Cambodian forests menaced by logging concessions

Uncontrolled logging threatens the future of Cambodian forests. A review of logging concessions in Cambodia was initiated last year, with the aim of identifying those concessions which should be terminated due to their repeated legal infringements, and those which should be continued under new contracts. The initiative, which was funded by the Asia Development Bank (ADB), has been crippled by time and financial constraints resulting from shortcomings in the ADB's management process.

In fact, even if the concession review was scheduled for January 1999, site inspection started only last October. As a result, since such inspections were carried out in the wet season, when access to the concession sites was limited by weather and soil conditions, the review team could not witness any logging activities. Only 12 out of the 21 concessions in existence in the country -covering a huge total area of 4,739,153 hectares- were visited and the inspectors spent just one day in each concession area, with sizes ranging from 60,000 to 766,000 hectares. Concessionaires' forest management practices were judged purely on the basis of these one-day inspections. This, coupled with the fact that none of the concessionaires' historical records -including illegal activities and poor forest management practices- were taken into account by the review, means that concessionaires who have severely depleted the forests are likely to enjoy impunity for their actions.

In spite of the above mentioned shortcomings, the conclusions of the review team are extremely worrying: all of Cambodia's concession land would be exhausted within seven years and the current logging levels are considered unsustainable. Additionally, the review concluded that every single concessionaire breached their contract for failing to achieve the required investment targets.

The results of this research have been published by Global Witness in a briefing document entitled "The Untouchables. Forest crimes and the concessionaires - can Cambodia afford to keep them?". Detailed information on twelve companies involved in significant and prolonged illegal logging activities -with the open or hidden protection of the authorities- is provided. The referred companies are not only national, but also from China, Taiwan, Malaysia and Japan. Recent and shocking photographs about illegal logging and transport in the coastal and eastern regions of the country are also published.

Those interested in obtaining a copy of the report, please contact Global Witness.

Source: Global Witness, 2/12/99;