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For immediate release: Monday 28th June

Singapore's 'sustainability credentials' undermined by environmentally destructive sand imports, says Global Witness

As host of this week's World Cities Summit under the banner of "liveable and sustainable cities", Singapore must do more to address the negative impacts of its demand for sand, which is fuelling an ecologically and socially devastating dredging industry in Cambodia, said Global Witness today. Singapore uses Cambodian sand in its construction and land reclamation projects and must do more to mitigate the negative effects of the trade to prevent its credibility as host of the sustainability summit being undermined.

"Singapore is in danger of appearing hypocritical as it promotes its commitment to sustainability while simultaneously driving demand in an industry that is wreaking havoc on Cambodia's coastal ecosystems," said George Boden of Global Witness. "Global Witness has repeatedly asked Singapore to regulate its sand trade to prevent an ecological disaster. We hoped to see action ahead of the summit, but nothing appears to have changed."

Singapore has increased its landmass by 22% since the 1960s; in 2008 it was the world's largest importer of sand. Global Witness's May 2010 report, *Shifting Sand: how Singapore's demand for Cambodian sand threatens ecosystems and undermines good governance*, revealed how an unregulated sand dredging industry in Cambodia has ballooned to meet this demand, despite a supposed ban on exports put in place by the Cambodian Prime Minister in May 2009.

Singapore insists that sand imports are a purely commercial activity, and says that it has regulations in place that require its companies to abide by the laws of the countries with which they trade. However, Global Witness' report makes it clear that this is insufficient, especially given the history of mismanagement and misappropriation of natural resource wealth in Cambodia by its political elite.

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 and dredging concessions have been allocated in protected areas. The industry is dominated by two prominent Senators Mong Reththy and Ly Yong Phat, raising serious questions about high-level corruption. Furthermore, it is not clear whether taxes and royalties are reaching state coffers.

"The situation in Cambodia makes a mockery of the supposed ban on sand dredging and underlines the need for Singapore to take responsibility for the consequences of its sand sourcing, rather than relying on ineffective legal measures in Cambodia," said George Boden. "As it plays host to a summit themed around sustainability, Singapore should commit to properly monitor the impact of its sand imports and ensure that they are not contributing to ecological or social devastation in the region. Failure to act will make the whole conference start to look distinctly like green washing."

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