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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

'Pirate' fishing vessel flees Sierra Leone to avoid sanctions

London, UK, 29/12/11: A fishing vessel documented operating illegally in Sierra Leone by the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) has reportedly fled to Guinea.

Following a call from a local fisherman, EJF filmed and photographed the Kum Myeong 2 fishing inside Sierra Leone's Inshore Exclusion Zone (IEZ), an area reserved for artisanal fishermen. The South Korean trawler had deliberately covered its name and markings and is believed to have destroyed the fishing equipment of local communities.

After receiving EJF's evidence, the Sierra Leonean Government called the vessel to port but it has reportedly fled to neighbouring Guinea in order to escape sanctions.

This is the eighth vessel documented fishing illegally by EJF during 2011 in the Sherbro River area in southern Sierra Leone. Seven of these vessels are accredited to export fish to Europe and once it enters a European port, fish can enter the UK seafood market unrestricted.

Another vessel, documented fishing illegally by EJF in October 2011, has recently been fined US\$90,000 by the Sierra Leonean Government.

Earlier in the year, EJF provided evidence that led European authorities to seize £4 million worth of fish in the Spanish port of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. This catch has subsequently been released by Spanish authorities, allegedly in breach of European law.

EJF are continuing to work closely with the Sierra Leonean and Guinean Governments to bring legal proceedings against the Kum Myeong 2 and to inform the vessel's flag state of its activities. Meanwhile, EJF are in close contact with European authorities to ensure the pirate fish does not enter the European seafood market.

Steve Trent, Executive Director of EJF, said, "*EJF's work is continuing to show the importance of improved transparency if we are to end pirate fishing and secure the food security and livelihoods of coastal communities. Combating this devastating practice requires a truly integrated approach, involving coastal communities, governments and actors in the seafood supply chain.*"

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High quality film and photographs available on request

Editor's Notes:

- Environmental Justice Foundation is a UK registered charity (no. 1088128) working internationally to protect the environment and defend human rights. EJF has been investigating, documenting and exposing IUU – ‘pirate’ – fishing since 2004 with a current focus on the negative environmental, social and economic impacts in West Africa, particularly Sierra Leone and Liberia.
- In Sierra Leone, EJF operates a community surveillance patrol vessel to document evidence of illegal trawler activity within the Inshore Exclusion Zone (IEZ) reserved for artisanal fishers.
- Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing is the term given to any fishing activity that contravenes national or international laws, such as using banned fishing gears, targeting protected species, operating in protected or reserved areas or at times when fishing is prohibited, not reporting or misreporting catches, or operating without any sort of permit or license to fish.
- IUU fishing is a global concern and recent studies estimate that illicit catches are worth between US\$10-23 billion annually. IUU fishing undermines sustainable fisheries management, devastates marine environments and jeopardizes the livelihood and food security of some of the world's poorest people.
- Illegal, foreign-owned, industrial ‘pirate’ fishing vessels often target developing countries that have little capacity to address the problem. Countries across sub-Saharan Africa are estimated to lose nearly US\$1 billion a year from IUU fishing.
- It is estimated that Sierra Leone loses US\$29 million a year due to pirate fishing. IUU activities severely impact on Sierra Leone's coastal communities, who are dependent on fish for an estimated 80 per cent of the animal protein they consume.
- Over 80 per cent of fish stocks are over-exploited, fully-exploited or depleted according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) most recent assessments. Scientists have estimated that, at current levels of exploitation, most commercial fish stocks could have collapsed by the year 2048.