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PRESS RELEASE

WALES -AFRICA LINK CREATES WINNING TEAM: BEST NEW SMALL & MEDIUM ENTERPRISE IN AFRICA

Welsh support has helped a Cameroonian company to win first prize in the prestigious Best New Business category at the 2011 Africa Small Medium and Micro Enterprise (SMME)¹ Award. Held on 13 October in South Africa, the award is a major recognition of over five years of hard work from a team of six and over 1000 beekeepers in the remote savannah and highlands forests in the Congo Basin forests.

Verina Ingram, one of the directors of the Cameroonian and Dutch registered enterprise, lived and worked for over six years in Cameroon. Born and raised in Essex, with a Welsh grandparent, she met the other five company founders whilst doing development work in the Bamenda mountain area. After collaborating with them for a year, became inspired by their enthusiasm, and triple bottom line (people, planet, profit) approach to doing business. A year later she joined as Environment and Marketing Director and works closely with Michael Tchana, the Cameroonian general director. She moved back to Europe to complete her PhD in Amsterdam about managing forest products such as honey, and to market the business worldwide. She says “We registered the company in 2007 after a year of research and marketing. We made our first sale to the UK at the end of that year. Now we are selling over 120 tons of honey, wax and propolis a year, and can’t keep up with demand! It was an enormous amount of work to set up systems to ensure quality of honey from the hive, through the beekeepers, to our registered collection centers, and eventually all the way to buyers in the UK, across Europe and Canada. For the skilled families that have been practicing beekeeping and honey hunting for centuries, but are largely illiterate and have not been further than their village, this is a major feat of perseverance and commitment to making the business work. What’s more important, we are selling this honey as organic, which means it is pure and free from pesticides”.

Guiding Hope sells its honey through its Aberystwyth based partner, **Tropical Forest Products**², a Welsh company specialising in the import and sale of honey and beeswax from Africa to British shops as certified organic. It is also sold online across Europe via the **Ethical Community**³ website. The **Body Shop**⁴ also uses Guiding Hope’s wax in its popular cosmetics. The **Soil Association**, which has the highest standards for organic products and processing in the world, has been certifying Guiding Hope’s honey, wax and other bee products such as propolis, since 2008. Their standard is one of the most stringent in the world, and is annually audited. This gives consumers assurance that the product is organic, pure and natural. Guiding Hope, which is currently on the way to become an **Ethical Trade** enterprise with the Soil Association, went for certification to prove the natural origins and quality of its products. This high value market also means that Guiding Hope can afford to pay its beekeepers up to 50% higher than current market prices in Cameroon. The average beekeeper earns just over \$2 a day (the World Bank indicator of poverty), and so good buying prices are essential to enabling these men and women to lead better lives and climb out of poverty. As Guiding Hope’s core trading principles are to both support local communities, trade fairly*, profitably, and look after the environment - they are overjoyed to be selling in the UK. A further Welsh link is **Bees for Development**⁵, a Monmouth-based UK registered charity, which together with Tropical Forest Products, is supporting the company to improve the efficiency and quality of their honey and beeswax for sale within the European Union. Guiding Hope’s ground breaking work has been recognised before: they were awarded the SEED award for sustainable business in 2008 and Michael Tchana was nominated Young Cameroonian of the Year in 2008.

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¹ <http://www.africagrowth.com/index.htm>

² http://www.tropicalforest.com/Tropical_Forest/Cameroon.html

³ <http://www.ethicalcommunity.com/guiding-hope>

⁴ <http://www.thebodyshop-usa.com/values-campaigns/community-trade-ingredients.aspx>

⁵ <http://www.beesfordevelopment.org/what-we-do/projects/cameroon>