

## ENVIRONMENT

# KL rejects illicit timber trade claims

Kuala Lumpur, AFP

Malaysia has strongly denied environmental activists' claims the country is turning a blind eye to the smuggling of illegal timber from Indonesia.

Malaysian officials said the government had taken all necessary measures to curb the smuggling of illegal logs from Indonesia.

"We have strengthened our laws and enforced the laws," said Malaysia's primary industry Deputy Secretary-General Suboh Mohamad Yassin.

"As far as Malaysia is concerned, illegal logging is not an issue. The onus is on Indonesia to upgrade its laws."

He said there had been 122 arrests in connection with the illegal trade, with 12 cases involving ramin, and offenders were liable to mandatory jail sentence.

The Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) has distributed a report backing the claim to some 2,000 delegates to the Convention on Biological Diversity, now meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

The EIA and several United States NGOs have called on the US to impose trade sanctions against Malaysia over the smuggling of ramin hardwood, an endangered species found only in Indonesia and Malaysia, according to the agency's president Allan Thornton.

The evidence is documented in its *Profiting from Plunder* report which details how ramin is allegedly smuggled from Indonesia into Malaysia to be made into furniture for export. The operation employed false documentation and local officials who facilitated the illegal trade.

"Sanctions are always a last resort but we want all trade in ramin to be suspended for the time being until the Malaysia government has shown concrete evidence they have cracked down on the illegal trade," he said.

The EIA compiled the report following two years of investigations by the agency and its Indonesian partner Telapak.

The Malaysian Timber Council also rejected "the generalisations and grossly overstated claims" made in the EIA report and said the government did not condone any illegal trade in timber.