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Sacking of Cambodia's forest chief unconvincing as move against illegal logging, says Global Witness

Global Witness today welcomed the removal from his post of the Director General of Cambodia's Forest Administration, Ty Sokhun, but warned that much more needed to be done to guarantee the survival of the country's remaining forests and the fair and sustainable exploitation of the country's other natural resources for the benefit of the many not the few.

Global Witness's 2007 report, [Cambodia's Family Trees](#), documented how Ty Sokhun and the Ministry of Agriculture Director, Chan Sarun, sold off 500 or more jobs in the Forest Administration. The report also revealed that Ty Sokhun's father-in-law was a key member of Cambodia's biggest illegal logging syndicate.

"Ty Sokhun's reign as Cambodia's forest chief was a disaster for Cambodia's forests", said Simon Taylor, Global Witness Director. "On his watch we saw Cambodia's forests shrink dramatically, largely due to illegal or ill-managed logging operations. It is a good thing he is gone, but he shouldn't be let off the hook for what happened while he was in charge."

Prime Minister Hun Sen says he sacked Ty Sokhun because he had no confidence in his ability to crack down on illegal logging but Global Witness questions why it has taken so long to act. In April Cambodia's international donors will meet to discuss next year's pledges and they will be looking for assurances of reform. But the Cambodian government has a lot more to do if it wants to prove it is serious about protecting the country's remaining forests and managing its other natural resources sustainably.

"The idea that Ty Sokhun has been removed from his post because of a failure to crack down on illegal logging is laughable," said Taylor. "His status as protector of Cambodia's forests was already stretched beyond credibility. If this move was really about that then he should have gone years ago."

For the last 15 years Global Witness has documented the extensive and untrammelled exploitation of Cambodia's natural resources by a corrupt and unaccountable elite. It has called on the government to investigate allegations of illegal activities relating to forests, oil, gas and mining, but as far as it can ascertain, no such investigations have ever taken place.

Taylor: "Ty Sokhun was not the only one responsible for the destruction of Cambodia's forests. Our investigations have proven the complicity of officials and elites at the highest levels, including members of the Prime Minister's own family. If Hun Sen genuinely wants closure on the destruction of Cambodia's forests, he should commission a full independent enquiry into what has happened, publish the findings and punish the perpetrators".

Whoever succeeds Ty Sokhun will need determination and independence to tackle the patronage networks which have underpinned illegal logging in Cambodia for the past 15 years. Corruption in Cambodia is systemic and deeply entrenched. It is unlikely to be successfully eradicated without much more significant pressure from international donors who provide the equivalent of 50% of the country's budget each year but don't do enough to insist on reform.

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