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MEDIA RELEASE:

Penan leader's body to be exhumed

The Malaysian police will exhume the remains of the late Kelesau Naan who was allegedly murdered

The Malaysian police will exhume the remains of Kelesau Naan, the late headman of Long Kerong, a Penan village in the upper reaches of the Baram river in Sarawak / East Malaysia. According to the New Straits Times (a newspaper appearing in West Malaysia), Police Commissioner Mohmad Salleh said that the police will apply for a permit to exhume Kelesau's remains so that the cause of his death can be determined.

The Police announcement follows calls from several Malaysian organizations for a full-scale investigation into the causes of death of the Penan leader. Last week, several relatives of Kelesau travelled to Kuala Lumpur to inform the Malaysian Human Rights Commission SUHAKAM about the matter. On this occasion, Kelesau's son Nick declared he had been offered 25'000 Malaysian Ringgits (7750 USD) by a logging company "frontrunner" in return for retracting a statement that he suspected foul play in his father's death.

Kelesau, a charismatic leader in the tribe's struggle to preserve their last rainforests, was reported missing on 23 October 2007. His skeletal remains, together with his traditional bead necklace, watch and parang sheath were found by a Penan search party on 12 December. Kelesau was the lead plaintiff of a pending land rights claim over 35'000 hectares of rainforest and agricultural land which was filed in 1998. Prior to his death, Kelesau had repeatedly rejected demands by a logging company representative to withdraw the legal action.

The Penan village of Long Kerong is located within a logging concession operated by the Malaysian Samling group. Part of the community's territory had been certified by the Malaysian Timber Certification Council (MTCC) without the Penan's consent.

Sources:

www.nst.com.my/Current_News/NST/Tuesday/National/2162064/Article/index_html

www.malaysiakini.com

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