



Media Release

For Immediate Release

Statement In Response to Article Posted in Bruno Manser Fonds

29 September 2021, Miri Sarawak - We refer to an article by Bruno Manser Fonds titled “Penan step up campaign to save Sarawak’s last primeval forests from logging”, which was the basis of reports that appeared in several internet and print media over the last two weeks.

The article alleges that the blockade erected by a group of 40 Penan was to prevent the encroachment into Sarawak’s “last primeval forests” in the Upper Baram region. The Penan are quoted as holding placards claiming the area is “Penan traditional territory”.

The Forest Department of Sarawak (FDS) has granted us the permit to enter the areas concerned to harvest timber in accordance with the rules and regulations laid out in the FDS permit. We strongly dispute any accusation of “encroachment” into primeval forests as we have obtained the consent of the representatives of the Long Selaan and Ba Buboi villages of the area.

This can be attested to by the fact that the village heads have each lodged police reports disclaiming the allegations made by the Penan protestors, and in fact have accused the Penan protestors of encroaching on their ancestral land.

According to the police report lodged by Peter Tingang Lalo who is the village head of Long Selaan, the area concerned is under the jurisdiction Long Selaan, while the group of Penan who had erected the blockade are actually from Ba Ajeng, Ba Muong and Ba Sebatu, which is located a considerable distance from where the harvesting is actually taking place.

Peter, together with other village heads Lucas Ngao and Tearie Abeng, are calling on the police to take the appropriate steps to remove the barricades so that we can continue with the work that we have been licenced to carry out.

The process that we adhere to before we enter any area for the purpose of timber harvesting includes obtaining full consent from the village heads. In this regard, we have obtained written consent from the village heads of Long Selaan and Ba Buboi, who are fully aware of our activities in their areas and have given their full cooperation to ensure adherence to all necessary requirements imposed by the FDS.

According to the practice of the Sarawak state government, areas deemed to be Native Customary Rights or NCR lands are excised out of areas that have been licenced for logging activities. Any claims of NCR lands outside of those identified by the Land and Survey Department of Sarawak must first be verified before they are acknowledged officially as such.

Thus, to say that we are encroaching on Penan traditional territory is untrue in more than one sense. Firstly, we have the written consent of village heads of the area to carry out harvesting activities, and secondly, the areas concerned are not classified NCR lands.

The BMF article also alleges that the area concerned is part of the planned Baram Peace Park, an initiative mooted by the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO). The ITTO has never approached us to discuss this proposal even though a large area of what is generally known as the Upper Baram Forest Areas, lies within our forest concessions. As far



as we are aware, the ITTO's proposal is merely at that stage – a proposal – and no concrete discussion or any form of approval has been granted for the proposal to proceed.

As part of the Baram community for the last 50 years, we are acutely aware of the struggles that the indigenous communities face in the area. We work not only with the communities, but with other NGOs as well to determine the means for which commodity industries can also help uplift the communities living in those areas, without depriving them of their traditional lifestyles.

As a conscientious corporation, we are heavily invested in Sustainable Forest Management and are striving to ensure that areas identified for logging activities are not left barren but continue to be naturally sustainable through our various efforts to regenerate and replenish them.

It is through this process of engagement and consultation, that we are able to also learn more of the needs of the community and help provide them the facilities required for their sustenance, growth, development, and longevity.

We have constructed roads that connect the communities with each other and with urban facilities, as well as helped build clinics and classrooms to provide better health care and education, which in turn empowers these communities to decide for themselves the type of future they want for their children.

Part of our outreach efforts also include providing transportation to children from the villages – including those from the Penan villages – to state-built schools, as well as ferrying villagers for medical treatment when the need arises.

Many members of the native communities have been employed by us for both upstream and downstream activities. This allows the communities to better their living standards through the provision of a steady income while still maintaining their traditional lifestyles and ways of living.

It is not, and has never been, our intention to drive any indigenous communities from their traditional and ancestral homes. We strongly believe that modernity can co-exist with tradition for the indigenous communities, and that they should be allowed to decide for themselves how they would like their communities to progress.

Decisions should never be forced upon the communities – be they to remain in their present state of economic hardship or to be forced to adopt modern lifestyles incongruent with their traditions. Instead, communities should be provided with the tools and opportunities to decide for themselves what is best for their communities.

As part of the Baram family, it is our wish that communities will be empowered to speak for themselves and bring their issues of concern directly to the government bodies and not remain dependent on foreign-based NGOs to fight their causes.