



Sahabat Alam Malaysia **Friends of the Earth Malaysia**

For Environmental Justice

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Press Release

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Villages near Marudi facing acute clean water shortage

At a time when the country is undergoing such a historic political transition, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) wishes to draw attention to the plight of our indigenous communities who have long been deprived of their rights to basic services. In Sarawak, Sabah and Peninsular Malaysia, a significant section of our indigenous population has yet to have access to a clean water supply system, electricity and sanitation as well as quality healthcare, education and transportation facilities. If we are really serious about institutional and governance reforms in the country, this matter must be pursued with great urgency and effectiveness by both the federal and state authorities.

In light of this, we would like to raise our concern on the acute clean water shortage faced by more than a thousand residents of the longhouses around the Puyut-Lubuk Nibong in Marudi, Baram. Based on our investigations in the last month, we have discovered that their living conditions today are extremely distressing, especially after the arrival of the long dry spell in mid-March.

According to the residents of Puyut, most longhouses here have constructed on their own, gravity-fed water supply systems, sourced from the nearby streams. The supply of this river water was originally intended to provide the people with safe, potable water which can also be utilised for other normal household cleaning purposes.

However today, the people claim that this source of river water has been contaminated by too much pollution, and may no longer be safe for consumption. At the most, it can only be utilised for cleaning purposes.

For villages that are located further away from any stream that can be utilised for a gravity-fed water supply system, the people have instead resorted to using water that is sourced from small pools located nearby their longhouses, which is only suitable to be used for cleaning purposes. However, as a result of the long dry spell, the water quality of such pools has deteriorated to such an extent and it is no longer possible to even utilise them for cleaning purposes.

Therefore, for the purpose of cleaning, most of such villages today have had to depend on filtered rainwater. Unfortunately however, the drought has now even begun to affect the storage of this water source.

Meanwhile, for clean potable water, the villagers have long been forced to source it from the public tap located at the site of the tamu market in the Marudi town or alternatively, from bottled mineral water that must be purchased. In the village of Rumah Entawan in Padang Kerbau, the people reported that some families may even have to purchase up to ten boxes of bottled water monthly.

SAM is also aware that the lack of access to clean water has been an on-going problem faced by many of the longhouses surrounding Marudi for several decades already. In the past, the people have lodged several complaints to the relevant authorities, including to their elected legislators during consultations with community leaders. Unfortunately however, all such complaints have not been given their due attention up to this day. Any promises that had thus far been made still remains unfulfilled.

It is totally unacceptable that these villages, which are located within a merely 30 minute drive from the town of Marudi, have yet to be supplied with a clean water supply system after more than five decades after the formation of Malaysia.

Therefore, SAM would like to urge both the federal and state authorities to pay attention to this matter and to take the correct actions swiftly. Such a living condition that is without access to clean water is indeed a serious and dangerous situation. It is also a denial of the basic human right to a safe and comfortable life. Last but not least, SAM would also like to call the government to develop immediately an action plan to supply clean water directly from the water plant located in the Marudi town to the affected villages.

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