

'Penan girls being sexually abused'

KUCHING: A foreign organisation has claimed that Penan women and girls in the deep interiors of Baram are being sexually abused by logging company workers.

The Bruno Manser Fund (BMF), which is based in Switzerland, claimed on its website that the workers were frequenting several Penan settlements looking for women.

It said the workers were usually drunk when they arrived at the settlements.

"They come on an almost weekly basis but the situation is worse during school holidays when they know that the students are back in the settlements," BMF said, quoting a Penan source.

The Penans had apparently claimed that the workers were from two companies operating in the area.

BMF also claimed that there had also been cases where students who accepted lifts on vehicles from the logging companies were sexually abused as the drivers would stop at a logging camp overnight.

It is claimed that there had been several cases of pregnancy among the Penan women and girls as a result of the abuse.

The Penans had apparently claimed that the loggers used armed thugs to intimidate them and gave alcohol to the youngsters in their community.

BMF had urged the government to start a formal inquiry into the claims.

Marudi district police chief Deputy Superintendent Jonathan Jalin promised to investigate the allegations although no reports had been received on the alleged abuse.

BMF was founded by Bruno Manser who lived for years with the Penan community in Sarawak.

On its website, BMF said it was committed to maintaining the threatened tropical rainforests and to campaigning, in particular, for the rights of the people who inhabit the rainforests.

NST Online » NewsBreak

http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/NST/Wednesday/NewsBreak/20080924164429/Article
2008/09/24

Sarawak Deputy Chief Minister dismisses claims by Bruno Manser Fund

Desmond Davidson

KUCHING:

Sarawak Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Alfred Jabu today dismissed the claims of a Swiss non-governmental organisation Bruno Manser Fund that Penan women and girls were being sexually abused by workers from two logging companies.

Jabu said unless the organisation was able to give specific details of their allegations, it would be a waste of time to investigate.

“Show proof. Tell us where and which Penan settlement.

“I have not heard of such complaints from the Penan communal leaders in my many visits to ulu Baram,” Jabu, who is the chairman of the steering committee on the Penans, said after launching the Ops Sikap XVII campaign in the state at KM19 on the Kuching-Serian Road.

The BMF had posted the allegations on its website, claiming that the workers preyed on students who were back in the settlement during the school holidays. It also claimed that the abuse had resulted in several pregnancies.

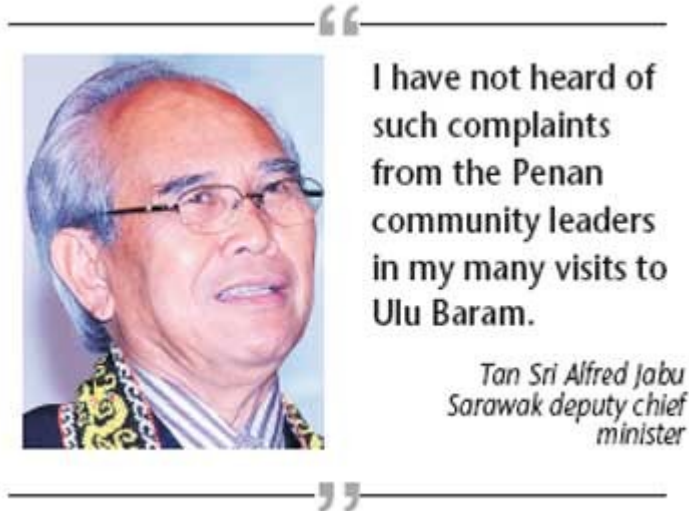
Jabu said if the NGO could provide some evidence, then the police could take action against the alleged culprits.

He was also dismissive of BMF, labelling it as a “bunch of people who are nothing in their own country but like to sensationalise events outside their country”.

2008/09/25

Penan sex claim is baseless, says Jabu

By : Desmond Davidson



KUCHING: Sarawak Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Alfred Jabu yesterday dismissed the claims of a Swiss non-governmental organisation that Penan women and girls were being sexually abused by workers from two logging companies.

Jabu said unless the Bruno Manser Fund could give details of their allegations, it would be a waste of time to investigate.

"Show proof. Tell us which Penan settlement.

"I have not heard of such complaints from the Penan community leaders in my many visits to Ulu Baram," said Jabu, who is the chairman of the steering committee on the Penans, after launching Ops Sikap XVII at Km19 of the Kuching-Serian Road.

BMF had posted the allegations on its website, claiming that the workers preyed on students who were in the settlement during school holidays. It also claimed that the abuse had resulted in several pregnancies.

Jabu said if the NGO could provide evidence, then the police could take action.

He was also dismissive of BMF, labelling it a "bunch of people who are nothing in their own country but like to sensationalise events elsewhere".

Jabu urged the BMF and other NGOs not to paint a negative picture of Sarawak and to respect the truth.

"Hearsay and sweeping statements are unfair to Sarawak."

NST Online » Frontpage

http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/NST/Tuesday/Frontpage/20080923150030/Article

2008/09/23

Police check claims of Penan girls being sexually abused

MIRI, TUES:

The police are investigating into claims that timber camp workers in the Baram district have been abusing Penan women and girls in the area.

Sarawak Commissioner of Police Datuk Mohmad Salleh said they would ascertain if there was any truth to the allegation published online by the Bruno Manser Fund (BMF), a non-governmental organisation based in Switzerland.

The report claimed that there had been several incidents of pregnancy among the Penan women and girls due to the abuses, while the logging workers were also behaving like thugs and carrying arms to intimidate the community.

Mohmad said that members of the public who had information about criminal activities should report them directly to the police rather than posting them on the Internet.

He added that making such allegation online before informing the police would only complicate the investigation.

The Star Online

http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2008/9/23/nation/20080923143355&sec=nation

Tuesday September 23, 2008 MYT 3:54:54 PM

Sexual abuse of Penan girls: Tell us, cops say

By STEPHEN THEN

MIRI: Sarawak police have called on non-governmental organisations or human rights groups that have information about sexual abuse by timber workers against interior Penan and native girls to lodge official police reports immediately.

State Police Commissioner Datuk Mohmad Salleh said Sarawak police are prepared to launch an immediate investigation into these serious allegations.

“We need official police reports to facilitate an immediate probe. Any NGOs or natives who know of such cases should lodge a report at the nearest police station.

“If there is an official report, we can commence investigations immediately,” he said.

Mohamad said Miri police have told him they had not received any official report on the allegations, adding that he would also check with the police chief in the interior division of Baram.

Mohmad, here on a working visit, was presenting donations to widows and orphans at the Miri police headquarters when asked about allegations circulating in cyberspace concerning the [sexual abuse of Penan women by timber workers](#) in interior Baram.

The allegations were highlighted by the Bruno Manser Foundation on its [website](#).

“Sometimes, the problem with NGOs is that they highlight complaints through their websites and the media. They don’t come to us (the police). They should come to us first,” he told a press conference here on Tuesday.

The website claimed that young Penan women in Baram had been sexually abused by timber workers in logging camps and in their settlements.

The foundation, based in Switzerland, is an environmental and human rights grouping set up by environmental activist Bruno Manser, the Swiss who made a name for himself in the 1980s when he organised huge anti-logging protests among the nomadic and semi-nomadic Penans of interior Sarawak.

He went missing in the interior of Sarawak in 2001.

A large part of Baram district, and other parts of interior Sarawak, have been allotted to private consortiums for logging and plantation development. Many of these areas are still populated by indigenous and minority groups, including the Penans.

EASTERN TIMES (auch ältere Artikel)

http://www.easterntimes.com.my/index.php?news_id=1&news_content=8855

No truth to Penan abuse report: Jabu

Thursday, 25 September 2008

By Johnson Kadam

KUCHING: The report of Penan women being sexually abused by logging camp workers was mere sensationalisation. It was meant to smear the good name of Sarawak, said Deputy Chief Minister, Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Alfred Jabu yesterday.

He said that the foreign organisation making the claim was fond of sensationalising events to create stories to earn a living.

“I’ve just come back from the Penan areas, meeting their leaders and people but no such thing was reported to me.

“But if the allegations were true then the non-governmental organisation (NGO) concerned should be specific. State the logging area and who are involved.

“Otherwise we are just wasting our time with such an NGO preying upon any situation just to create sensationalisation without respect to the facts...respect to the truth,” he said when asked to commend on the claims by the Bruno Manser Fund (BMF).

Jabu made this rebuttal when speaking to reporters after launching the state-level road safety campaign at Km 18 near here yesterday.

BMF which is based in Switzerland claimed on its website that logging camp workers were frequenting several Penan settlements looking for women.

He said, in this country, anybody, loggers or any other people found to be harassing Penan women or any other women or men, there would be relevant authorities to take appropriate actions.

“If they can substantiate their claims I would strongly recommend to the police and proper authorities to take the cause of law appropriately to punish those wrong doers.

“We are very serious and anybody who flouts the law will be dealt with,” said Jabu.

On Monday, a national daily reported BMF as saying that the loggers were usually drunk when they arrived at Penan settlements and harassed their women and girls.

The newspaper also reported that BMF claimed that there had also been cases where students who accepted lifts on vehicles from the logging companies were sexually abused as the drivers would stop at a logging camp overnight.

It was claimed that there had been several cases of pregnancy among the Penan women and girls as a result of the abuse.

BMF was founded by Bruno Manser who lived for years with the Penan community in Sarawak.

According to Jabu, while the government was committed in resettling the Penans there were NGOs who still wanted to champion the cause of the Penan community.

Resettlement of Penans underway

“Yesterday (Tuesday) I chaired a meeting on the resettlement of the Penan and I am happy because the federal government had allocated Sarawak with RM100 million for 2008, 2009 and 2010 to settle the Penan.

“I have been appointed as the chairman of the Penan Steering Committee and I will do my best.

“At the meeting, we have identified one specific project that is to build handicraft centre and Tadika at Long Bruang in Ulu Baram.

“The Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) will be installing e-Bruang similar to e-Bedian and e-Jekitan in the Penan areas,” he said.

Long Bruang is a 14-hour drive with 4-WD from Miri.

Altogether there are more than 16,000 Penans in the state. 3% are still nomadic, the rest all settled, Jabu added.

“Programmes are in the pipeline to have the 3% nomadic Penans to settle down,” he disclosed.

http://www.easterntimes.com.my/index.php?news_id=1&news_content=8839

Police to check abuse of Penan women

By Norni Mahadi

MIRI: The Sarawak Police will check on the allegation that Penan women and girls in Ulu Baram had been sexually abused by logging camp workers. The allegation made by Bruno Manser Fund (BMF), was reported in a national English daily on Monday. State Commissioner of Police, DCP Dato Mohmad Salleh said he would look into the matter personally by ordering an investigation.

However, he said he had not been informed on the matter, other than in the paper mentioned.

“I have not received any report on the case,” he said.

Salleh was commenting on the online claims by BMF, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Switzerland. The NGO reported several cases of pregnancy among the Penan women and girls as a result of the sexual abuse by logging workers. It added that the workers used armed thugs to intimidate the Penans too.

Salleh urged the public, especially the NGO, to report the matter directly to the police instead of posting it on the Internet.

“The NGO should be willing to come forward and assist the police in the investigation so that the matter would not worsen,” he added.

http://www.easterntimes.com.my/index.php?news_id=1&news_content=8811

No abuse or discrimination against the Penans, says Dennis Ngau

23 September 2008

By Norni Mahadi

MIRI: The Sarawak government had never discriminated against nor abuse the rights of Penans. In fact, the government had always regarded them as special and various development programmes had been introduced so that they would not be left behind other communities in the State.

Making the remarks was Youth Chief of Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) Telang Usan, Cr. Dennis Ngau. He said the local authority in Baram had been giving its best assistance to safeguard the various interests of the Penans. "Be it at government department level, village, association or the party branch in the constituency, all concerned are very committed to help the Penans," he said in a phone interview when contacted to comment on a news report published in a national English daily claiming that a foreign organisation had discovered sexual abuse of Penan women and girls by local logging company workers in the interior of Baram constituency.

Cr. Dennis who hailed from Long Bedian, Baram, said no such report had been received so far.

"I have no idea about the claims by BMF (Bruno Manser Fund). For me, such claims must be supported by concrete evidence. Then, a proper investigation would take place," he said.

He stressed that as far as he was concerned, no Penan had lodged any report about such an abuse.

In fact, he added, the Penans, the majority of whom are found in Apoh-Tutoh area with some in Ulu Baram, were living normally with their families all this while.

He said he was disappointed about what was reported. He asked why the organisation did not bring the victims out to report to the police for proper action. Instead, it published something which could not be substantiated, giving rise to doubts, including a motive for creating mischief such as tarnishing the state government's image, he added.

The Star Online

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2008/9/24/nation/2100923&sec=nation>

Wednesday September 24, 2008

Report any sexual abuse in Penan areas to us, say cops

MIRI: Foreign and local non-governmental organisations or human rights groups that have information about sexual abuse by timber workers against interior Penan and native girls are urged to lodge police reports immediately.

State Police Commissioner Datuk Mohmad Salleh said police were prepared to launch an immediate investigation into the allegations.

"We need police reports to facilitate an immediate probe. NGOs or natives who know of such cases can lodge official reports at the nearest police station," he told a press conference here.

"The Miri police have told me they have not received any report on such allegations.

"Sometimes, the problem with NGOs is that they highlight complaints through their websites and newspapers and on the Internet. They don't come to us (police)."

Mohmad, who was here on a working visit and to present donations to widows and orphans at the Miri police headquarters, was asked on the allegations circulating in cyberspace.

The allegations, highlighted by the Bruno Manser Foundation on its website, claimed that young Penan women and girls, including students, in Baram had been sexually abused by timber workers in logging camps and in their settlements.

The foundation cited a source from the Penan community,

The foundation, based in Switzerland, is an environmental and human rights grouping set up by environmental activist Bruno Manser, the Swiss who organised huge anti-logging protests among the nomadic and semi-nomadic Penans of interior Sarawak in the 1980s.

Manser later escaped from Sarawak and made his way back to Switzerland, where he set up the foundation.

In 2001, he was said to have managed to sneak into Sarawak again, but went missing during a trip into the deep forests.

It has been eight years since he was last spotted somewhere in interior Miri, when he purportedly tried to climb Batu Lawi to visit the Penans in the deep jungles near the Sarawak-Kalimantan border. He was never seen again.

Nonetheless, the foundation continues to highlight issues of concern about the Penans and natives of Sarawak through its website.

Mohmad said yesterday that the Sarawak police had faced difficulties before in probing claims by NGOs due to lack of information.

“We had previously investigated claims by NGOs that a certain native chief had been murdered in Belaga (central Sarawak), but we did not find any such evidence,” he said.

Asked if the Sarawak police could start a probe by using information from the Bruno Manser Foundation website, he said he must look at the contents of the website.

“Let us check what is contained in the website first. We will decide what to do next,” he said.

A large part of Baram district, and other parts of interior Sarawak, have been allocated to private consortiums for logging and plantation development.

The Star Online

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2008/9/26/focus/2120477&sec=focus>

Friday September 26, 2008

Probe sex abuse allegations

THE article “Penan girls being sexually abused” (*The Star*, Sept 24) fills me with dread.

In the course of my work and travel in East Malaysia, I was fortunate to meet and live with several local indigenous people.

The story of girls being abused is not new. This has been going on for several years and not just by the logging industries but also by unscrupulous traders who want the goods and services these people can provide.

There were also cases of girls being recruited to work as sex slaves in the cities, not just in East Malaysia but in the South East Asian circuit.

Abuse is not limited to the womenfolk. Men, too, were plied with cheap alcohol to make them compliant or dependent on the giver.

Giving drugs to make them addicted and thus dependent on the giver was also a perverse form of coercion.

In return for this dependence, the men were offered ridiculously reduced wages in return for their goods and services.

These services comprised but is not limited to logging, gathering jungle produce or in exchange of their cottage industry goods. In essence, they were signing away their rights and responsibilities.

We are comfortable and complacent in our towns and cities and unaware that these people are being coerced, forced and abused against their will.

I think it is time that the authorities investigate this serious and heinous crime with the urgency that it deserves and bring the responsible culprits to justice.

However, be mindful that these communities are isolated. Serious retributions and reprisals may await them, were it known that some form of complaint has been made to the police or relevant authorities.

Therefore, confidentiality and protection for the complainants and their communities is vital if they are to come forward.

Conversely, the authorities may issue denials as it is a reflection of performance of their duties in upholding and enforcing the law.

It is not going to be an easy task. Logging companies are invariably protected by big money and even bigger names.

MARIAM MOKHTAR,
Ipoh.

Eastern Times

http://www.easterntimes.com.my/index.php?news_id=1&news_content=8855

(Thursday, 25 September 2008)

No truth to Penan abuse report: Jabu

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“But if the allegations were true then the non-governmental organisation (NGO) concerned should be specific. State the logging area and who are involved.

“Otherwise we are just wasting our time with such an NGO preying upon any situation just to create sensationalisation without respect to the facts...respect to the truth,” he said when asked to commend on the claims by the Bruno Manser Fund (BMF).

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“Programmes are in the pipeline to have the 3% nomadic Penans to settle down,” he disclosed.

Eastern Times

http://www.easterntimes.com.my/index.php?news_id=1&news_content=8839

(Wednesday, 24 September 2008)

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However, he said he had not been informed on the matter, other than in the paper mentioned.

“I have not received any report on the case,” he said.

Salleh was commenting on the online claims by BMF, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Switzerland. The NGO reported several cases of pregnancy among the Penan women and girls as a result of the sexual abuse by logging workers. It added that the workers used armed thugs to intimidate the Penans too.

Salleh urged the public, especially the NGO, to report the matter directly to the police instead of posting it on the Internet.

“The NGO should be willing to come forward and assist the police in the investigation so that the matter would not worsen,” he added.

Eastern Times

http://www.easterntimes.com.my/index.php?news_id=1&news_content=8811

(Tuesday, 23 September 2008)

No abuse or discrimination against the Penans, says Dennis Ngau

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Cr. Dennis who hailed from Long Bedian, Baram, said no such report had been received so far.

“I have no idea about the claims by BMF (Bruno Manser Fund). For me, such claims must be supported by concrete evidence. Then, a proper investigation would take place,” he said.

He stressed that as far as he was concerned, no Penan had lodged any report about such an abuse.

In fact, he added, the Penans, the majority of whom are found in Apoh-Tutoh area with some in Ulu Baram, were living normally with their families all this while.

He said he was disappointed about what was reported. He asked why the organisation did not bring the victims out to report to the police for proper action. Instead, it published something which could not be substantiated, giving rise to doubts, including a motive for creating mischief such as tarnishing the state government's image, he added.

The Borneo Post Online

<http://www.theborneopost.com/?p=41782>

Thursday, September 25th, 2008

RM100 mln for Penan community

SRI AMAN: The federal government has approved an allocation of RM100 million for the development of the Penan community, Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Alfred Jabu said.

He said the allocation would be used to develop the community with a view to bring them into the mainstream of development, adding that the money would be used for various sectors with the intention to improve the living standard of the community.

“The allocation will be spent until 2010, and we thank the federal government for responding to help the Penan community,” Jabu, who is also Rural Development Minister said.

He was speaking to reporters after a site visit to Sri Aman Waterfront and Tidal Bore Observation Tower projects here.

According to him, the allocation was a testimony that the government was taking care of the people to ensure no race was left behind in development and progress.

The Penan, like the other communities, needed to be developed, he pointed out, adding that the Barisan Nasional (BN) government would always fulfil its promises to the people.

“Unlike the opposition who make empty promises, the BN always deliver what it promised,” Jabu, who is also Minister of Infrastructure Development and Communications said.

In this respect, he advised the people to reject the opposition. Accompanying Jabu during the visit were Sri Aman Resident Abang Shamshuddin Abang Seruji and Sri Aman acting district officer Mahri Sarpawi.

The Star Online

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2008/10/1/nation/2159546&sec=nation>

Wednesday October 1, 2008

Suhakam to look into abuse claims by Penans

By **STEPHEN THEN**

MIRI: Suhakam will investigate claims about timber workers sexually abusing Penan women and girls in the deep interior of Sarawak.

The probe by the human rights commission will begin after the Hari Raya holidays, its commissioner for Sarawak Dr Mohd Hirman Ritom told *The Star* yesterday.

“We must establish the truth. These allegations are very serious in nature, especially if they involved natives who are isolated and defenceless.

“They are allegations of a criminal nature, not just a violation of human rights. We will have to visit those areas where such alleged crimes took place and speak to the people in those areas,” he said.

Dr Hirman was commenting on the increasing calls from various quarters in the country for an official probe into the allegations which were posted on a website two weeks ago.

“If there is any truth to these allegations, then Suhakam will have to make sure the police and the relevant authorities do something against those who had victimised these natives,” he added.

Sarawak Police Commissioner Datuk Mohamad Salleh had said that the police had not received any official report on the allegations.

Dr Hirman said the Sarawak police must find out why there were no such official reports.

“Is it because the Penans are afraid to come forward and lodge official reports? Maybe the reports have not been accepted or they have been threatened or maybe it is due to logistic problems,” he said.

In the meantime, Kuala Lumpur-based Suhakam commissioner Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria said that the federal police, Women and Family Development Affairs Ministry and the Sarawak Government should initiate their own investigations into the allegations.

“The excuse by the Sarawak police that there is no official report and thus they cannot investigate is shallow and unacceptable,” he said.

“We hope the federal police will make sure these allegations are investigated. The police can start their own investigations even without an official report.

“If there is any truth, then the victims must be protected and punishment must be meted out on those who committed such crimes.”

The Star Online

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2008/10/1/nation/20081001142642&sec=nation>

Wednesday October 1, 2008 MYT 2:29:51 PM

Ministry to probe Penan sexual abuse allegations

By ROYCE CHEAH

PETALING JAYA: The Women, Family and Community Development Ministry will investigate claims about timber workers sexually abusing Penan women and girls.

Its minister, Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen said she has instructed the director-general of Women Affairs to meet Sarawak deputy chief minister Tan Sri Alfred Jabu to get more information immediately after the Hari Raya holidays.

“We are very concerned about the matter.

“I have also talked to the Health Ministry to do something as we want to ensure the health of the Penans has not been compromised,” she said.

Alfred, who is also the chairman of the steering committee on the Penans, had previously dismissed the sexual abuse claims saying he had not heard such complaints from Penan community leaders.

Dr Ng was responding to a statement from Suhakam commissioner for Sarawak, Dr Mohd Hirman Ritom, who had said on Tuesday that the commission would investigate the sexual abuse claims.

Another Suhakam commissioner, Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria, had also urged the ministry and the federal police to look into the matter since the Sarawak police said they could not investigate as no official report had been filed yet.

The claims of abuse first surfaced on the Bruno Manser Foundation website.

Malaysiakini

<http://www1.malaysiakini.com/news/90173>

'Sexual abuse of Penan women': Company in the dark

Fauwaz Abdul Aziz | Sep 22, 08 4:37pm

Interhill Logging Sdn Bhd, one of the two logging companies mired in allegations of employees sexually abusing Penan women and girls, said that it has not received any report on the matter.

Its spokesperson, who identified himself only as 'Mr Kiu', explained that "normally the camp managers at the operations offices would report to the head office" in Miri in the case of any misconduct.

"But so far, we don't have any information on the matter," he said when contacted.

Infrequent communication between operations offices and the headquarters was common due to the lack of infrastructure in the interiors, he added.

"Whatever it is, we will investigate this further," he stressed.

Kiu was responding to claims by rainforest communities advocacy group Bruno Manser Fund (BMF) that loggers were frequenting Penan settlements in the Middle Baram area 'looking for women'.

"The company workers are based in logging camps in the region and are usually drunk when they arrive at the villages," said BMF, which has done a study on the issue.

"When we hear their off-road vehicles coming, we just leave everything as it is and flee into the forest," said BMF stated, quoting a Penan source.

"They come on an almost weekly basis but the situation is worse during school holidays when they know that the students are back in the settlements," added the source.

The Swiss-based NGO claimed that these abuses have resulted in pregnancies.

"In other cases, school transports operated by company vehicles had been arranged in such a way that schoolgirls had to stay overnight at a logging camp, where they were abused."

Distance deters police reports

The second Miri-based logging company implicated in this issue could not be reached for a response.

Borneo Resources Institute's (BRI) Sarawak coordinator Raymond Abin said that he too has been informed by Penans of the abuses, pregnancies and 'forced marriages' - for some time now.

“But perhaps the operations offices of the logging companies do not inform the head office of the matter,” said Abin when contacted today.

“Even if they are aware, the most that they would do when their workers are involved is to transfer them to other operations offices,” he added.

He said due to the distance between the interior settlements and closest police stations, police reports are rarely lodged.

“Even if they lodge a police report, will the police act on it?” he asked in reference to long standing complaints of the police acting in favour - and sometimes on behalf - of the state-backed logging companies.

Malaysiakini

<http://www1.malaysiakini.com/news/90256>

'Sexual abuse': Samling in the dark as well

Fauwaz Abdul Aziz | Sep 23, 08 5:48pm

Logging giant Samling has come out to say that it too has not received any complaints of its workers sexually abusing Penan women or girls in Sarawak, following Interhill's - the other company implicated - response yesterday.

"Such events are criminal and will not be tolerated because we do not condone any illegal act by employees," said its corporate communications head Cheryl Yong in an e-mailed statement today.

"Any victim of criminal acts should lodge their complaints directly to the police," she added.

Yong was responding to allegations by non-governmental organisations that Samling and Interhill loggers have been frequenting Penan settlements in the Middle Baram area and were sexually abusing women and girls.

"The company workers are based in logging camps in the region and are usually drunk when they arrive at the villages," said the Swiss-based Bruno Manser Fonds in a statement on its website.

"When we hear their off-road vehicles coming, we just leave everything as it is and flee into the forest," the BMF stated, quoting a Penan source.

Police to probe allegation

The loggers were also alleged to have used armed thugs to intimidate the settlers.

The Borneo Resources Institute (BRI) substantiated BMF's claims, adding instances of 'forced marriages'.

Interhill yesterday clarified that it has not received any reports on the matter from their operating offices in the interiors. He did concede that infrequent communication was common due to the lack of infrastructure in the interiors.

"Whatever it is, we will investigate this further," he stressed.

Bernama, meanwhile, reported that Sarawak police commissioner Mohamad Salleh said an investigation will be carried out.

He also called on the public with information on the matter to report straight to the police and not through the Internet.

THE STAR:

<http://thestar.com.my/services/printerfriendly.asp?file=/2008/10/6/lifefocus/2150772.asp&sec=lifefocus>

Monday October 6, 2008

Violated by loggers

By HILARY CHIEW

Pictures by SIA HONG KIAU

Teenage schoolgirls have become the latest target of unscrupulous timber workers.

BLOCKADES have sprung up again in middle Baram in the midst of the padi planting season in interior Sarawak.

Several Penan communities have abandoned the padi fields to put up symbolic barricades - flimsy wooden gates across logging roads - to stop encroachment into the last stretch of remaining ancestral forest in a region that has seen extensive logging over the last 25 years.

The once-nomadic tribe, noted for their unwavering rejection of logging on their territory and synonymous with blockades since the late 1980s, is fighting a losing battle against the Government-backed timber industry.

At grave risk : Young Penan women bathing and washing in a polluted river next to their settlement. As the Penan communities in middle Baram struggle to stave off the continuous destruction of their ancestral lands by logging firms, their womenfolk are being victimised by timber company workers.

Yet another sinister threat has crept into the remote communities - Penan women, especially the young ones, are preyed on by workers from logging companies.

About three weeks ago, a media release by non-governmental organisation Bruno Manser Foundation (BMF) brought to light a long-held concern - the sexual abuse of Penan women.

The Swiss group charged that workers from two timber companies were preying on Penan women in the various settlements within the companies' operation areas, and targeting female students who relied on the companies' transportation service to get to school.

Students from middle Baram are boarders in secondary schools in the interior towns of Long Lama and Long San, which could take up to a week to travel on foot from their villages. The Baram district in Miri division is almost as big as the state of Perak.

The allegations were flatly denied by Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Alfred Jabu who dismissed the NGO's claims as baseless. Jabu, who is also Rural Development Minister, challenged BMF to name the villages otherwise "it would be a waste of time to investigate".

Largely ignorant of their rights and not well-versed in criminal law, the Penans have long suffered the transgression against their womenfolk in silence.

The problem is further compounded by stigmatisation associated with rape in the predominantly Christian communities.

Sexual violations

A visit to several villages reveals the prevalence of sexual abuse since the advent of commercial logging. Village leaders who readily air their grouses of hardship brought by logging are hesitant to talk about the sexual exploitation by workers from nearby logging camps.

Bulan Laing, a female elder of Long Pakan claims that violation of the women began around 1996 when a logging company began operation in middle Baram.

Nonetheless, at Long Pakan, Bulan Laing, a female elder claims that violation of the women began around 1996 when a Miri-based logging company arrived.

"There have been three pregnancies so far; the last one was in 2006. In one case, the woman married the Indonesian worker who violated her but was later divorced after she was sexually abused by another worker," recalls Bulan.

Asked if the cases were reported to the police, Bulan appears not to know that rape is a criminal offence.

"We complained to the camp manager. He assured us that they would take action against their men but we're still suffering."

Her husband, headman Pada Jutang, says: “We’ve lost hope in the police taking any action. So we stopped going to them.”

The village’s nearest neighbour, Long Item €“ two hours’ drive away €“ faces a similar predicament. Headman Balan Jon reveals the modus operandi of unscrupulous timber workers.

He says the workers come to the village in small groups of not more than five, either on motorcycle or by company vehicle, with alcoholic drinks and entice the young men to join them for drinking binges at night.

“They become bold after several drinks and will coax our boys to bring them to houses with young women or girls.

Long Pakan headman Pada Jutang says his people lost hope in police taking any action and stopped going to them.

“Or they bring along instant noodles and persuade the victims to cook them a meal on the pretext that they have not yet had dinner. They then hang around and wait for the chance to strike after other occupants of the house turn in for the night,” adds Balan.

Bulan explains that young Penan men are curious about “anything from the cities” and are easily influenced despite advice by village leaders to be wary of these outsiders. She also suspects that the victims could have been drugged.

Balan laments that complaints to the company’s managers on the ground are not taken seriously.

“There are always new workers showing up. They are also good at covering their tracks and the camp manager refuses to investigate or take action,” he says dejectedly. Like Pada, Balan says he has given up on the police.

Further north in the Apoh region, Long Belok’s headman Alah Beling recalls no less than four cases of sexual violation. The latest incident resulted in a baby born last December. He reckons that the known numbers could just be the tip of the iceberg. Victims who do not end up with unwanted pregnancies may choose to remain silent to hide their shame.

Easy targets

It appears that schoolgirls are the latest to be preyed upon, according to villagers at Long Kawi, next to Long Item. They complain that timber workers come to the village during the day to identify the young girls and return later at night to carry out their plans. The harassment gets worse during the school holidays when the girls are around.

But the latest revelation of female students being made to stay overnight in logging camps, thus exposing them to sexual abuse, has plunged the Penan community into despair.

The Penans have abandoned their nomadic lifestyle so that their young ones could get an education and have a better life.

“If we don’t send our children to school, we are blamed. But providing them transportation is beyond our ability. We are at the mercy of the timber companies. We’ve to beg them to ferry our children to the secondary schools which are far away.

“I walk my younger children to Long Kevok (a four-hour drive away) to attend primary school. This problem was discussed at the school’s parent-teacher association meetings a few years ago. The school asked us to get help from the Government. There were promises but we’re still waiting,” says Galang Jutang, Pada’s younger brother.

Principal of SMK Long Lama, Ng Cheng Soo, acknowledges that transportation remains a huge problem for Penan students who make up about 12% of the 945 pupils.

“We put in a proposal for a transport allocation in 2006 to the Resident Office in Miri,” says Ng. Resident Ose Murang could not be reached for comment on the status of the proposal.

Ng adds that Penan students are catching up in their studies as shown by their better examination results and lower dropout rates.

“We hold special remedial classes and show them that we care for them. They appreciate it and they like coming to school. Penan kids are the first to volunteer for any gotong-royong events,” Ng says, adding that being rather timid, Penan students are easily bullied.

Instances of students trekking in the jungle for days to get to school and even missing major examinations when company transportation fails to materialise, are common. Hitching a ride by the side of dusty logging roads makes teenage girls especially vulnerable.

Following recent publicity of the alleged sexual abuse of Penan women in the local media, Sarawak Police Commissioner Datuk Mohamad Salleh says the force needs a police report to be lodged to facilitate investigations.

Dismayed by the police response, the Women’s Centre for Change pointed out that according to the Child Act 2001, the authorities must take action if they suspect child sexual abuse has taken place. Under the Act, anyone below the age of 18 is a child.

The Women, Family and Community Development Ministry and the Human Rights Commission have announced that they will investigate the claims.

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Monday October 6, 2008

Penan girls claim abuse

By HILARY CHIEW

PETALING JAYA: School was supposed to be a way for the community to improve their socio-economic situation.

However, Penan girls hitching rides to school and back have now found themselves easy victims of sexual abuse by logging company workers.

Interviews conducted in settlements in the Middle Baram area in northern Sarawak, revealed that several students had become victims of rapes by logging workers.

The students are boarders in two secondary schools in the area and only go back to their settlements during the school holidays.

Victimised: A mother and her children in a Middle Baram longhouse. Penan girls are falling prey to unscrupulous timber companies' workers who take advantage of their marginalised condition.

Village leaders have previously appealed to timber camp managers to provide transportation for the students so that their journeys can be cut down to several hours from up to a week if done on foot.

Last year, a 16-year-old student from Long Kawi, a settlement in the Middle Baram, became pregnant after being raped while returning to her boarding school. She gave birth recently.

Relating the incident, she said she was hitching a ride with a logging company vehicle back to her school SMK Long Lama.

When the driver reached the logging camp, he refused to continue driving although the school was not much further.

She alleged that she was dragged to some bushes behind the camp and raped by a man who she believed had been drinking.

A student from the other secondary school with boarding facilities in Long San said she knew of cases of female students being driven to logging camps when taking transportation provided by companies.

Long Belok settlement headman Alah Beling believed the known cases could just be the tip of the iceberg.

Earlier reports quoted Sarawak Police Commissioner Datuk Mohmad Salleh as saying that police were prepared to launch immediate investigations into the allegations of sexual abuse against Penan girls by logging workers.

Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen and the Human Rights Commission have said that the complaints would be investigated.

Allegations of sexual abuse against Penan girls came to light after it was exposed last month by local and foreign non-governmental organisations.

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Monday October 6, 2008

A neglected people

THE Penan's protracted resistance to deforestation and the international attention the tribe continues to receive must have irked the Sarawak government.

The state government continues to dismiss their concerns over the loss of forest resources brought on by industrial logging that degrades the forest and pollutes the rivers.

At the height of the international anti-tropical timber campaign in the late 1980s, the state set up a Penan Affairs Committee to help the nomadic tribe to lead a settled life with promises of socio-economic development. The state announced allocations worth millions of ringgit.

Two decades later, the benefits remain elusive for many Penans. The rapid expansion of acacia and oil palm plantations eats into their ancestral land. To top it off, the natives are becoming illegals with many not having official documents.

The Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) has raised the issue of poor MyKad registration which complicates the issuance of birth certificates.

Suhakam has thus far failed in persuading the state government to resolve the land rights issue inflicting every native group in Sarawak.

In recent years, the Penans are turning to the court of law to stop further encroachment.

But the nomadic Penans face a tough battle in claiming native customary rights (NCR) as the Sarawak Land Code 1958 states that one cannot stake a claim for NCR if one had not cultivated that piece of land before Jan 1, 1958.

In May 2007, further restrictions were imposed when the clause "any other lawful method of establishing land claim" in Section 5(2) was dropped. Lawyers had previously used that provision to argue for a broader interpretation of land use.

“When environmental groups suggest setting aside forests for wildlife, the state will agree but when we demand for our forests to be protected, we are ignored. It seems that the wildlife living in the forests are more valued than us humans,” notes a young Penan.

Although disillusioned, the Penans remain hopeful.

As Balan Jon of Long Item puts it: “It’s not only our livelihood but our culture and survival as a tribe has been affected for so long. We’ll die if we continue to be neglected.”

<http://thestar.com.my/lifestyle/story.asp?file=/2008/10/6/lifefocus/2164007&sec=lifefocus>

Monday October 6, 2008

Against their will

ON a sunny Sunday morning last year, 16-year-old Cynthia (not her real name) boarded a four-wheel drive dispatched by logging company Samling to ferry students to SMK Long Lama from her longhouse in Long Kawi, middle Baram, Sarawak.

However, the driver did not send the passengers €“ two boys and three girls €“ to the school directly. He dropped by a logging camp and told the students that they had to spend the night there.

“It was around 4pm. Although the school is not far from the camp, the driver didn’t want to continue the journey. The boys and girls were separated into two rooms. I was with my younger sister and another girl. When night fell, the men in the camp were drinking. In the middle of the night, several men came into our room. One of them dragged me from the room and took me to the bushes behind the camp,” Cynthia recalls her ordeal. The other two girls were not harmed.

A life ruined: Mindy, 21, is saddled with two children after being coerced into having sex by a timber company worker.

The Form 3 student became pregnant and delivered a baby girl a few months ago. Cynthia, who harbours hopes of being a nurse, is now unsure of her future as she has been absent from school due to her pregnancy.

The fair-skinned, soft-spoken girl had previously been harassed by workers from a Samling camp but managed to elude them.

Samling, when contacted, says the camp implicated in the incident may not have belonged to the company and urged those making the allegations to contact the police and provide accurate information to enable criminal investigations.

Samling’s head of corporate communications Cheryl Yong says: “We are very concerned over the latest allegations even though we do not operate in the Temela Camp (where the alleged sexual assault took place). We do not condone any criminal acts within our premises or by employees.”

Yong explains that Samling has a zero-tolerance policy towards alcohol consumption during work hours. Furthermore, alcohol sale is unavailable on its premises and anyone found consuming alcohol while working will be dismissed.

At Long Belok, Rina (not her real name) who was raped in her house and delivered a baby girl in May 2005, is fearful of timber camp workers. "If I see them in the village, I will run and hide in the forest."

She is glad that she did not have to marry the man who raped her despite persuasion from her parents and neighbours' unkind remarks.

The youngest in a family of two boys and two girls, Rina, 20, says life is difficult with an extra mouth to feed. At times, she confesses that she feels like running away.

Mindy (not her real name) of Long Item, recounts the intimidation, deceit and harassment of a 40-something man who works for Interhill.

"We know him as Ah Heng. My parents and I got a ride in his vehicle from Ba Abang sometime in 2005. Shortly after that, he came looking for me in the village. He offered to take care of me but I declined. He then said I should give in or he would hurt me and my family," says the 21-year-old woman who eventually acceded to his demands and has since borne him two girls, one in 2006 and another in February.

Ah Heng now rarely visits nor provides maintenance for the family after his wife found out about his activities and accused Mindy of seducing her husband.

"I don't want him to come here anymore; I will raise the kids myself. I don't even love him," says Mindy.

THE STAR

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2008/10/7/focus/2201666&sec=focus>

Tuesday October 7, 2008

Step in to stop abuses

I AM ashamed that we have either been apathetic, ignorant or closed an eye to the horrific abuses suffered by young Penan girls.

This situation is completely intolerable and must not be allowed to be swept under the carpet any longer. Immediate action must be taken.

What's horrifying is that such incidents have been taken place as far back as 1996, according to one Penan elder. Far worse is the fact that their complaints to the authorities and police have fallen on deaf ears.

The Penan community are vulnerable. Their lands are encroached on and their way of life taken away from them. Now, their daughters, their sisters or cousins are being sexually abused, and we are taking our time to investigate?

We would have acted immediately if this had happened in any town or city, but why the inaction here?

Are the Penans any less Malaysian?

Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Ng Yen Yen should visit the Penan community herself, and look into resolving the failure of official action and reporting.

In fact, the absence of criminal prosecution and justice have only emboldened the errant loggers to continue the abuses. A proper reporting and justice mechanism needs to be set up to punish these perpetrators for robbing the innocence of young girls like 16-year-old Cynthia (StarTwo, Oct 6).

The managers of these logging firms should be taken to task and heavily fined for their complicity in protecting their guilty workers.

The Government should provide monetary aid to the victims and their families, especially those girls who have ended up with unwanted pregnancies, as well as a Penan community officer to look into issues affecting them.

We need to act now, or be forever guilty in our moral omission.

EUGENE CHUA,
Kuala Terengganu.

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2008/10/7/nation/20081007133403&sec=nation>

Tuesday October 7, 2008 MYT 1:38:35 PM
Deputy CM calls for full probe into Penan rape claims
By SHARON LING

KUCHING: Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr George Chan has called for a full investigation into claims of sexual abuse of Penan girls by timber workers.

“This is a serious allegation and I hope that a complete investigation will be done to find out what’s going on,” he said on Tuesday.

He urged the media and the public not to speculate about the matter but to leave it to the police to investigate the matter thoroughly. He added that such allegations were bad for the country’s image and as such, it was important to get to the truth of the matter.

“Our country must not be seen as a ‘cowboy country’ where anything can happen. Whoever has done wrong things should be brought to justice.

“But at the same time we should not speculate on things we are not sure of,” he told reporters after launching the state Farmers’ Day logo at Menara Pelita here.

In an interview with The Star, several Penan schoolgirls from settlements in the Middle Baram area in northern Sarawak claimed they had been raped by timber workers.

The claims of sexual abuse were first exposed by local and foreign non-governmental organisations last month.

Sarawak Commissioner of Police Dep Comm Datuk Mohamad Salleh has been reported as saying that police were prepared to launch immediate investigations into the allegations. It is not known whether they have begun such investigations however.

Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Ng Yen Yen and the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) have also said that the complaints would be investigated.

Earlier, Dr Chan said the state Farmers’ Day celebration would be held on Oct 30 to Nov 3 with the theme “Agriculture is Business”.

He said the key event would be an exhibition showcasing new methods of farming as well as a broad range of agricultural products, crops and livestock.

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2008/10/7/focus/2201440&sec=focus>

Tuesday October 7, 2008
SMS your views

Penans

NO AID n basic transport infrastructure 4 Penans, forcing them 2 depend on loggers.
Shameful

GOVERNMENT shud do something 2 help all those poor penan girls. 51 years of merdeka, still at de mercy of timber cos.

TALK of caring society but what about Penans’ SOS. Needs help instd of living among d amorous loggers. Something’s wrong somewhere. jwt.

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2008/10/7/focus/2203358&sec=focus>

Tuesday October 7, 2008

Samling not logging in areas stated

WE REFER to “Against their will” (StarTwo, Oct 6) where the first paragraph reads: “On a sunny Sunday morning last year, 16-year-old Cynthia boarded a four-wheel drive dispatched by logging company Samling to ferry students to SMK Long Lama from their longhouse in Long Kawi, middle Baram, Sarawak.”

We have carried out an internal investigation and would like to categorically state that Samling did not dispatch a four-wheel drive vehicle to ferry students to SMK Long Lama from their longhouse in Long Kawi, middle Baram, Sarawak.

Samling is in no way involved in the allegation as it does not operate in the areas mentioned in the article where the alleged sexual abuses took place. We do not condone any criminal acts by employees or contractors.

As part of our community initiatives, we offer transportation assistance to schoolgoing children from the villages within our areas of operations.

However, Long Kawi and Long Belok (also mentioned in the story) are not within our areas of operations.

CHERYL YONG,
Head of Corporate Communications,
Samling Global Ltd.

NSTONLINE

http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/NST/Sunday/National/2366700/Article/pppull_in_dex_html

Loggers marry Penan women
By Sulok Tawie

2008/10/05

KUCHING: Logging workers are believed to have married Penan women in the deep interiors of Baram, in Miri division. The concern is whether these marriages, carried out in accordance with Penan traditions, are temporary arrangements that would end when the workers leave the area.

The marriages were discovered by the police during their investigations into allegations by the Bruno Manser Fund, a Swiss-based non-government organisation (NGO), that Penan women and young girls were being sexually abused by logging workers.

Marudi district police chief Deputy Superintendent Jonathan Jalin said police did not find evidence to support the NGO's allegations. However, they did find a number of marriages between the workers and Penan women.

The marriages, he said, were between two willing parties and were accepted by the Penan elders

"However, I am not sure if these marriages are of a temporary nature and will end once the workers leave for other logging areas.

Jalin said police who visited Penan settlements found that many of the children looked Chinese and not Penan.

"Interestingly, we came across a woman in Long Kerong, believed to be not more than 30 years old, who appears to be Eurasian."

On the claims that many schoolgirls had fallen pregnant from being sexually abused by the logging workers, Jalin said the police who interviewed teachers from the two schools in the area found no evidence to support the allegation.

"The teachers told us that they had received no reports on the matter."

Jalin said police had also interviewed workers from the two logging companies operating in the Penan areas and found no incriminating evidence.

http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/NST/Tuesday/National/2368240/Article

2008/10/07

Difficult for Penan women to get legal redress

KUCHING: It will be difficult for Penan women deep in the interior of Baram to seek legal redress after they have been abandoned by timber loggers who married them according to their customs and traditions, a lawyer said yesterday.

"The so-called marriages are not registered with the registrar of marriages," said Harrison Ngau.

"They are just marriages of convenience."

He said registering marriages could also be a problem since many Penan women did not have legal documents such as birth certificates and identity cards.

He said many Penan women had come seeking advice after being abandoned by their husbands.

"There is nothing I can do, except say that they should have investigated the backgrounds of those they were about to marry."

He said the village elders needed to be strict in these matters, or there would not be an end to the exploitation.

He said the problem with the Penans was they were too trusting.

He said he told the Penan elders that they must be wary of outsiders taking advantage of them.

"They are innocent people, and they think the loggers are good people," he said, adding that local Sidang Injil Borneo (SIB) churches had been helping the Penan community.

According to Ngau, cases of "cowboy marriages" not only involved the Penan community, but also the Kelabit, Kenyah and Kayan communities in Baram.

"I have heard the Kelabits, Kenyahs and Kayans talk about women being left behind by men from logging areas."

He added that these women were forced to take care of their children on their own, and some did not even know who their children's father was.

Borneo Resources Institute of Malaysia (Brimas) project director Raymond Abin said there were cases of Penan women and girls being sexually assaulted by loggers in the deep interior of Baram.

"I have heard of such cases, but I do not know how widespread they are."

He said Brimas, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) which had a close relationship with the Penan community, would go to the ground and gather evidence of sexual abuse by loggers on Penan women and girls.

He said Brimas wanted to verify allegations made by the Bruno Manser Fund (BMF), a Swiss-based non-governmental organisation, that loggers had harassed and raped Penan women and girls.

Abin said there was truth in BMF's allegations.

"We need solid evidence to present cases of sexual abuses to the state government," said deputy chief minister Tan Sri Alfred Jabu, who is in charge of Penan affairs,

Alfred had recently denied that sexual abuses had ever taken place

Abin said Brimas would report its findings to the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam).

"We want Suhakam to conduct a public inquiry into the sexual abuse against Penan women and girls by loggers.

"The exploitation of the Penans has to be stopped once and for all."

On Jabu's statement that the sexual abuses had never taken place, Abin said the minister should have met the Penan elders at a proper forum.

"From what I know, Jabu had met the community leaders from Baram where some of them spoke in praise of the government."

He said he did not think that the community leaders would be brave enough to speak about sexual abuse at such a gathering.

Abin said Jabu should meet ordinary Penans and learn the truth behind the allegations.