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For Environmental Justice

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Press Statement

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**Expedite Efforts To Secure International Funds
For Forests Protection**

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) calls on the Federal Government to urgently expedite efforts to secure international funds to help states protect and conserve their forests, which are vital for addressing climate change and protect biodiversity, instead of allowing them for logging and other purposes.

SAM makes this call in view of media reports yesterday that Kedah Menteri Besar Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor had said that 40 forest concession holders had to be paid RM1 billion in compensation or be given replacement forests due to the withdrawal of their concessions in permanent reserved forests by the previous government.

We appeal to the Kedah state government not to provide loggers with replacement forests but instead to seek Federal government assistance in securing international funds that are available for forests protection and conservation, if the purpose is for addressing climate change and for biodiversity protection.

International funds are available such as from the Green Climate Fund, the Adaptation Fund and the Global Environment Facility. These international funds are targeted to support developing countries in meeting their climate change and biodiversity objectives, which bring global benefits as well.

These funds for the protection of forests in the states can only be accessed with the support of the Federal government.

Such international funds recognize the need for payments to developing countries such as Malaysia for the ecosystem services provided by our tropical rainforests, such as in acting as carbon-sinks in absorbing greenhouse gases, as well as in protecting water resources and in maintaining biodiversity.

The Federal government must urgently access these funds and channel them to the states that are rich in forests resources such as Kedah, so that the country is able to meet its international commitments under the Paris Agreement as well as the Convention on Biological Diversity.

It is critical for the water catchment forests of the Ulu Muda and its surrounding areas (known as the Greater Ulu Muda Forest) to be protected, as the sustainability of water resources are critical for the survival of millions of people not only in Kedah but also Perlis and Penang. These water resources are also vital in supporting the rice-bowl of the country, which the Kedah MB has promised to protect.

The Ulu Muda forests serve the water needs of an estimated population of 4.09 million people in three states. About 96% of raw water in Kedah, 70% in Perlis and more than 80% in Penang comes from the Ulu Muda.

Logging in the past has damaged areas in the Ulu Muda Forest Reserve.

We therefore appeal to the new Kedah State Government to urgently gazette the Ulu Muda Forests as water catchment forests if this has not already been done, and not allow any activities within the forest areas which threaten its life-supporting functions.

Otherwise, we will be facing a serious water crisis in the coming years, especially due to climate change impacts.

We reiterate that the federal government must take measures to compensate the Kedah state government for keeping its forests intact for the larger public good, in exchange for the loss it will suffer due to compensation claims from the loggers.

We call for no further delay in acting to save and protect the Ulu Muda forests, as well as other forests in Kedah which should not be replaced for logging.

We should not be inviting future disasters, including that from the impending climate and water crises that can result due to the destruction of our remaining forests and biodiversity.

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