



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பினாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

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Press Statement

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Make those responsible for Batang Kali tragedy accountable

Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) express our deepest condolences to the families who lost their loved ones in the Batang Kali landslide tragedy. It is one of the worst tragedies in recent times and should serve as a wake-up call to the authorities to take measures to ensure the safety of campsites and recreational grounds near hill slopes.

The tragedy occurred due to the collapse of the man-made hill slope which apparently was due to the soil being saturated with water. The relevant Federal ministry must set up an independent committee of experts to enquire into the reason for the landslide. It must examine the way the slope was constructed, whether it included adequate safety measures, and whether there was regular inspection and maintenance. Those responsible for the landslide, including public officers, must be made accountable.

It is shocking that the campsites were allowed to function without a license incorporating conditions as to the maintenance of the sites including the slope. It is a serious dereliction of duty by the relevant local authority and the state government.

Landslides have become frequent, particularly during rainy seasons with loss of lives and property. There were 220 reported landslide cases from January to December this year. The authorities do not seem to have learnt a lesson from these disasters and put in place adequate safety measures. Every time a tragedy happens there is a lot of media attention and promises by ministers and officials but a few months later it is off their radar screen. It is business as usual.

According to Jabatan Kerjaraya, there were 1,045 slopes along federal routes in the peninsula identified as very high-risk slopes. The slopes were probably man-made without incorporating appropriate safety measures and conducting regular inspections. Warning the public about the dangerous slopes is necessary but not sufficient. The authorities must go to the root cause that makes these slopes dangerous and remedy it.

Despite warnings from scientists and the UN Secretary-General, there is no sufficient appreciation on the part of our officials and the business community about the adverse impact of human activities on the environment. We are clearing thousands of hectares of our virgin forests for cash crops and townships and cutting through hills to construct highways without considering the impact of these activities on the environment.

Our laws on environmental protection are inadequate having regard to the climate crisis we are facing now. The Department of Environment, the agency responsible for protecting the environment, is ineffective, as can be seen from the recurring pollution of rivers in Selangor and Johore, and the deforestation in Pahang and Kelantan leading to massive floods.

We call on the unity government to:

1. Conduct a thorough investigation of the causes leading to the Batang Kali landslide and make those responsible for the tragedy accountable.
2. Put in place comprehensive guidelines on campsites and recreational areas to ensure they are safe.
3. Update our environmental laws to deal with the challenges posed by the climate crisis and other ecological problems
4. Implement our commitments under international treaties on sustainable development and the climate crisis
5. Conduct a study on the failure of relevant agencies to enforce laws to protect the environment and promote sustainable development and take measures to remedy the weaknesses

Mohideen Abdul Kader
President
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