

1972

Japanese Sgt. **Shoichi Yokoi** is found hiding in a Guam jungle, where he had been since the end of World War II.



1977

**Atocha massacre** occurs in Madrid during the Spanish transition to democracy.

1984

**Apple** Computer places the Macintosh personal computer on sale in the United States.

1989

Notorious serial killer **Ted Bundy**, with over 30 known victims, is executed by the electric chair at the Florida State Prison.

# The US should get tough on timber with Peru

*A poorly enforced trade agreement continues to damage the environment and the economy*



A chainsaw operator stands on the cut roots of a Shiwawaco tree during a forest management project in Peru.



**RICHARD CONNIFF**

When the trade deal between the United States and Peru went into effect in 2009, proponents touted it as a shining example of environmental good sense. It was the first time the main text of any trade deal included detailed protections for the environment and for labor. That mattered — and still matters — both as a model for other trade deals and also because the environment ostensibly being protected includes a large chunk of the Amazon rainforest.

As part of the deal's Forest Sector's Annex, the United States provided \$90 million in technical assistance to beef up enforcement by Peru's forest service and to create an electronic system intended to track every log from stump to export. (That system does not appear to be working so far, because of software issues, according to rumours.) Peru in turn agreed, among other things, to ensure the independent status of its forest watchdog agency, called Osinfor, which sends its agents into the field to check that loggers have actually harvested the trees reported in their export

documents. (That system works all too well, repeatedly demonstrating that logging companies lie.) On passage, then-Sen. Max Baucus assured skeptics that enforcement of the treaty's added provision would "have real teeth."

Sadly, the US-Peru Trade Promotion Agreement is now slouching toward its 10th anniversary on Feb. 1 in shambles, brought on this time by the Peruvian government's latest attempt to hobble, cripple or otherwise rid itself of this meddlesome Osinfor.

From the start, the Peru deal has served as a cover for almost laughably rampant illegal logging. The Environmental Investigation Agency, a nonprofit group, laid out detailed evidence in 2012 that Peru's timber industry was a "laundering machine," mass-producing "legal" paperwork for stolen timber. Stolen, that is, from national parks, protected areas and the lands of indigenous communities, whose leaders risked assassination if they resisted. So not laughable, after all, especially since much of the stolen timber has routinely been making its way from the Amazon port of Iquitos to American lumber yards and DIYdo-it-yourself stores.

The Office of the United States Trade Representative, which has traditionally focused on promoting trade, has been toothless in response. It waited

until 2016 to ask the Peruvian government to verify the legality of a timber shipment — and even then, did so only after the Department of Homeland Security, acting on information from Osinfor, had already impounded the timber in Houston. It was the first time the USTR had ever issued an environmental verification request in any trade deal. When Osinfor inspectors subsequently demonstrated that 93 per cent of the impounded timber was illegal, the USTR responded by suspending a single Peruvian timber exporter from the United States market for up to three years. Peru's response was to fire the head of Osinfor, who fled the country after death threats and a firebombing of one of Osinfor's regional offices.

The Peruvian government, which rates a 37 out of 100 on the Transparency International scale of perceived corruption (with 100 being "very clean"), has been maneuvering ever since to bring Osinfor under its thumb. In mid-December, when many people were distracted by pre-Christmas doings, the government's council of ministers decided on short notice and without consulting the affected agencies to bury Osinfor within the environmental ministry.

Rep. Richard Neal, Democrat of Massachusetts, as incoming chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, fired

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off a letter to the USTR, angrily protesting this "brazen, bad faith decision" as "a flagrant attack on the heart of the forestry annex." The surprise came when the trade representative, Robert Lighthizer, appointed by a Trump administration that is otherwise outspokenly contemptuous of environmental concerns, wrote back just two days later, "in complete agreement with you and your colleagues that this development is unacceptable."

One possible explanation is that the USTR has finally become fed up after 10 years of being lied to and laughed off by Peru. Also possible: Lighthizer may simply be making a show of force on past environmental commitments to help ease the revised North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA —

the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement — through forthcoming congressional hearings. (Happily for the USTR, the environmental provisions of the unpronounceable USMCA are largely too weak to require much enforcement.)

For now, Lighthizer has "requested consultations with Peru under the Environment Chapter" of the trade agreement, another first for the USTR, with the possibility of sanctions still ahead. In Lima, government ministers are taking a this-too-will-pass attitude.

It should not pass. Tolerating stolen timber imports costs the jobs of thousands of Americans in the legal timber industry. It lends an eager hand to deforestation even as an intact Amazon forest is increasingly seen as a critical factor in fighting climate change. It implicates everyone who buys or sells lumber, or who lives in a wood house, in a global pattern of corruption, murder and devastation. And it turns all trade agreements into thinly veiled invitations to crime.

If in fact the Office of the US Trade Representative has overcome its teething pains, that's good news. Now when trade partners prove false, it should learn how to bite.

(Richard Conniff is the author of "The Species Seekers: Heroes, Fools and the Mad Pursuit of Life on Earth" and a contributing opinion writer.)



TOP  
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TWEETS

01



The Chinese government has granted Ivanka Trump's company preliminary approval for another 5 trademarks this month, as her father's admin pushes ahead on trade negotiations with China.

@kylegriffin1

02



Self proclaimed hacker Syed Shuja was never on ECIL's rolls as a regular employee nor was he involved in EVM designing & development between 2009 & 2014. @KapilSibal and the Congress have much to answer!!

@MrsGandhi

03



The last WH briefing was more than a month ago, before the shutdown began. Sanders has not taken one question from the podium about a shutdown that has impacted millions of Americans. We have to catch her in the driveway after her hits on Fox. So the briefing room sits empty.

@Acosta

04



Having botched Brexit and created a deadlock in Parliament, it's shocking that a third of the Cabinet have the audacity to run off to sip champagne with the world's elite.

@jeremycorbyn

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