

**VOLUNTARY PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT SUPPORT UNIT
(VPA SU)
17TH Street /Payne Avenue
Sinkor, Monrovia, Liberia**

August 13, 2015

For Immediate Release

Training workshop on the Liberia-EU Forest Law Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) Legality Assurance System (LAS):

The Voluntary Partnership Agreement Support Unit (VPASU) in collaboration with the Legality Verifications Department (LVD) of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) and SGS is organizing a 5-day Legality Assurance System (LAS) training workshop for government ministries, agencies and commissions (MACs) as well as other stakeholders who have roles and responsibilities in the implementation of the VPA. The workshop which is funded by EU and UK-Aid will run from Monday 17th August thru Friday 21st August 2015 commencing at 9:30 a.m. at the S. Trowen Nagbe United Methodist Church, 13th Street, Sinkor, Monrovia, Liberia.

The Legality Assurance System (LAS) aims to ensure that all allocation of forest use rights and of harvesting, processing and selling of timber in Liberia are legal. The LAS is a core element of the VPA ratified by legislature in 2013. It is based on the national legislation in force and existing government control systems and was designed by a national multi-stakeholders process which includes representatives of forest dependent communities, civil society organizations (CSOs), government agencies and the private sector.

The LAS sets out five elements of compliance: legality definition, verification of compliance with the legality definition, chain of custody system, FLEGT licensing and Independent audit. These core requirements and verification systematically determine compliance with the legality definitions and legislations that are applicable to the forest sector of Liberia. Compliance assurance is the responsibility of government bodies designated by the legislation and by the VPA.

The goals of the workshop are to: a) improve understanding of the Liberian VPA stakeholders on the LAS implementation procedures and b) to increase the knowledge of the stakeholders about their respective new roles and how to execute them.

The VPA provides a way for Liberia to tackle illegal logging, improve management of its forests and strengthen market opportunities for its timber products. However, to meet these expectations, significant strengthening of the capacities of government, the private sector and communities, supported by development cooperation, will be required. To this effect, UK-Aid and the European Commission agreed to contribute by establishing the VPA Support Unit and the FLEGT office to local capacities and coordinate all VPA related activities and, to engage the SGS as service provider to build, operate and to finally transfer the LiberTrace System to the Government of Liberia

The VPA SU, SGS and the Liberian FLEGT office roles are to strengthen the capacities of different institutions with roles in the forestry sector to enable them to meet their responsibilities as set out in the VPA and its annexes; and to ensure efficient and effective coordination of all VPA actors until Liberian institutions gain the necessary capacity to do this independently.

Institutions that are expected to benefit from this training workshop include key VPA implementers: the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) and the private logging operators. Others implementers are: Internal Affairs, Finance and Development Planning, Labor, Commerce and Industries and Justice; the National Bureau of Concessions, Environmental Protection Agency, National Social Security and Welfare Corporation, Liberia Revenue Authority. The VPA implementation monitors invited are: Civil Society Organizations and the Union of Community Forestry Development Committees as well as representatives from the University of Liberia and the Forestry Training Institute.

The Managing Director of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA), Hon. Harrison S. Karnwea, Sr. will deliver the opening remark.