



MEDIA RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Just Forests partnership to raise awareness of FSC certified African blackwood amongst Irish woodworkers and musicians

Sound & Fair has launched a partnership with Just Forests, an Irish non-governmental organisation, to raise awareness of the availability of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified African blackwood, which is widely used in traditional Irish musical instruments.

African blackwood is the most commonly used wood in the manufacturing of instruments such as traditional Irish flutes, as well as other woodwind instruments such as clarinets, oboes and bagpipes.

Due primarily to demand for the manufacture of woodwind instruments, the species has already disappeared from large parts of its East African range and is now confined to small areas of southern Tanzania and northern Mozambique.

Sound & Fair aims to establish a sustainable trade in African blackwood through a chain of custody linking all handlers of FSC-certified African blackwood, starting with forest harvesters in Tanzania and ending with instrument manufacturers and retailers in the West.

The chain of custody provides consumers with independent verification that the wood used to produce their instruments originates from a sustainable source, enabling them to make purchasing decisions based on ethical as well as quality considerations.

Tom Roche, Director of Just Forests says: *"For Just Forests this is a dream come true. We are delighted to partner with Sound & Fair in this very practical project through our Just Music initiative. This partnership will engage Irish musicians and Irish musical instrument makers with our fight against poverty and un-fair forest exploitation."*

The world's first harvest of FSC-certified African blackwood was carried out in December 2009 in a Village Land Forest Reserve managed by Kikole village, southern Tanzania, under the guidance of the Mpingo Conservation Project.

Kikole received a payment of around £1,200 in return for 15m³ of African blackwood, a sum 400 times greater more than they would have received before FSC-certification.

The wood is currently being processed at an FSC-certified sawmill in Tanzania and will shortly be exported to the UK.

Neil Bridgland, Sound & Fair Campaign Manager, says: *"Sound & Fair looks forward to working with Just Forests in reaching out to Irish woodworkers and establishing FSC-certified African blackwood as the standard source of supply for flute makers. Through FSC, flute manufacturers have an opportunity to facilitate a 'win-win' situation of environmental sustainability for the forests of Southern Tanzania and poverty alleviation for some of the world's poorest people."*

Ends

Notes to Editors

1. African blackwood is a slow growing tree that is highly prized for making clarinets, oboes and bagpipes. It has long been over-harvested across the continent to obtain its dark, lustrous heartwood. The wood is greatly prized for its strong structural qualities by international manufacturers of woodwind instruments. Although African blackwood is still relatively abundant in southern Tanzania, illegal logging is widespread and very poor, forest-dependent communities generally receive little benefit from logging on the land around their villages.

2. FSC is an independent, not-for-profit organization established to promote the responsible management of the world's forests. The FSC label provides a credible link between responsible production and consumption of forest products, enabling consumers and businesses to make purchasing decisions that benefit people and the environment as well as providing ongoing business value. FSC's forest certification standard is recognised as the global gold standard for responsible forest management.

3. Just Forests is a trading name for the Irish charity Irish Woodworkers for Africa (no.CHY10686). The charity was founded in 1989 in response to the trade in tropical timber and the resulting decline of global forests, thus making it one of Ireland's longest established non-governmental development education organisations working solely on global poverty-related tropical forestry/timber issues from a local development perspective.

4. The Mpingo Conservation Project (MCP) aims to conserve endangered forest habitats in Tanzania by promoting sustainable and socially equitable harvesting of valuable timber stocks, and with a particular focus on Mpingo, the Swahili terms for African blackwood. MCP holds an FSC group certificate (SA-FM/COC-002151) and grants FSC status to Village Land Forest Reserves that meet the required FSC criteria.

Background on the Sound and Fair Campaign

The Sound & Fair campaign aims to realise a sustainable trade in African blackwood through a fully-certified chain of custody linking village communities in Tanzania to woodwind instrument musicians in the UK.

By safeguarding a hugely valuable natural resource, Sound and Fair will help lift some of the world's poorest people out of poverty.

The Sound & Fair campaign is managed by Kilimanyika and funded by the Environment Africa Trust through a grant from Comic Relief.

Mpingo Conservation Project (MCP) is the Tanzanian partner responsible for managing village FSC-certification.

Fauna & Flora International, the environmental organisation, is a UK partner.

Further Information

www.soundandfair.org

www.justforest.org

Images and further and interviews available on request from:

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For technical information on African blackwood and its exploitation:

www.mpingoconservation.org.

