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Rainforest communities campaign against Malaysian Samling Group

Protests against logging on native lands in Sarawak and Guyana

Indigenous people living in tropical rainforests in Malaysia and Guyana are stepping up the campaign against the Samling group, one of Malaysia's leading timber companies.

In Malaysia, four nomadic and semi-nomadic Penan communities living on the Limbang river in the North of the state of Sarawak launched a joint appeal to the international public. They urge Credit Suisse, HSBC and Macquarie Securities, the three banks who have sponsored Samling's recent public listing, to stop supporting the timber giant.

"Samling is destroying our last remaining rainforest in the Upper Limbang", headman Awing Tubai said on behalf of the Penan communities. "We need clean water for drinking and fishing and intact forests where we can gather our food and other forest products." Samling has already logged large areas of primary tropical forests in the Upper Limbang river area, close to the Batu Lawi, a mountain which the Penan consider to be holy. The appeal against the loggers is endorsed by the communities of Long Nyakit, Long Peresek, Long Adang and Long Keneng.

In the South American state of Guyana, the Akawini Amerindian Village asked the Government for support to end an agreement with a Samling-subsiary, which was negotiated with them in bad faith. In July 2005, the community was made to sign an agreement which favoured a shelter company for the Guyanese Samling subsidiary Barama Co. Ltd. "As soon as the agreement was signed we saw heavy duty machinery such as bulldozers, logging trucks and excavators come onto our village lands. After some time we learnt that the heavy-duty machinery belonged to Barama Company", the Akawini village council stated.

In a press statement, the Akawini Village Council said that the villagers were threatened they would be taken to court unless they signed an agreement allowing logging on their lands. "Only because of the circumstances under which we were placed we signed the agreement. This, we regret to this day as the livelihood of our people is now threatened." The Amerindians fear the destruction and loss of their forest resources through the Samling subsidiary's activities.

The Samling Group holds 1,6 million hectares of tropical forest concessions in Guyana and 1,4 million hectares in the Malaysian state of Sarawak. On the occasion of its public listing at the Hong Kong stock exchange, 37 organisations from 18 countries asked investors and banks to shun the company for its failure to comply with basic environmental and social standards.

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