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New Cambodian anti-corruption plan will not stop high-level offenders

Cambodia's new anti-corruption strategy is a welcome step forward but there are some serious flaws in its design that mean it will fail to tackle corruption at the top of the political elite, warned Global Witness today. The lack of separation between the new Anti-Corruption Unit and the executive is a major weakness that makes prosecution of senior political figures extremely unlikely.

"The need for a credible anti-corruption initiative is clear but as it stands this strategy will not succeed in catching the real villains", said Global Witness campaigner George Boden. "Cambodia's donors should not be fooled: this does not represent a break from the well-documented and entrenched patterns of corruption at the highest levels of Cambodia's government, and it should not be welcomed as such."

Global Witness has repeatedly documented how senior Cambodian government officials have sold off the rights to the country's natural resources in dubious deals, against the interests of ordinary Cambodians and the environment. Senior figures close to the Prime Minister have personally benefitted from this wholesale stripping of the country's assets, and yet very little action has been taken to address this situation.

The new anti-corruption strategy offered an opportunity to form a genuinely independent oversight mechanism. Instead the government has established a body which risks being undermined by undue executive influence. The threat of defamation against whistleblowers is also likely to deter many from coming forward.

The head of the new Anti-Corruption Unit is a close associate of Prime Minister Hun Sen and has links to mining interests. The concentration of the unit's decision making powers in this man's hands seriously undermines the chances of there being any real challenge to the behaviour of the prime minister's corrupt cabal of family members, senior businesspeople and government officials and politicians.

In spite of the obvious flaws, Cambodia's international aid donors have said the strategy will 'play a major role in improving public sector governance' and 'improve Cambodia's international competitiveness'.

"The Cambodia government has a track record of pacifying its international aid donors with reformist rhetoric and commitments to transparency, while in fact doing little to change their actual behaviour. This anti-corruption strategy looks like the latest example of this tactic," said Boden. "Donors need to get serious about promoting transparency as a central plank of their engagement with the country."

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Read Global Witness's latest report on Cambodia, *Shifting Sand*: [how Singapore's demand for Cambodian sand threatens ecosystems and undermines good governance](#)

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