision of forest management, and the industries, it can make a good tool for HRDD in the future. But this requires trade union access to workplaces for certified companies, so the social criteria can be monitored and enforced.