

13 January 2010

MEDIA RELEASE, BRUNO MANSER FUND, BASEL / SWITZERLAND

Malaysia and China sign US\$ 11 bn power deal that involves the displacement of 608,000 Borneo natives

Sarawak Energy's Norwegian CEO Torstein Dale Sjøtveit asked to step down over his role in the controversial plans

KUALA LUMPUR / MALAYSIA. Malaysia and China have signed a deal to carry out a highly controversial energy masterplan in the Malaysian part of Borneo that involves the displacement of thousands of Borneo natives. According to the Financial Times, the plan involves the construction of several mega-dams and mining of large coal deposits and is likely to require the relocation of some 608,000 natives who live in the East Malaysian state's rainforest-covered interior.

The deal was signed last Monday in Kuala Lumpur between the Malaysian Government and the China State Grid Corporation and was witnessed by the Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak and Sarawak Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud. According to the Malaysian government, the plan could result in projects worth 11 billion US dollars of Chinese investment.

Sarawak's controversial energy masterplan is being developed under a cloud of secrecy despite its far-reaching impact on a significant part of Sarawak's population. The plan is labelled Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE) but involves the exploitation of 1.46 billion US dollars of coal reserves and 41,000 billion cubic feet of natural gas.

It would be more appropriate to label the Sarawak Chief Minister's favourite project the "Sarawak Corridor of Corruption". Construction companies linked to the Chief Minister Taib Mahmud's family interests will be among the main beneficiaries of the new energy development plans. Earlier this week, Sarawak opposition politician Baru Bian had labelled the as yet incomplete multi-billion dollar Bakun dam a "monument of corruption" and said he viewed the new dam plans as a "pretext for extinguishing native rights in the name of a public purpose."

The large-scale energy plans will be implemented by state-owned power producer Sarawak Energy that has recently appointed Norwegian national Torstein Dale Sjøtveit as its CEO. Sjøtveit, who will be paid an annual salary of US\$ 1.2 million, has come under fire in the Norwegian media for his controversial role in the Borneo dam projects. The Bruno Manser Fund asks Mr. Sjøtveit to step down as his position is incompatible with being a responsible citizen. - Ends-

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