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For Environmental Justice

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Letter to editor

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SAM echoes Royal call for protection of forests and trees in Malaysia

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) echoes the recent call by His Royal Highness, Sultan Nazrin Shah of Perak, on the need to protect forests and trees.

According to media reports, Sultan Nazrin had said that “trees and forests were no longer appreciated, as they both were increasingly seen as commercial produce for timber, while forests were seen as land for commercial farming that resulted in rampant logging”. He is reported to have made these remarks at the at the opening of the state-level Landscape Day celebration on 3rd March.

SAM completely agrees with him on how our forests and trees are not valued enough, especially the important role they play in the sequestration of carbon dioxide, which is the main gas in Malaysia’s greenhouse gas emissions.

As noted by the Sultan, "Every young tree is able to absorb 13 pounds of carbon dioxide per year and a tree is at its most productive level after 10 years and capable of absorbing 48 pounds of carbon dioxide annually, thus supplying oxygen for two people." He also said that "on average, an acre of forest is capable of isolating 2.5 tonnes carbon dioxide per year. Every tonne of growing trees will be able to absorb 1.5 tonnes of carbon dioxide," and called for adaptation and mitigation measures that must be pioneered and implemented to ensure environmental sustainability.

Hence, it is vital to protect our forests and trees as they play an important role as a carbon sequester and are also important for protecting our rich biodiversity of flora and fauna, as well as in providing critical ecosystem services including in soil and water protection.

SAM has been relentlessly championing the cause against continued deforestation and the cutting of trees for the past many decades and we are glad that the important voice of a Royal has lent credence to our calls.

Save the Kuala Langat Forest Reserve from destruction

In this context, we are most distressed that over proposed degazettment of about 930 hectares (ha) (or about 2,300 acres) of the Kuala Langat North Forest Reserve (KLNFR) for a mixed development project in Selangor.

Most of the KLNFR is situated on peatlands that are important stores of carbon because the organic matter of the forest has been accumulating for thousands of years. Clearing and draining the forest would result in the oxidation of this organic matter and the release of carbon into the atmosphere.

It is vital to note that peatlands store about 10 times more carbon per ha compared with other tropical forest types. The conservation value of KLNFR includes functioning as a natural terrestrial carbon store and regulating carbon dioxide composition in the atmosphere. Peat swamp forest degradation is a major cause of greenhouse gas accumulation in the atmosphere and is one of the main contributors to global climate change.

The KLNFR has the capacity to store carbon up to 1,600 tonnes of carbon per ha. The total stored stock capacity of KLNFR is approximately 1,500,000 tonnes of carbon. An estimated 5.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions can be avoided if the KLNFR is maintained as a Permanent Reserved Forest which is protected in perpetuity.

In view of the importance of forests and trees in regulation our climate, SAM calls on all the states in the country to stop the destruction of our forests and trees. In particular, the KLNFR should not be destroyed for the purposes of so-called 'mixed development'.

The Federal government of course has to enable forest endowed states to protect, conserve, and rehabilitate their forests through the provision of international grants that are available for such efforts to address climate change and conserve biodiversity. Only through these efforts will Malaysia be able to meet its international commitments under the Paris Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The states must cooperate in appreciating the forests and the trees and in protecting them, and heed to the call of Sultan Nazrin.

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