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Friends of the Earth Malaysia
For Environmental Justice

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Press Statement

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Let communities instead of corporations lead us in addressing climate change

On October 13 and 14, Friends of the Earth International (FOEI) member groups across six continents are mobilising to highlight the climate emergency, fight dirty energy and false solutions in order to call for a people-led transformation of our energy system. These actions are part of our *Reclaim Power Campaign 2017*. Climate change and the global energy crisis threaten the lives and livelihoods of billions of people worldwide, especially the poor and the marginalised. FOEI and its members believe that the drivers of these issues are unsustainable economic and development models based on fossil fuels and other destructive energy sources and the concentration of power over energy goods and services in the hands of the wealthy few.

As a member of the FOEI federation, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) therefore wishes to also highlight our current global reality. To address the climate crisis we need a just transition to shift out economies away from fossil fuels, large dams and other unsustainable economic practices and towards alternatives based on democratic and community control.

Large hydroelectric dams for instance have been proven to be a non-renewable source of energy. They do not only destroy large areas of productive farmlands owned and worked on by our indigenous peoples but also their rainforest which contains priceless biodiversity. The rainforest also functions as a large reserve of carbon sink which serves to prevent the continued rise in global temperature. Yet today, Malaysia is irrationally determined to build more large dams.

Indigenous communities all over the world are the ones who have been sustainably utilising and protecting the world's forests and natural resources since time immemorial. Corporate-led economic and development policies which harm indigenous communities will inevitably harm the world and all life. In the face of climate change, we must recognise the futility of our current economic and development model which continues to advocate dirty energy, including large dams, and corporate-controlled agriculture. We must be ready to promote a new mode of moving forward, one which accords the highest respect for communities instead of corporations.

In Sarawak, we work with nine indigenous communities to promote community-based forestry management and sustainable agriculture. The community-based reforestation effort was in fact pioneered by the Uma Bawang Residents' Association in Baram, Miri Division as early as 1992, following the logging of the customary territory of this Kayan community in the 1980s. Such agroecology activities also serve to protect such community land and forests from corporate-led encroachment. Further, many organisations today are also assisting indigenous communities in accessing clean and renewable energy, such as mini-hydro dams or solar. Justice demands that community needs be prioritised over corporate wants.

We therefore call policymakers and members of the concerned public alike to look into such community-led sustainable alternatives in the face of climate change. Dirty energy and unsustainable corporate-led practices are at the root of climate injustice. We no longer can afford to continue participating in an economy where corporations are allowed to rake in indecent amounts of profits as communities suffer and their resources permanently destroyed. At its core, only a renewed sense of justice can save the world from a very difficult future.

To our indigenous communities, the nation certainly owes them an acknowledgment of gratitude in resisting destructive corporate practices. Let such communities, instead of corporations, show us the way forward for a safer and sustainable future.

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