



global witness

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Global Witness launches pioneering forest transparency website Report card assesses public access to information in four countries

Natural-resource campaign group Global Witness is today publishing the first ever Forest Sector Transparency Report Card via a dedicated website, www.foresttransparency.info. The launch will take place at an illegal logging update meeting today, hosted by Chatham House in London.

The innovative report card is the result of a collaborative project with campaign groups in Cameroon, Ghana, Liberia and Peru. It assesses 70 transparency indicators across 15 themes ranging from 'Are forest land use / ownership maps available?' to 'Are logging contracts made public?' and 'Is there a Freedom of Information Act?'

At the launch, Global Witness Forest Campaigner David Young will say: "This report card highlights best practice while also exposing the ways in which vested interests can secretly control and siphon off profit from a nation's forests. It is designed to be a tool for civil society members to put pressure on their governments to address failures of democracy and push for positive change."

Highlights of the report are:

- Forest sector transparency is generally poor. The main problem areas relate to the way key decisions are made in the capital city, and the limited amount of information that reaches those most directly affected by forestry deals. Only one country has a Freedom of Information law.
- Particular weaknesses exist in relation to largely secret mining contracts and other extra-sectoral initiatives running roughshod over forest protection measures. This reflects the greater economic and political power of mining authorities compared to those overseeing forests. None of the four countries have a strategic process to assess priorities between development options.
- Insecure land and forest tenure comes through as a major issue.
- On the positive side, transparency is increasingly recognised as an issue and discussed openly, and there are elements of good practice in each country which could easily be replicated. These include Human Rights Commissions covering environmental issues, revisions of forest laws towards more transparency, and greater recognition of the role of civil society in holding duty-bearers to account.
- An important emerging issue is the value of forests in the context of climate change mitigation. While this offers an opportunity for forest preservation, there is very little legal commitment to transparency for environmental services and carbon deals, and often the rights to these goods are disputed.

The report card will be refined before the complete 2009 Annual Transparency Report is published later this year. The process will be repeated annually and expanded to cover other countries.

Mr Young will conclude: "The report card provides a useful tool for civil society to improve their analysis of the issues and prioritise strategies. This is crucial to help them engage with government and the private sector and push for greater access to information and policy processes".

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Notes:

1. The Forest Sector Transparency Report Card can be found at www.foresttransparency.info
2. Full details of the Chatham House event available at: www.illegal-logging.info.
3. Global Witness has been working on forest transparency and illegal logging for over 15 years, and pioneered the concept of Independent Forest Monitoring (IFM) in Cambodia in the late 1990s. Read more about our work on forests at www.globalwitness.org
4. The report card is part of Global Witness' *Making the Forest Sector Transparent* project, funded by the UK Department for International Development ([DFID](http://www.dfid.gov.uk)) Governance and Transparency Fund.

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