



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement/ Letter to the Editor

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Set up Parliamentary Special Select Committee to investigate root cause of floods and make recommendations

Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) calls on Parliament, during its special sitting scheduled for Monday next on the recent devastating flood disaster, to set up a Parliamentary Special Select Committee to identify the root causes of the floods, including the uncertain weather pattern due to the climate crisis, and to make recommendations to deal with them.

The Committee should identify the reasons for our National Disaster Management Agency (NADMA) not responding speedily and effectively to the crisis. It should investigate the causes for the failure of institutions mandated to protect our environment, to perform their duties.

It must also deal issues of corruption, abuse of power, and undue influence by powerful individuals and institutions in the approvals given for forest land sale and/or clearing.

The massive floods in the country in the last ten years should have sounded the alarm that there is something fundamentally wrong in our development model. We have prioritized economic growth and private profit at the cost of environmental protection and social justice. We ignored the numerous services the environment provides and the widening gap between rich and poor. Elite greed for material wealth has contributed to the climate crisis which is threatening our very survival.

Large tracts of forest reserve areas have been cleared to make way for townships with factories and high-rise buildings without regard to environmental impacts. We are now being punished for such destructive development. For example, Taman Sri Muda, which experienced one of the worst floods recently, was once a forest reserve set aside for water catchment.

Who was responsible for changing the status of the land? No one knows. Only a commission of enquiry can unearth the truth. Are the authorities prepared to do that? The developers and their political patrons have made their fortune but the ordinary people are paying a heavy price – lost lives, destroyed homes and wrecked business.

Nine districts in Pahang have experienced severe flooding due to logging and rampant clearing of natural forests including forest reserves. Some people died and around 250,000 people were evacuated to relief centers. There are online advertisements offering for sale timber land and logging licenses in our natural forests. Are our forests, rich in biodiversity, flora, fauna, wildlife and ecosystems up for sale? Do the authorities that sanction such transactions realise that forest ecosystems provide us with water, food, flood and disease control as well as recreational and spiritual benefits?

The shocking revelation in the media recently was that the Pahang Department of Environment had, in 2021, approved 46 environmental impact assessments (EIAs) including for logging and plantations. The DoE is vested with authority for protecting our environment - our hills, forests, rivers, seas, and atmosphere – and not sanctioning its destruction.

The climate crisis and global poverty have emerged as the most important issue for the international community to deal with. At the recently concluded COP26 conference Malaysia committed itself to stop deforestation and achieve net zero emission by 2050.

Six years ago in 2015, we signed on to the 17 UN SDGs. Goal 13 requires us to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts by integrating climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning. The target date for achieving the UN SDGs is 2030. Six years have passed and we don't even have a low emission development plan to achieve that objective.

We need to develop and implement a detailed plan with targets and timelines, setting out the actions to be taken to fulfill our commitments made during COP26, and under the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Federal Government, State governments and local authorities are not moving in tandem to address environmental issues. State governments are approving forest clearances and land reclamation, and local authorities are approving building plans, without regard to the greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) such activities produce, aggravating the climate crisis.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres warned the world leaders at the opening of COP26: "We face a moment of truth. We are fast approaching tipping points that will trigger escalating feedback loops of global heating." The Government should immediately suspend all forest clearing and land reclamation projects that contribute significantly to planet-warming.

Thus, the authorities need to take a serious approach to address the climate catastrophe. The political leaders and officials at the federal, state and local authority levels must share a common vision and work together to achieve our international commitments with regard to sustainable development and the climate crisis.

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