

**Penan women visit Kuala Lumpur to highlight lack of progress on  
National Taskforce Report's Recommendations**

*Kuala Lumpur* – Five Penan women have journeyed far from their villages in Middle Baram, Sarawak to the capital city Kuala Lumpur to meet with representatives from the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFC), the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM), the Malaysian Bar Council and the Selangor state government, to highlight the continuing plight and struggles faced by the Penan community.

Amelia Balan from Long Item, Catherine Bitang from Long Sengayan, Gadong Ngok from Long Lilim, Tabita De' from Long Item and Juliet Bulan Singa from Long Pagan, on behalf of the Penan communities from Baram area, also wanted an update by the relevant authorities on the recommendations of the National Taskforce Report on allegations of sexual abuse against Penan women in 2009, as well as a plan of action endorsed by the Cabinet in May 2009 to address the problems brought to light by the task force investigation.

The National Taskforce was set up in 2008 by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development to investigate the widespread allegation of rape and sexual abuse by timber workers against the Penan women. The report<sup>1</sup> found that sexual exploitation did occur, and the Penan women and girls were especially vulnerable because of their low socioeconomic status and lack of access to government and healthcare services. The report had an impressive list of recommendations to address these issues including sexual exploitation, remote access, poverty, lack of development and infrastructure building, as well as lack of basic necessities and healthcare.

An independent fact-finding mission report by the Penan Support Group, FORUM-ASIA and Asian Indigenous Women's Network (AIWN) was published in 2010. The report highlighted new sexual abuse cases in 2009 and highlighted that little action has been taken since the National Taskforce Report.

**Meeting with SUHAKAM and relevant government representatives**

In their visit to Kuala Lumpur, the Penan women met with representatives from SUHAKAM and The Bar Council. Unfortunately, YB Datuk Hajjah Rohani Abdul Karim, the Minister of Women, Family and Community Development is out of town but has indicated a strong interest to meet with the group at a later date in Sarawak. SUHAKAM will write to the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development to follow-up on the status of the recommendations of the National Taskforce Report.

Other representative met was YB Rodziah Ismail, state assembly person and Selangor EXCO member in charge of welfare, women's affairs, science, technology and innovation. YB Rodziah has pledged to raise the issue in Parliament, provide training for Penan women depending on their needs and consider providing scholarships for vocational schools and University of Selangor (UNISEL). YB Rodziah will also consider organising a visit to Baram to get to know about the issues better.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Laporan Jawatankuasa Bertindak Peringkat Kebangsaan Bagi Menyiasat Dakwaan Penderaan Seksual Terhadap Wanita Kaum Penan di Sarawak* <http://hornbillunleashed.files.wordpress.com/2009/09/penan-ir.pdf>

### **National Taskforce Report: Act Now on Recommendations**

*(Refer to issues and problems raised by Penan women)*

The National Taskforce Report had specific recommendations to be implemented in the areas of sexual abuse, registration and citizenship, healthcare and education. Unfortunately, it was observed that there is a lack of progress and meaningful impact on the implementation of these recommendations.

The Penan women also highlighted other critical issues outside of the recommendations made in the taskforce report, and yet are equally important and must be addressed by the Government. These include the commercial exploitation and loss of their customary lands, lack of access to clean water and proper sanitary facilities as well as unwanted projects that are destroying the land that the community depends on to survive.

The Penan women reiterated the urgent needs to implement the recommendations made in the National Taskforce Report and subsequent action plan, and call on the government to look into the welfare of the Penan community immediately. The Penan has voiced out their struggles and hardships for decades, but progress seems to be moving at a snail's pace. Implementation of action plans must be expedited in view of the critical and urgent needs of the community, which if left unmet, will eventually lead to the loss of the Penan's culture, tradition, land and even the community itself.

The Penan women's visit is facilitated by the Penan Support Group (PSG), a coalition of NGOs in East and West Malaysia dedicated to advocating for the rights of the Penans. Members of the PSG who are facilitating this trip are: Women's Aid Organisation (WAO), Sarawakians Access (SACCESS), All Women's Action Society (AWAM), Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM), Pusat Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER) and Women's Centre for Change (WCC).

- Ends -

---

*Issued by the Penan Support Group. For more information, please contact:*

*Liza Bong  
012 886 0067*

## ISSUES AND PROBLEMS FACED BY PENAN COMMUNITY, SARAWAK

**Below are the issues and problems facing by these Penan women and their communities:**

***Registration and Citizenship:*** For Amelia Balan and the people in her community, registrations of ICs and birth certificates continue to be a challenge. Visits conducted by Jabatan Pendaftaran Negeri to her village are scarce. In some instances, officials insist that applicants must append a copy of their parents and grandparents' ICs and birth certificates, while in many cases even the parents and grandparents were not even registered. Not being properly registered means having restricted access to services that should otherwise be available, paying higher fees, inability to pursue further studies, and denial of the right to vote.

***Access to Education:*** For Gadong Ngok, a mother of four, finding transportation to send her children to school has always been a constant struggle. Three of her children are currently in school, but one will soon drop out after Form Five due to financial difficulties. Her story is commonly found in many other villages, and in some, education can be practically out of reach for the future generation because of the lack of registration.

***Access to Healthcare Facilities:*** For Tabita De' as the appointed health representative of the community (Wakil Kesihatan Komuniti - WKK), supply of medication is not always enough. Doctor visits are regular in some villages, but not in others. Often, medical supplies do not last until the next doctor visit, which are usually irregular due to bad weather, and lack of manpower and resources.

***Loss of Indigenous Land:*** For Juliet Bulan Singa, her home land is at a risk of being taken away and destroyed for logging activities (a court case is currently on-going). She said that for her, the land is like our hospital where traditional medicines can be found; and like the supermarket for city dwellers where food sources can be obtained. The Penan's rights to lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned and occupied is internationally guaranteed under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). Yet, her land is still at a risk of being stolen.

***Proper Sanitation and clean water:*** For Tabita De' and the people in her community, clean water and proper sanitary facilities are non-existent in her village. The river is polluted due to logging, and the community is left with no choice but to use the polluted water for drinking, cooking, bathing and washing. As a result, many have fallen sick. The only source of clean water from the jungle is also no more as the bamboo pipe providing clean water from the jungle is now broken.

***No Dams, more facilities for villages:*** For Catherine Bitang, a mother of six, she wants to know why the Baram dam is being built around her village, while other much needed development programmes and facilities such as new schools and clinics are nowhere to be seen. Her community is one of the communities located near the dam, which will be destroyed and flooded if the dam is built. Catherine wants to see more roads, long houses, bridges and water pipes, and certainly no dam.