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<https://www.fim-musicians.org/fr/cites-bow-making-jeopardised-at-international-level/>

## **CITES | International threat to bow making**

01.09.2022 CITES , ORCHESTRAS

Photo: Mauro Halpern



What is Pernambuco?

Around 1775, the French bow maker François-Xavier Tourte – inventor of the modern bow – recommended the use of Pernambuco wood in bow making because of its very specific physical properties, in particular its hardness and density. For more than two hundred years, all quality bows have been made with this type of wood.

Pernambuco (*Caesalpinia echinata*) grows exclusively in Brazil, in the Northeast region of the country. Unfortunately, due to agricultural deforestation, the species has been rare for many years. To remedy this, bow-making professionals founded the IPCI (International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative).

Since 2007, Pernambuco has been listed in Appendix II of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), which has resulted in severe regulations. A certificate from the exporter and the importer is thus required, in order to guarantee that the wood comes from a plantation respecting the principles of sustainable harvesting.

This much more restrictive classification would have severe consequences on bow making and the preservation of the know-how of artisan bow makers worldwide.

Will 2022 mark the end of bows in Pernambuco?

On the occasion of the 19th Conference of the Parties of CITES (CoP19) from November 14 to 28, 2022, Brazil wishes to obtain the transfer of Pernambuco from Appendix II to Appendix I. This much more restrictive classification would have severe consequences on bow making and the preservation of the know-how of craftsmen bow makers worldwide.

If this proposal is accepted by CoP19, any bow transaction in Pernambuco will require a CITES permit. Furthermore, if the national CITES authorities deem that existing stocks do not meet the new criteria, the production and sale of new bows will become impossible.

In the event that these stocks remain authorized, their renewal will be prohibited, including from trees replanted at the initiative of the bow makers themselves. By way of comparison, remember that after the inclusion of ivory and tortoiseshell in Appendix I of CITES, ivory and shell makers had to cease their activity.

For musicians, this classification in Appendix I would make it compulsory to obtain a Musical Instrument Certificate (CIM) before any trip abroad, this certificate then having to be stamped by the customs services each time border. In addition to the administrative red tape, there would therefore be the risk of delays or blockages at the borders.

However, the effect of these measures on the preservation of the species remains very uncertain. Indeed, Pernambuco suffers above all from deforestation and illegal trade in Brazil. In comparison, the levy necessary for the activity of craftsmen bow makers is negligible. The annual consumption of raw wood for the hundred or so French bow makers is thus estimated at only one cubic meter. It is therefore in Brazil itself that action should be taken.

Solutions?

The actions financed by the IPCI at the initiative of the bow makers have enabled the replanting of nearly 300,000 Pernambuco plants, mainly intended for the conservation of the species. In fact, the use of Pernambuco for the manufacture of bows is a means of contributing to its preservation, this consumption with high added value based on the preservation of the species.

Therefore, we recommend that CITES Member States reject the proposal to list Pernambuco in Appendix I and identify, in consultation with Brazil, an effective strategy to control legal channels and put an end to trafficking. We are convinced that only the development and control of the resource are able to guarantee its sustainability.

Furthermore, we encourage the whole of the musical sector to join in the financing of the conservation of this extraordinary wood, essential to the practice of all bowed instruments.

What role could musicians' unions serve?

We urge all musicians' unions to undertake advocacy actions with their respective governments, in coordination with national associations of bow makers. A reference document is available here to help you write your arguments.