

PENAN SUPPORT GROUP

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Media Statement

NGOs Counter Police Allegations of Non-Cooperation in Penan Sexual Abuse Cases

It has been three months since the Swiss-based NGO, the Bruno Manser Foundation (BMF) released the press statement on the rape and sexual abuse of young Penan women by logging company workers.

It has been two months since The Star followed up the BMF press statement and provided details of rape and sexual abuses in Middle Baram in Miri Division, Sarawak.

Two young Penan mothers had since been sheltered by NGOs and friends in Kuala Lumpur and they had made two police reports with Bukit Aman.

NGOs are cooperating with Police

KL-based NGOs continue to cooperate with the Sexual Assault Unit of the Police Headquarters in Bukit Aman. The NGOs have facilitated the presence of the Penan women at Bukit Aman each and every time such requests were made by the unit for the Penan women to provide statements and clarification. Such cooperation has been progressing well on a professional level, with the last session taking place yesterday, 9th December 2008.

Under such circumstances, it is highly inappropriate for the IGP and the Bukit Aman CID head to make public statements contrary to such cooperation and its on-going investigation.

No case again?

We are puzzled by statements from the police suggesting that the police's initial investigations show that there is no case to prosecute.

This seems like a repeat of what happened to the 1994 NGO-facilitated rape report of a 12-year-old Penan girl which gave more than sufficient details and information to enable the police to nab the rapist and the other perpetrators. Yet we were only informed recently that that case had been thrown out by AG's chambers due to insufficient evidence gathered by the police.

We are providing copies of the police reports made in 1995 regarding this case to demonstrate the leads and names mentioned that should have led police to at least an arrest.

Sarawak media not reporting the full truth

We also condemn the outright attempts at white-washing the latest rape and sexual abuse cases by the Sarawak-based The Borneo Post newspaper on numerous occasions. The Borneo Post's reporting on the issue reflects blatant biasedness and lack of journalistic professionalism.

NGOs hiding the victims?

We take objection to the police's insinuation that we hid two victims in KL for 9 days before making the police reports as we wanted to coax them as to what to say to the police.

This further demonstrates the insensitivity and lack of understanding of the police top brass in handling rape and sexual abuse victims, especially those from isolated, marginalized and long-abused communities.

Why we sought help from Bukit Aman?

The original intention of the victims and the Penan communities to seek support in KL was to avoid the biased Sarawak police that they had come accustomed to. However, the statements and actions coming out of Bukit Aman are of increasing concern to us. And raises questions about where the Penan victims can go to now.

Our offer

The police have said that they are unable to meet the people from the community as part of their investigations. This is not surprising as the Penans do not trust the police or anybody from the authorities.

The NGOs in Sarawak who have a good working relationship with the Penans and who are trusted by the Penans, are willing to take a team of *women* police officers from Bukit Aman into the Penan homelands for them to meet the other victims and whoever else they need to interview. But only women police officers from Bukit Aman are to be in the team.

In conclusion, we call upon the police to be professional and free of bias in its investigation into the latest allegation of rape and sexual abuses of Penan girls and women. And for them to see to it that such crimes are not perpetuated in Sarawak or elsewhere.

10 December 2008