



# Sahabat Alam Malaysia

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## PRESS STATEMENT

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### **Penan Villagers Re-Stage Symbolic Blockades To Reinstate Their Demands**

More than 150 Penan villagers from Long Nen, Long Belok, Long Sayan, Long Kevok, Long Bangan and Ba' Marong in Sungai Layun, Apoh, Tutoh and Patah gathered in Kampung Long Nen and Long Belok to stage a symbolic blockade in commemoration of their one-year blockade anniversary on Sept 2, 2010, which brought the logging industry in the area to a halt

At 7am, the villagers set up the blockades with banners while holding placards across logging roads to reinstate their demands which were unfulfilled by the government despite signing the latter agreeing to them in a memorandum of understanding (MoU).

The blockade erected last year, which lasted for more than a month from August to September, was compelled by the apathy shown by the state government towards the community and their native customary rights (NCR).

Their land has been continuously plundered by logging and oil palm companies despite the strong opposition displayed by the communities over the last three decades.

Following the setting up of the blockade last year, the communities from Long Nen and Long Belok issued four sets of demands to the state authorities:

1. To stop all logging operations and encroachment on their NCR land to avoid starvation among their people because of a shortage in forest resources.
2. The government to acknowledge their NCR status upon their land and recognise their boundary.
3. To allow them to decide about developments that involve their NCR land.
4. For companies to respect their rights to their ancestral land and way of life.

In response, the Telang Usan state assemblyperson, YB Lihan Jok, turned up at the blockade site and instead of listening to the genuine demands of the communities, pressured the communities into signing an MoU with watered down pledges on the part of the state:

1. To make an effort at bringing Penan community leaders to meet with higher authorities in order to discuss on matters concerning their land and traditional territories;
2. To make an effort at bringing the Penan communities' application for the construction of kindergartens and primary schools at each Penan longhouse (to the appropriate authorities).

*"for environmental justice"*

3. To increase the number of community leaders for the Penan community.
4. To make an effort at introducing agricultural activities that are suitable for the Penan communities.
5. To make an effort at obtaining financial allocations for the housing and healthcare needs of Penan communities

We are very troubled by the fact that in spite of their revised and watered-down content, the state government has yet to fulfill any of the pledges a year later. Compounding the matter is the fact that in the months following the signing of the MOU, YB Lihan was quoted in a news daily in December that the state wanted the communities to relocate to a government resettlement site similar to the Sungai Asap Resettlement Project.

The newspaper quoted him as stating that all the demands in the MoU will only be fulfilled if the communities agreed to being relocated to the site. Apparently, the state wanted the communities to stop living a semi-nomadic life and to settle in one place with jobs in rubber plantations, and only then will plots of land be provided for the people

Following this, SAM had written to the state authorities to request them that consultations are conducted to inform the communities of this plan but to date there has been no response.

Also perplexing the community is the question of RM2.7million government allocation for the construction of Penan housing as announced by Miri Resident Dr. Ngenang Janggu in Borneo Post on Sept 18, 2009.

In relation to the symbolic event, the Sarawak Penan Association (SPA) has rightfully asserted that the Sarawak State Government cannot continue to act and function in such a non-transparent governance process that is uninterested in community consultations and information disclosure. We also strongly support the SPA in its position that communities cannot be forced or threatened to move from their rightful home. The right to livelihoods and property is a right protected by the Federal Constitution.

We believe that the poor governance system in Sarawak pertaining to forestry, land and NCR matters has long needed some major transformative changes. We therefore believe that fulfilling of the peoples' demands this time around and a serious study on all their existing grievances, will be a right step in this direction.



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President