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## Corruption blamed for rainforest destruction

By Lloyd Jones in Port Moresby  
March 2, 2006

ASIAN logging companies are openly defying the law and cutting down Papua New Guinea's rainforests, thanks to corruption and government inaction, a new report alleges.

A Washington environmental group, Forest Trends, linked loggers, mainly from Malaysia, to Papua New Guinea's political elite. It described working conditions as "modern-day slavery" and said forests were effectively being logged out.

While the Government had policies, laws and regulations to ensure sustainable timber production, these were not being enforced, the report said.

It identified "a political vacuum with no demonstrated government interest in controlling the problems in the sector".

The president of Forest Trends, Michael Jenkins, said landowners needed funding and advice to fight loggers in the courts. "Papua New Guinea's legal system does exist outside of political control, and the courts have a track record of ruling against illegal logging."

The report summarised the findings of government-commissioned independent reviews of the timber industry between 2000 and 2005. It is dominated by Malaysian interests and focused on round-log exports - mainly to China, Japan and South Korea - with many of the logs processed in China sent on to Europe and North America.

Forest Trends' program manager for finance and trade, Kerstin Canby, said corruption had devastated rural living standards and ignored the basic rights of landowners.

"There are a few logging operations in the country which are deemed beneficial to both local landowners and the country, but they are lost in a sea of bad operators," she said. "The Government needs to support these companies, or risk having the international community boycott all of PNG's exports."

### Australian Associated Press

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