



## PRESS RELEASE

### **South East Asian Human Rights Commissions call for freeze on agribusiness concessions until indigenous and community rights secured**

**5 November, Kota Kinabalu:** After a week of field investigations and discussions, the 6<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference on Human Rights and Agribusiness in South East Asia [issued a resolution](#) calling for moratoriums to halt the further hand out of concessions throughout the region. The meeting noted how land conflicts as a result of agribusiness expansion are proliferating and urged a pause in the hand out of licenses while community and indigenous peoples' land rights are secured.

"We have noticed that there is a failure in protecting native customary rights in the region," said Marcus Colchester, Senior Policy Advisor of Forest Peoples Programme. "Land grabbing continues and native people are losing their land and rights. This needs to change. There's a need for political reforms to close the gaps."

The conference, which is the most recent of a series of events organised by Forest Peoples Programme in collaboration with the South East Asia National Human Rights Institutions Forum over the last five years, aimed at discussing and developing frameworks which can ensure that human rights obligations are binding on transnational and national agribusiness companies.

The meeting also examined the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil's Jurisdictional Approach to palm oil certification, which the state of Sabah is pioneering. This innovative and promising approach will apply the RSPO standard to all producers in the state. The aim is to make sure that by 2025 all palm oil produced in Sabah will be sustainable and RSPO certified. The conference made concrete recommendations on how to strengthen the process so it upholds UN principles on business and human rights and addresses the marginalized position that indigenous peoples and local communities have with government agencies in local and sub-national areas.

Before the conference, some participants had the chance to join two fact finding missions organised by the Jaringan Orang Asal SeMalaysia (JOAS) and indigenous organisations Partners of Community Organisation (PACOS) and Sabah Environmental Protection Association (SEPA), with the aim of investigating the

challenges faced by communities in Pitas and Bigor, Nabawan (Sabah) due to the development of land-based projects in the areas. The results of the missions were shared and discussed at the event.

“The visits to Pitas and Bigor were an opportunity for the communities to look for solutions about the areas,” said Jannie Lasimbang, Secretary General of JOAS. “The message we would like to convey is that we are going for agribusiness but we also want to comply with international standards.”

Following the fact finding mission, participants to the meeting also called on the Chief Minister of Sabah to heed the appeals of the communities in Pitas, whose lands have been taken over by a shrimp-pond development project leading to the destruction of mangrove forests and loss of local peoples’ livelihoods. It also called for a revision of the law on ‘communal title’, to close loopholes that are being misused to favour corporate takeovers of community lands without proper consultation and without securing consent from the communities.

“It is in our present mandate to stop the breaching of human rights in the agribusiness sector,” said Francis Johen, Commissioner of SUHAKAM. “This requires support from different stakeholders, most importantly the government.”

ENDS

### **Notes for editors**

Link to resolution document:

<http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/news/2016/11/Sabah%20Resolution%20final.pdf>

#### Marcus Colchester:

Marcus Colchester is Senior Policy Advisor at Forest Peoples Programme, a UK-based organisation that supports the rights of forest peoples around the world. His primary work has focused on securing indigenous people's rights to their lands and livelihoods by pressing for policy change at grass-roots, national and international levels.

#### Jannie Lasimbang:

Jannie Lasimbang is prominent human rights and indigenous rights leader. She is the Secretary General of JOAS, also known as the Indigenous Peoples Network of Malaysia, an umbrella network for 84 Orang Asal (indigenous peoples) organisations. She has previously served as a member of the Malaysian National Human Rights Commission (SUHAKAM) and as a member of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Francis Johen:

Mr. Francis Johen was appointed as a Commissioner of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia in 2013 and was re-appointed for a second term from 2016 until 2019. He holds a Bachelor of Laws (Hons) from the University of Malaya. He served as an Assistant Secretary and legal officer respectively in Kuching Municipal Council from 1981 until 1990, before he was appointed as a Senior Legal Officer in the Sarawak State Attorney-General Chambers in 1990.

In 2009, Mr. Francis Johen was appointed as the Deputy Attorney-General for Sarawak for three years until 2011. From January 2012 until 31 August 2013, he served as the Senior Administrative Officer (Legal) at the Ministry of Local Government & Community Development of Sarawak.

**Press Contacts**

For further information or to arrange interviews please contact:

Camilla Capasso (Communications Officer Forest Peoples Programme): +44 0 1608 652957 [camilla@forestpeoples.org](mailto:camilla@forestpeoples.org)

Jannie Lasimbang (Secretary General JOAS): 0060 109311944,  
[jannielasimbang@gmail.com](mailto:jannielasimbang@gmail.com)

Marcus Colchester (Senior Policy Advisor Forest Peoples Programme): +44 0 1608 652894 (UK) / +62 813 16045245 (Indonesia) [marcus@forestpeoples.org](mailto:marcus@forestpeoples.org)