

# Masalai i tokaut

*Number Fifteen: 7 December 2002*

## Aussie Government backs illegal logging, corruption and human rights abuses

**Undaunted by the controversy surrounding its sponsorship of the 2002 PNG Forest Industry Trade Fair, Austrade has announced that it will again collaborate with the Forest Industries Association in supporting the 2003 Trade Fair.**

**This is despite overwhelming independent evidence that the FIA's biggest financial backer, Rimbunan Hijau, is involved in illegal logging, political corruption and gross human rights abuses.**

**Once again it seems that Australian rhetoric on the need for good governance, the eradication of corruption, the defence of human rights and good environmental stewardship all take second place to greed and the need to service big business.**

**Meanwhile the FIA is already proudly advertising in the media its collaboration with the Australian government – a collaboration that only gives respectability to the corrupt and destructive logging industry and exposes Australia's real interest in PNG.**

---

The 2003 Forest Industry Trade Fair will be held in Port Moresby on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of March. The trade fair is being organised and funded by the Forest Industries Association in collaboration with the Australian Trade Commission.

The Forest Industries Association was set up in 1992 by Rimbunan Hijau to oppose forestry reform measures including new forestry guidelines introduced by the PNG government under the 1991 Forestry Act.

RH's political interference at that time prompted the present Prime Minister, Michael Somare, to call for the company to be deregistered.

The Forest Industries Association is primarily funded by its members through a levy on

log exports with RH contributing over 50% of the FIA's annual income.

In July, Rimbunan Hijau was condemned by the Ombudsman Commission in its report on the illegal Kamula Doso logging permit. The Ombudsman has ordered a full audit and careful monitoring of all RH logging projects but forest authorities have so far ignored this.

The police have also just begun a full inquiry into human rights abuses by police mobile squads employed by Rimbunan Hijau in Western Province. The Southern Region Commander has ordered the mobile squad based at the RH camp at Kamusie to return to Port Moresby while the inquiry is conducted.

Rimbunan Hijau has also been condemned in two National Intelligence Organisation reports released on the internet.

These reports find that the company is guilty of political bribery, the theft of forest resources and human rights abuses that have led to the complete breakdown of governance in Gulf Province.

In February this year RH was granted an illegal extension to its Wawoi Guavi logging permit. The extension was granted despite the protests of the local landowners and provincial forestry officers and in gross contravention of the procedures set out in the Forestry Act.

The Governor of Western Province, Dr Bob Danaya, has recently described logging company workers in his province, where Rimbunan Hijau is the largest operator, as being 'treated like slaves'.

In May 2001, Australian TV company SBS, broadcast a documentary program detailing the environmental damage and corruption endemic in the logging industry and making specific allegations against Rimbunan Hijau that included rape, forced prostitution, brutality, and other human rights abuses by company officials.

Yet despite all this evidence that builds an overwhelming case against Rimbunan Hijau, the logging industry and its lobbying organisation, the Forest Industries Association, the Australian government is happy to work in close collaboration with the FIA to promote Australian business interests.

024761

Site Counter