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Environment at risk as Cambodia exports millions of tonnes of sand to Singapore, new Global Witness report reveals

Singapore's rapid expansion is driving an ecologically and socially devastating sand-dredging industry in Cambodia, according to a new report released today by Global Witness. This booming trade is being monopolised by two prominent Cambodian Senators with close ties to Prime Minister Hun Sen – despite a supposed government ban on sand exports.

The Global Witness report *Shifting Sand: how Singapore's demand for Cambodian sand threatens ecosystems and undermines good governance* reveals that:

- Cambodian Senators Mong Reththy and Ly Yong Phat have been awarded sand extraction licences behind closed doors, gaining control of an industry worth millions of dollars – but there is no evidence of any revenues reaching Cambodia's state coffers. Both have been implicated in dubious land deals and forced evictions, and have recently been criticised for sponsoring units of Cambodia's armed forces. This points to the increasing stranglehold of Cambodia's kleptocratic elite on its natural resources, replicating a pattern of corruption, cronyism, and rights abuses previously found in the forestry sector and extractive industries.
- Cambodia's sand-dredging industry poses a huge risk to its coastal environment, threatening endangered species, fish stocks and local livelihoods. There is no evidence that basic environmental safeguards have been applied, with boats reportedly turning up and dredging sand, often in protected areas, with no local consultation. All this makes a mockery of the government's supposed May 2009 ban on sand-dredging.
- This trade is driven by Singapore. The city state was the world's largest importer of sand in 2008. It has used sand imports to increase its landmass by 22% since the 1960s. This project has wreaked havoc on the region's coastlines, with Malaysia, Vietnam and Indonesia having all now announced bans on sand dredging for export due to environmental concerns.

"This situation highlights the continued failure of Cambodia's international donors to use their leverage to hold the small elite surrounding the Prime Minister to account," said George Boden, campaigner at Global Witness. "Cambodia's natural resource wealth should be lifting its population out of poverty. Instead, international aid has propped up basic services in Cambodia for over 15 years, providing the equivalent of 50% of the government budget. Meanwhile, money from natural resources disappears into private bank accounts, and nearly 70% of the population subsists on less than \$2 a day."

Global Witness' investigation tracked boats being loaded with sand in Cambodia to their destinations in Singapore. It also uncovered contracts linking Singaporean companies to Cambodia's sand industry. In June this year, Singapore will host the World Cities Summit, which promotes 'sustainable and liveable cities'.

"Singapore says that the import of sand is a purely commercial activity but it also presents itself as a regional leader on environmental issues," said Boden. "The country's failure to mitigate the social and ecological cost of sand dredging represents hypocrisy on a grand scale. If Singapore wants its environmental stance to be taken seriously, monitoring where the sand is sourced and what is being done to obtain it would be an obvious place to start."

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