

## **SIMPLE LIFESTYLE**

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Prepared by Steve Hampton

#### **MADE IN CHINA: CHEAP FURNITURE**

From "Charging Towards the Big Melt" by Stephen Leahy (published Jan 16, 2007 by Inter Press Service)

"People don't appreciate that their purchases have real environmental impacts," said Monique Tilford, acting executive director of the Centre for a New American Dream (CNAD), a Maryland group promoting environmentally and socially responsible consumption. [See their excellent website at <http://www.newdream.org/> for information on a whole range of consumer choice issues.]

A Chinese-made computer desk that can be bought for 40 or 50 dollars at a U.S. or European retail store is likely to be the product of illegal clear-cutting in Indonesian rainforests. Such clear-cutting not only fuels crime syndicates, it results in the loss of biodiversity, releases huge amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and drives indigenous people off their lands.

China makes about one-third of the world's furniture, quite surprising in a country that strictly protects its few remaining forests. Imports of foreign timber have skyrocketed and are well over 40 million cubic metres per year. Reports show that re-exports of forest products from China to the United States and Europe have increased by about 900 percent since 1998.

"Scarcity quickly crosses national boundaries," Brown said in an interview. "If the Chinese furniture makers can't get trees in China, they get trees from Siberia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia."

Greenpeace, Global Witness and other NGOs have documented extensive illegal logging operations in these countries, with China the main receipt of the illegal timber.

#### **MADE IN CHINA: CHINA'S HUKOU LABOR SYSTEM**

Products from China are also cheap for two major economic reasons: 1) they fix their exchange rate and an artificially low level, making Chinese exports cheap; and 2) they employ an apartheid-like system, dividing their labor force between urban and rural workers. The latter have artificially low wages, especially when they sneak into cities to work illegally in factories. You can read more about this, and how it is slowly changing, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4424944.stm>

#### **OIL**

When it comes to consumer products that raise concerns regarding social justice or the environment, oil is the giant elephant in the room. The Feb 2007 issue of *National Geographic* paints an appalling picture of exploitation, environmental destruction, corruption, and corporate greed amidst extreme poverty in Nigeria. Shell and Chevron are the major American companies involved. We can avoid those two, but the alternatives are hardly superior. To minimize our participation in this exploitation, as well as our contribution to CO2 levels, we can make a pledge to cut our fuel use. Start by making a goal to reduce your gasoline consumption by 10% or even 20% this year. Imagine if every Christian did that.

**SUGGESTIONS AND IDEAS** for future tips are welcome! Email me at [hamptons@sbcglobal.net](mailto:hamptons@sbcglobal.net)