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Sierra Leone bans timber exports



Gola Forest (Copyright: www.visitsierraleone.org)

The government wants trees to be replanted

Sierra Leone has re-imposed a timber export ban because of what it says is indiscriminate plundering of forests by Chinese and other foreign companies.

"They just invaded and started doing what they felt like doing," Forestry Minister Joseph Sam Sesay told the BBC.

He said the ban would remain in effect until a policy was put in place to help local communities benefit from logging.

It comes a month after newly elected President Ernest Bai Koroma declared the Gola Forest a national park.

People living near the forest, close to the border with Liberia, are being compensated for the loss of royalties from logging firms.

Correspondents say the activities of foreign logging companies have caused severe environmental degradation in other West African countries, including Ivory Coast, Guinea and Liberia.

Sierra Leone is recovering from a brutal decade-long civil war, which ended in 2002.

Policing

Forestry ministry official Hassan Mohammed told Reuters news agency that rapid deforestation in the north of the country had caused serious soil erosion, forcing local communities off the land.



map

S Leone sets up forest park

The forestry minister said a ban on logging in Guinea and Ivory Coast has caused many foresters to flood into Sierra Leone.

"A lot of them are Chinese, Ivorians, Guineans - we do have a forestry law that outlines how to do business here... this law was not complied with by most of them," Mr Sesay told the BBC's Network Africa programme.

"Unfortunately even though the previous government did put a ban on the logging they were not effectively enforcing it and that's why we've put the ban."

There has been no official response from China to the allegations.

Mr Sesay said the ban was not indefinite and the new government, which came to power in September, was working on a new forestry policy.

He says it will ensure that logged trees were replaced, the industry was effectively policed and communities were able to benefit.

At the moment "the logs being cut are exported raw without value addition and benefit to the country", he said.