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Global Witness: Singapore's statement on sand report leaves major concerns unaddressed

On 11 May 2010, the Singapore government published an official response to the Global Witness report, "*Shifting Sand: how Singapore's demand for Cambodian sand threatens ecosystems and undermines good governance.*"

Global Witness welcomes this statement and hopes that it signifies the beginning of an open and constructive dialogue with the Singapore government. However, this initial response does not yet answer the main findings of our report, and appears to hide behind regulatory frameworks already shown to be woefully inadequate in defending Cambodia's environment against the effects of a sand trade driven by Singaporean demand.

The response restates the Singapore government's position that imports of sand from Cambodia to Singapore are "*done on a commercial basis*" and that "*sand suppliers are private entities and they purchase sand from sand concession holders*". Given the ecological risks posed by sand-dredging on this scale, this stance compares poorly with its desire to be a regional leader on sustainable development. If its claim to be "*committed to the protection of the global environment*" is to have credibility, it must address the report's concerns directly by introducing effective regulations for companies sourcing sand from outside its borders.

"The Singapore government's response does not answer the key allegation in our report – that their current approach to sourcing sand is enabling environmental destruction and corruption in Cambodia," said Global Witness campaigner George Boden. "Singapore is proud of its reputation as a figurehead on the environment – if it wants that reputation to bear scrutiny, it must stop hiding behind inadequate regulation and unconvincing excuses."

Specific points where Global Witness would like to see further clarification from the Singapore government are:

- 1) The statement refers to the import of sea sand or 'reclamation sand' – this is only one of two types of sand being dredged in Cambodia and exported to Singapore. *Shifting Sand* focuses on river sand dredging because this practice was banned by the Cambodian government in 2009, yet concessions for exploitation and export of river sand continue to be allocated. If Singapore genuinely wishes to distance itself from the corruption and environmental damage described in the report, it must suspend the import of all types of sand from Cambodia until it can monitor the trade effectively.
- 2) The Singapore government states it has not been given official notice of the Cambodian sand ban. However, the fact that Singapore is the main market for Cambodian sand and that Singapore's Building and Construction Authority publicly commented on it in May 2009 suggests that the Singapore Government is aware of the ban.
- 3) The government states that it requires companies operating overseas to abide by the laws of the host country. As *Shifting Sand* shows, such an approach does not protect the environment in Cambodia. Supposed legal measures are being flouted and concessions are being allocated to corrupt figures as this completely unregulated sand industry balloons to meet Singaporean demand. If Singapore wants its environmental credentials to be taken seriously, it should not permit the importation of sand from jurisdictions which are open to such abuse. It needs to lead by example and take responsibility for its environmental footprint through putting in place effective regulations of its own.

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Global Witness investigates and campaigns to end natural resource-related conflict and corruption and associated environmental and human rights abuses