
Malaysia: Sarawak forest peoples harassed by logging and dams

In last month's WRM bulletin we recalled the long standing battle that local communities had waged for Sarawak's forests, notably through road blockades for stopping the entry of logging trucks into their territories.

Now the Kenyah people are in again for the defence of their livelihood. According to a report from the Borneo Resources Institute (BRIMAS), "More than hundred (100) indigenous Kenyah peoples from various longhouse communities living in the interior of Telang Usan (Kedaya Telang Usan) area in the Baram region of the State of Sarawak, East Malaysia, gathered at upper Moh River to stage a non-violent protest against logging operations of Samling Timber Company. On 19th May 2008, the Indigenous Kenyah from six (6) longhouse communities, namely Long Moh, Long Je'eh, Long Bela'ong, Long Sawan, Long Silat and Long Mekabar started with the blockade. The blockade is set on the major logging roads used by Samling Timber Company to carry out its logging activities within the communal lands and forest area of the Kenyahs of Kedaya Telang Usan in Baram Region."

The Samling group, one of Sarawak's timber giants certified by the Malaysian Timber Certification Council MTCC, had been carrying out illegal logging without prior consent within the indigenous communal land area. Not only that but also it ignored "reasonable demands for social benefits and development of the community as they are the rights stakeholders that should be fairly benefit from forest resources in their area," said the Borneo Resources Institute.

The Kenyahs had repeatedly complained to the authorities and the logging company about the problems caused by the destruction of the forest, on which they still rely very much for their existence. However, no measure was taken and the company had continued untouched, so they decided to resort to blockades to bring attention to their claim and stop the logging trucks so the company couldn't extract and transport valuable trees born in the Kenyah's forest in the upper Sungai Sebuah, Sungai Jekitan and Sungai Moh area. Their banners said: "Samling, do not rob the wealth from the poor people's land and give it to the rich in the city."

According to BRIMAS, on the last 14 June, Police personnel have been ordered to the blockade site to enforce a Warrant of Arrest granted by the Magistrate Court in Miri. Yet, so far we have no news that any arrest has taken place.

But it seems that no truce is given to Sarawak's forest peoples. According to Survival International, a leaked secret document reveals plans of the company Sarawak Energy Berhad to build a series of massive hydroelectric dams in Sarawak, submerging the homes of at least a thousand Penan, Kelabit and Kenyah indigenous people. One dam would also submerge part of the Mulu National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage.

The power projects are planned to be constructed between now and 2020. The Sarawak Energy Berhad presentation was posted –it seems accidentally-- on a Chinese website and has now been removed. However, it still can be downloaded together with a map of the proposed dam sites from Survival's website, at <http://www.survival-international.org/news/3450>

Article based on information from: "Malaysian police ordered to clear Kenyah logging road blockade", Bruno Manser Fonds, <http://www.bmf.ch/en/news/?show=102>