

Professor Andrew Hamilton, Vice Chancellor, University of Oxford
andrew.hamilton@admin.ox.ac.uk

Ms Gay Haskins, Dean, Executive
Education, Saïd Business School and Chair of Day One of the Oxford
Global Islamic Branding and Marketing Forum 2010
gay.haskins@sbs.ox.ac.uk

Mr Paul Temporal, Conference Organiser, Oxford Global Islamic Branding and Marketing
Forum 2010
Paul.Temporal@sbs.ox.ac.uk

Mr Allen Lai, Contact person for the conference, Oxford Global Islamic Branding and
Marketing Forum 2010
oxfordislamicmarketing@sbs.ox.ac.uk

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Dear Sir, Madam,

We, the undersigned, are disturbed that the Chief Minister of Sarawak, Mr. Taib Mahmud, has been invited to present the opening address at the Said Business School's inaugural Islamic Branding and Marketing Forum 2010.

During his nearly 30 years of iron grip over Sarawak, Taib Mahmud has systematically plundered the rich Borneo jungles for timber. His multiple roles in government, as Chief Minister, Minister of Finance and Minister of Planning and Resources Management minister, has given him the power to dispense land, forestry and palm oil concessions as well as the power to approve infrastructure projects.

Taib Mahmud's 'business interests' are notorious. Most of the state of Sarawak has been absorbed into the possession of his cronies and family members through 'privatisations' and the handing out of palm oil and timber concessions, via arbitrary state acquisitions of native lands. So the lands and other resources of many of Sarawak's indigenous and poor communities have been taken by the state government purportedly for 'development' into large-scale commercial oil palm plantations and other tree plantations, which has resulted in environmental destruction, serious human rights violations and poverty.

Thus, while the Taib's fortunes continue to increase and they have become multi-billionaires and owners of luxury properties in Canada, USA and the UK, much of Sarawak languishes in poverty.

We have always believed that a prestigious University like Oxford University would not provide a platform to anyone with a reputation of Taib Mahmud, and certainly not by asking him to be a keynote speaker.

We therefore express serious concern over the decision and criticize it. This decision could compromise your University's standing as a hallmark of democracy, justice and human-centred development. To have Taib Mahmud give the opening presentation of the Inaugural

Oxford Global Islamic Branding and Marketing Forum certainly gives the impression that the Forum or the Said Business School does not think Islamic Branding ought to be just, democratic, ethical and done with respect for the environment and human rights.

The questions we therefore have are: Why has the University/Said Business School deigned it fit to invite Taib Mahmud, a person reportedly associated with many actions of injustices and violations of human rights? More importantly, has the School researched the background of Abdul Taib Mahmud in terms of the widespread and documented evidence available of gross corruption, human rights abuses, environmental devastation and electoral fraud all associated with his 30 year regime?

We respectfully request a written response from the University on the above questions.

Signatories:

Feja Lesniewska, School of Law, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London - UK

Hermann Edelmann, Pro Regenwald - Germany

Lukas Straumann, Bruno Manser Fund - Switzerland

Nils Hermann, Rainforest Foundation Norway

Rainer Baake, German Environmental Aid - Germany

Reinhard Behrend, Rettet den Regenwald - Germany

Saskia Ozinga, FERN - UK

Stuart Wilson, Forests Monitor – UK

Tom Griffiths, Forest Peoples Programme - UK

Correspondence address:

FERN; 1C Fosseway Business Centre;
Stratford Road; Moreton in Marsh;
GL56 9NQ;
info@fern.org; +44-1608-652895

For more information on Taib Mahmud, see also ‘Bloomberg: ‘Getting rich in Malaysia, Crony capitalism means Dayak Loose Land’ at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aBC4ld4jmdV4>

c.c.

Andrew Smith, MP for Oxford andrewsmith.mp@gmail.com
The Oxford Times, dholmes@nqo.com and tim.hobden@nqo.com
Guardian, George Monbiot, george@monbiot.info
BBC Oxford at oxford@bbc.co.uk