



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பிளாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

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## PRESS STATEMENT

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### ANOTHER CALL TO STOP ALL HILLSLOPE DEVELOPMENT IMMEDIATELY

Why must it take a tragedy to happen in Penang before the Penang state and local governments wake up to the dangers of rampant and unsustainable development especially on hill slopes? Or will they wake up?

Two years ago, in December 2015, the Penang Forum, alarmed by such negative developments, organized a half-day event titled “Save Our Hills” in which engineering, planning and legal experts gave presentations on the dangers of hillslope development. (The presentations are available on Penang Forum’s website.) It then called on the government to review and stop further hillslope projects. Very sadly, the call fell on deaf ears and the consequences are painfully evident today after an estimate of perhaps 14 lives could be lost in a landslide in a hillslope project in Tanjung Bungah.

The Penang Forum started the Penang Hills Watch (PHW), a citizens’ initiative to provide the state government, information on hill cuttings that it collects from the public. In January 2017, the PHW met with the state government; the present site where this tragedy happened was the first case that PHW highlighted to the state government. (Please visit PHW website.) Photos of construction and hill cutting on this site were presented to the state government to which it responded that the “earthwork is under monitoring.”

The Chief Minister of Penang, in the Safety Guidelines for Hillside Development, wrote “Penang Local Governments (MPPP and MPSP) are to strengthen their Geotechnical unit, which processes and approves applications for hill site developments, followed by strict enforcement. A monitoring team will be established to ensure compliance in construction and monitoring performance of slopes.” The question is what happened then? Did the state and local governments follow through their own guidelines? Or was there gross negligence?

Such senseless tragedy could have been avoided. Penang Forum calls for an independent Royal Commission of Inquiry to investigate what went wrong and how such incidents can be avoided in the future. All parties beginning from the State Planning Committee that gave approval of all hill slope projects, to the One-Stop-Centre Committee of the Penang Island City Council that also approved the project, to the engineers who are supposed to monitor the projects, to the developers and contractors who carried out the project should be investigated and held responsible.

In the meantime, Penang Forum once again calls on the authorities to:

- i. stop all hillslope projects with immediate effect;
- ii. immediately amend the 2009 guidelines on ‘special projects’ to explicitly prohibit all development on hill lands, except if it is for essential public services;

- iii. rehabilitate all existing exposed and barren slopes and spaces to prevent further soil erosion;
- iv. undertake stern enforcement, effective and deterrent punishment on those who clear land illegally or do not abide by conditions imposed to prevent soil-erosion;
- v. monitor frequently and effectively all hill slopes by the local authorities;
- vi. publicly declare and give warning on all hill slopes and areas that are not safe.

**Penang Forum**

**Sahabat Alam Malaysia**

**Consumers Association of Penang**

**Malaysian Nature Society, Penang**

**Women for Change**

**Penang Heritage Trust**

**Friends of Botanical Gardens**

**Residents Associations and Management Committees of Penang representing 25 such organizations**