
Malaysia: Charged logging company Rimbunan Hijau strikes back

Malaysia is one of the world's major producers and exporters of tropical timber. It is the home base for a number of major transnational logging companies, including Rimbunan Hijau, a global conglomerate of companies controlled by the Tiong family from Sarawak in Malaysia.

Greenpeace released a report on Rimbunan Hijau (RH) in February of this year ("The Untouchables. Rimbunan Hijau's World of Forest Crime and Political Patronage", available at: http://www.greenpeace.org/international_en/reports/ex-summary?item_id=398660&language_id=en), highlighting the corrupt and destructive activities of the Malaysian firm which apart from being a powerful industry player in Malaysia and Equatorial Guinea, dominates the logging industry in Papua New Guinea and also holds significant forestry interests in Gabon, Indonesia, Vanuatu, New Zealand, and Russia. The timber extracted by the corporation is traded across the globe with little concern for the environmental damage, misery and suffering caused in producer countries.

According to the report, their Malaysian production comes from Sarawak, where RH has an estimated 800,000 hectares of production forest, affecting particularly the Penan people –a semi-nomadic forest dwelling people for whom this forest has been their home for thousands of years.

They have been fighting for their lives against logging for years (see WRM Bulletin 35, 41, 58, 75), waging protests and blockades. In 2002, they documented the abuses they have suffered at the hands of the logging industry in the Long Sayan Declaration (<http://www.earthisland.org/borneo/news/articles/020616article.html>).

"Our forest and land have been supplying us with abundant resources and providing us with sources of income and have also shaped our culture, beliefs and customs. Thus, to destroy the forest has the same impact of destroying our community" explains the Long Sayan Declaration.

Indigenous peoples in Sarawak have made many complaints to the authorities about logging-related and land rights problems, but their complaints have constantly been ignored. Meanwhile, the logging industry continues to reap huge profits from the sales of timber resources extracted from their ancestral land with impunity.

In response to the report, Greenpeace International has received a letter from the lawyers of RH threatening to sue the organization. The letter includes a demand to apologise to RH for the publication of the report. RH have also demanded that Greenpeace withdraw the report from the public domain, and to supply them with a list of the recipients of the report.

Needless to say, Greenpeace International has declined to comply with this demand. "RH is hoping that the threat of litigation will silence its critics. But Greenpeace won't back down, nor will we retract any allegations we have made. We're confident our report will hold up in court." said Jasper Teulings, Greenpeace International's Senior Legal Counsel.

Impunity and bullying behaviour usually feature global corporations, be they loggers, miners,

“dammers”, oil extractors -and the list goes on. They share the same greed for profits, the same indifference for the people and the environment. The same lack of future.

On the opposite side, humane humanity spreads the seeds of resistance.

Article based on information from: “World's largest forest destroyer takes on environmentalists”,
Greenpeace press release,
http://www.greenpeace.org/international_en/press/release?item_id=58817