

The Last Great Ape Organization - LAGA

November 2009 Report



Highlights

- **A strong letter of support from 7 Ambassadors as LAGA faces threats in line of their work in wildlife law enforcement and the fight against corruption.**
- **3 dealers were sentenced this month.**
- **A dealer, also a recidivist who threatened the team with his gun was arrested in Djoum – South Region for illegally trading in protected wildlife species.**
- **LAGA holds a general meeting on how to tackle problems for a better functioning of the organization.**

General

This month was marked by a strong letter of support from 7 Ambassadors as LAGA especially the Director faces direct threats in line of work in wildlife law enforcement and the fight against corruption.

LAGA deals regularly with many threats – physical, political and legal. Basically the biggest wildlife dealer in Cameroon seems to have been trying to influence the court through corruption to put the LAGA Director behind bars as revenge and to escape justice after his arrest in 2007. But the debate that opened in court seemed to have little to do with reason or with law. The dealer lied under oath at least three times. The case file against him was reported to have “disappeared” and later in court, he claimed that no case was ever opened against him. Both the State Counsel and the Judge were unexplainably hostile. Nevertheless, **the international community took quick and unprecedented action to stand by LAGA and the LAGA Director as no fewer than seven ambassadors signed a strong letter of support** (see Appendix) sent to the Minister of Forest, Minister of Justice and the Prime Minister. Afterwards, the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife wrote a strong letter of support himself. The Ambassadors stated in their letter that they have supported the Director and LAGA’s work for a number of years and **see the success in fighting wildlife trafficking as one of Cameroon’s anti-corruption success stories.**

A well known dealer was arrested in Djoum – South Region for illegally **killing and trading in primates and other endangered wildlife species. He is a recidivist** who had been arrested several times before. His father and brother are well known dealers who had also been arrested. **He threatened the arresting officials with a hunting rifle.**

3 dealers were sentenced this month. The Court of First Instance of Bengbis (South) sentenced a dealer to **6 months in prison and to pay a total of 1.722.650 FCFA (about \$3500)** as fines and damages. He will be retained in jail in default of payment of the fines and damages. He was arrested in Somalomo – Dja Reserve for the killing of elephants. **He was arrested with a military gun and ammunition and he affirmed that the weapon was given to him by an officer of the Gendarmerie** in Messamena - East Region. In another case, the **Court of First Instance of Nkambe (North West) sentenced 2 dealers** to pay a total 647 248 FCFA (about \$1300) as fines and damages. They will be retained in jail for 21 months in default of payment of fines and damages. They were arrested for illegally killing and trading in 3 chimpanzees.

There was a LAGA General Meeting this month to **discuss about the problems** within the organization and **how to tackle these problems for a better functioning of LAGA** so as to **meet up with the set goals and conveniently carryout the mission of wildlife law enforcement and the fight against corruption.** Issues raised included the status of workers, field problems, financial issues, equipment etc.

Investigations

- **16 investigations** of varying lengths were carried out in **5 Regions** of Cameroon- West, South West, Littoral, East and Center.
- The Head of Investigations Department concerted with LAGA Legal Department on **how to get more information from dealers arrested** so as to target other dealers connected to them.
- Internet Investigations targeted 2 Internet wildlife dealers engaged in fraud in Bamenda – North West Region and Buea – South West Region. Investigations are still ongoing.
- One new candidate was interviewed this month and sent out on field tests.
- Field tests continue for another new candidate with encouraging results.

Operations

An operation was carried out this month with ECOFAC against 1 **subject who is also a recidivist**.

- **02/11/09** – a well known dealer was arrested in Djoum – South Region for illegally **killing and trading in primates and other endangered wildlife species**. **He is a recidivist** who had been arrested several times before. **His father and brother are well known dealers who had also been arrested. He threatened the arresting officials with a hunting rifle.**

Legal

- LAGA Legal Department carried out **15 missions** out of Yaounde- Centre Region: 1 in Mamfe (South West), 2 in Bafoussam (West), 1 in Dschang (West), 1 in Bazou (West), 2 in Douala (Littoral), 3 in Bamenda (North West), 1 in Nkambe (North West), 1 in Ntui (Centre), 1 in Bengbis (South) and 2 in Djoum (South).
- There are **14 dealers behind bars during this month**: 2 in the West Region, 1 in the East Region, 2 in the Littoral Region, 3 in South Region, 2 in the North West Region and 4 in the South West Region.
- **26 cases** were followed up by the Legal Department this month.
- **28 cases** are scheduled and being trailed in the court this month.
- **Prosecutions**: 3 dealers were sentenced this month
 - **11/11/09** - The Court of First Instance of Nkambe (North West) sentenced Mengang Mathew and Nwibin David to pay a total 647 248 FCFA (about \$1300) as fines and damages. They will be retained in jail for 21 months in default of payment of fines and damages. Mengang Mathew and Nwibin David were arrested for illegally killing and trading in 3 chimpanzees.
 - **25/11/09**- The Court of First Instance of Bengbis (South) sentenced Ebale Mfou Daniel to 6 months in prison and to pay a total of 1.722.650 FCFA (about \$3500) as fines and damages. He will be retained in jail in default of payment of the fines and damages. Ebale Mfou Daniel was arrested in Somalomo – Dja Reserve for the killing of elephants and illegally trading in the trophies of protected species.

Media front

- **51 media pieces** were produced and pushed through to radio, TV and written press including: 5 written press materials (3 in English and 2 in French), 40 radio news flashes (21 in English, 19 in French), 1 radio news feature in French, 2 TV news features (1 in English and 1 in French) and 3 radio talk shows in English.
- Guests include: The Minister of Forestry and Wildlife, LAGA Director, The traditional ruler of Bali Nyonga – North West Region, Head of LAGA Legal Unit, Focal Point CARPE, and Manager of CCORUD.
- Subjects focused on wildlife law enforcement including; crackdown ivory operations in Central Africa, elephant traffickers prosecuted in Mamfe court, Nkambe court proceeding of chimp dealers, prosecution of ivory dealer in Bengbis, circular on bush meat trade,

traditional ruler fight wildlife crime, ivory dealers in Central African Republic (CAR), Bangui (CAR) arrest of hippo teeth and leopard skin dealers.

- 28 media pieces in English, 23 in French making a percentage of 54.9% in English and 45.1% in French.

External Relations and Policy

- **LAGA deals regularly with many threats** – physical, political and legal. Basically the biggest **wildlife dealer in Cameroon has been trying to use bribes to put the LAGA Director behind bars, as revenge and to escape justice after his arrest in 2007**. But the debate that opened in court had little to do with reason or with law. The dealer lied under oath at least three times. Both the State Counsel and the Judge were unexplainably hostile. Nevertheless, the international community here took quick and unprecedented action to stand by me and LAGA as no fewer than **seven ambassadors signed a strong letter of support** (see Appendix) sent to the Minister of Forest, Minister of Justice and the Prime Minister. The US Ambassador then led and accompanied me to a meeting with the Minister of Justice, to raise the concerns. Afterwards, the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife wrote a strong letter of support himself. The Ambassadors stated in their letter that they have supported the Director and LAGA's work for a number of years and see the success in fighting wildlife trafficking as one of Cameroon's anti-corruption success stories.
- LAGA Director held a meeting with Global Witness on independent observers and links between wildlife crime and forest crime.
- Meeting between LAGA Director and Canadian High Commissioner, issue discussed were on good governance in the forest sector.
- Meeting in the Dutch embassy where by a presentation was made by the LAGA Director on corruption in the NGO sector and the APT-AID principle.
- Meeting in the National Assembly for the preparatory meeting of parliamentarians of the sub region for climate change meeting in Copenhagen.
- LAGA Director gave a presentation in Douala during a meeting with NGOs involved in the fight against corruption within the NGO sector.
- The Director General of the Ministry in Charge of Wildlife in Central Africa had a meeting with LAGA Director issue discussed, the replication of LAGA model in C.A.R
- The Coordinator of WCS for Africa held a meeting with LAGA Director to discuss on the assimilation of LAGA's experience in to WCS projects and WCS involvement in the replication of the LAGA model throughout the sub region.
- LAGA Director held meeting with TRAFIC concerning the failure and corruption in bush meat market operation and irregularities in auction of seized bush meat.
- A meeting was held between LAGA Director and the country Director of the World Bank concerning the situation of the forest sector and legal threat on LAGA.
- LAGA Director gave presentations to government forum responsible for the fight against corruption (CONAC, Anti-corruption ministerial cells, ANIF, National Audit Bench etc). The first was on the protection of denouncers and Whistleblowers and the second on corruption in the AID business and the APT-AID principles.
- LAGA Director held a meeting with "Agence de Développement – A2D" in Douala which represents a net work of more than 200 NGOs on their interest to sign up for the APT- AID certification.
- The LAGA Director and LAGA Head of Media and External Relations participated at the Congo Basin Forest Partnership meeting organized by the government of Cameroon and chaired by the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife. The **Minister called for increased support from the various partners in the sustainable management of forest and wildlife resources in the Congo Basin.**

Management

- There was a LAGA General Meeting this month to **discuss about the problems** within the organization and **how to tackle these problems** for a **better functioning of LAGA** so as to **meet up with the set goals and conveniently carryout the mission of wildlife law enforcement and the fight against corruption**. Issues raised included the status of workers, field problems, financial issues, equipment etc.

Activism Front

- A presentation by Tah Eric of the Department of Media and External Relations on MINFOF - LAGA partnership in wildlife law enforcement. The power point presentation describes the collaboration between LAGA and MINFOF in the enforcement of the 1994 wildlife law in Cameroon.

Finance

In preparation, will be made available shortly.

THIS MONTH IN PICTURES



The Director of LAGA (backing the camera), H.E. Elvis Ngole Ngole – Minister MINFOF (facing the LAGA Director), and the Head of Department Media and External Relations (second from right) during the Congo Basin Forest Partnership meeting organized by the government of Cameroon and chaired by the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife. The Minister called for increased support from the various partners in the sustainable management of forest and wildlife resources in the Congo Basin

Links of this month

- A network of dealers in the meat of protected wildlife species busted in Yaounde - National Television Broadcast. 3 members of network specialized in illegal trade in bush meat of protected wildlife species were arrested in Yaounde – Center Region. They have suppliers from the East, South and Central Regions and have a store with deep freezers in which they keep the killed animals.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87l4KvMk1a0>

Appendix

Annex 2 – A strong letter of support from 7 Ambassadors as LAGA faces threats.

EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

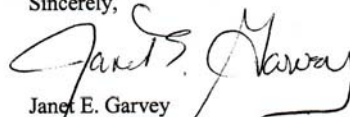
November 23, 2009

Dear Mr. Minister:

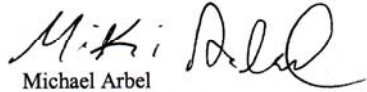
We are writing to express appreciation for your ongoing cooperation with and assistance to The Last Great Ape Organization (LAGA) and its Director, Ofir Drori. As you know, Mr. Drori is currently facing a court case which he is convinced is instigated by corrupt individuals trying to foil some of his work in combating corruption in the wildlife sector. We understand that Mr. Drori is sending you a complaint letter detailing concerns arising from this case and seeking clarifications from your ministry.

We have supported Mr. Drori's work for a number of years and see the success of his and your ministry's work in fighting wildlife trafficking as one of Cameroon's significant anti-corruption success stories. We hope that your timely intervention will help ensure that the current court case does not undermine LAGA or threaten Mr. Drori's ability to continue his important work. Thank you.

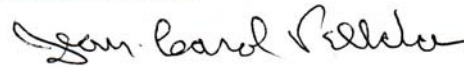
Sincerely,



Janet E. Garvey
Ambassador of the United States of America



Michael Arbel
Ambassador of Israel

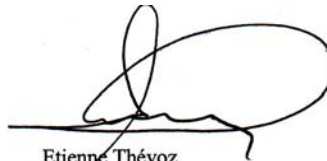


Jean-Carol Pelletier
High Commissioner of Canada

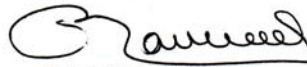


Bharat S. Joshi
High Commissioner of the United Kingdom

His Excellency
Elvis Ngolle Ngolle,
Minister of Forests and Wildlife of
the Republic of Cameroon,
Yaoundé.



Etienne Thévoz
Ambassador of Switzerland



Nicolette Saskia Bakker
Ambassador of the Netherlands



Mary Barton-Dock
Country Director of the World Bank

CC: H.E. Amadou Ali, Minister of Justice, Keeper of the Seals of the Republic of Cameroon, Yaoundé