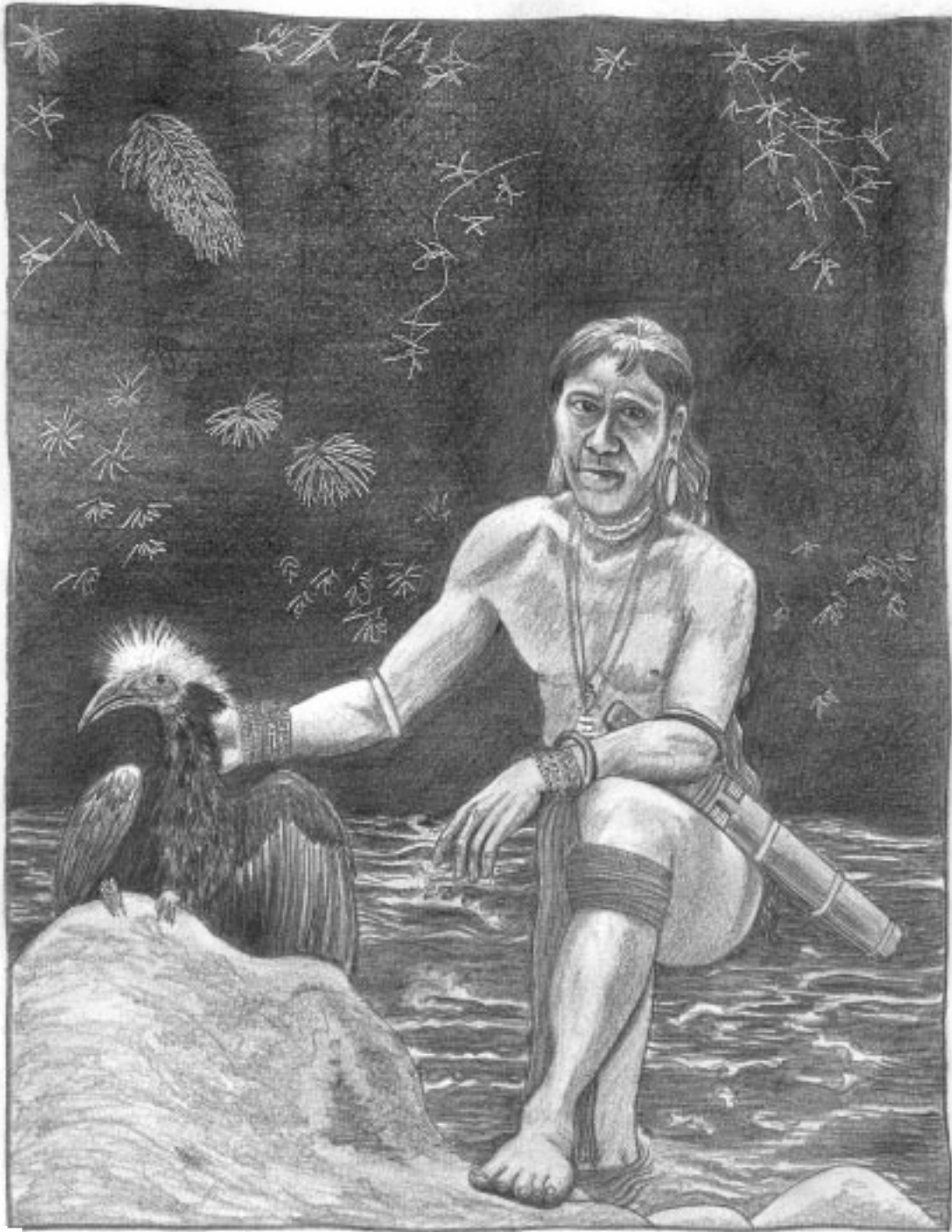


Tong Tana

July 1998

Journal of the Bruno-Manser-Fonds on the subjects of rainforests,
indigenous rights and timber trade



ALANG MIT SUBANESCHTÖTER. BESON. 2

BMF, Heuberg 25, CH-4051 Basel, Switzerland

Editorial

by Bruno Manser

The last messages from the Penan were full of sadness and despair. We have not received any news for a long time from the area where the genuinely nomadic Penan are living and we are very concerned. The forest fires have spread to the northern Malaysian part of the island of Borneo. Settled Penan complain about smoke, heat and lack of food. Logging companies cannot transport the cut logs downstream because of the low water levels. Smaller companies have temporarily stopped work due to financial difficulties.

Our newsletter "Tong Tana", meaning "in the forest" in the Penan language, is not meant to just shock the reader with its information on the situation of the rainforest, but

also to show how everyone of us can contribute to protecting the last remaining virgin tropical as well as northern forests through our personal and political decisions: a good deed is better than a thousand words. Those who keep asking the following question as consumers are contributing to the solution of global environmental problems: "What gives us, people of the rich countries, the right to sell and consume underpriced resources from the other end of the world which are not even ours geographically seen, if the local people concerned neither agree nor profit from this trade in the long run?"

Wishing all of us a lot of courage!

Bruno Manser



Photos: Anke Schmitt: Brutal police attack on Iban people in Sarawak.

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Sarawak (Malaysia)

Outbreak of police violence

by Roger Graf and Laszlo Maraz

On December 19, 1997, a total of 22 Ibans were arrested, including a 13-year-old boy, during protests against the extension of a palmoil plantation onto land belonging to indigenous people. Two persons were badly injured by gunshots from the paramilitary police; a 40-year-old Iban died on December 24, 1997, from a gunshot in the head.

The company Empresa (M) Sdn. Bhd. already possesses several large palmoil plantations and wanted to set up a further plantation on the land of the Iban longhouse Rumah-Banggau. The people only heard of these plans when the bulldozers drove onto their land. The Iban complained to the authorities who, however, did not react. The Iban then confiscated three bulldozers and blockaded the road in front of their longhouse. The 40 policemen of the "General Operations Force" finally dispersed the group of about 60 demonstrators by force. The police wanted to arrest the chief of the longhouse. A close fight ensued during which Enyang ak Gendung, who was standing passively in the background, became mortally wounded by a shot in the head. During the shooting Indit ak Uma was also hit; wounded, he dragged himself to the longhouse and tried to defend the participants of the blockade using a bushknife. After he was hit a second time by gunshots he succeeded in wounding a policeman. He was shot a third time lying on the ground. Siba ak Sentu was also shot in the belly after he tried to protect the chief from being arrested. Other Ibans were also wounded by blows from sticks and kicks. Among them was the 63-year-old village chief Bangga Ak Andop who was arrested for several days. He was charged with carrying a weapon during a demonstration and for incitement to troublemaking. Immediately after the hearings in the court of Miri the chief was arrested a second time and jailed for ten days. The issue of the hearing concerned the charges of the Iban representatives against the company Empresa for trespassing on their land.

The Iban traditionally practice shifting cultivation (rice) and hunting and gather diverse products from the rainforest. They live in longhouses in which 20 to 30 families usually live



Brutal police force attacks Iban people in Sarawak; two severely wounded and one dead.

under one roof. The Iban, as well as all the other inhabitants of Sarawak, have certain land rights which they however have to fight for in tedious court cases. These traditional land rights are being increasingly ignored by timber and plantation companies and even by the authorities. Laws were issued which increasingly restrict the indigenous peoples' entitlement to land. Compensation payments are often much too low and chiefs are being coaxed into giving up their land in exchange for money. The indigenous people of Malaysia remain a stumbling block for the gigantic development plans of the government. According to the will of the government, which aims for a maximum urbanization of 95% (!), the indigenous people should become integrated into a civilization modelled according to western criteria, allegedly to create a just society together with the members of other races (Malays, Chinese and Tamils). In effect, "civilizing" the indigenous people can create a dependency from which they are not able to escape any more. In the end the government and private industry will gain easy access to the lands of the uprooted indigenous people. The question whether the planning of development projects in which the indigenous people present a hindrance to realization was in effect faulty from the beginning will have to be answered by Malaysia when confronted with their own conscience as well as their trading partners.

Sarawak (Malaysia)

Sarawak: Penan visit the Chief Minister

by Bruno Manser

At the end of January a delegation of seven Penan representatives from the Ulu Baram area were met by the Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud in Kuching. In their petition written in the official Malay language they drew attention to the problems caused by the logging companies: erosion damages, pollution of drinking water, rising temperatures, decimation of the stocks of wildlife and fish, living under the constant threat of local police violence. They begged the Chief Minister to withdraw the logging licences from their traditionally inhabited areas. There has been no answer yet from Taib Mahmud. The same request was made by the representatives of three Penan communities living downstream in August 1997. They are also still waiting for an answer.

German forestry project

by Bruno Manser

The German Organization for Technical Cooperation (Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit, GTZ) has equipped the Ministry of Forestries in Sarawak with the most modern technology and has recently signed a contract for sustainable forest management with the Samling company. One of the GTZ's main tasks is to make an inventory of and map out all tree species. The project area encompasses an area of 1,500 square kilometers in the Ulu Baram region, largely in the area inhabited by the Penan, who have been trying to defend themselves against logging for years. A four-year-old boy died during a blockade in 1993 as a result of tear gas thrown by paramilitary troops. The Penan have personally pleaded with the minister for the withdrawal of the logging licences. If the GTZ adheres to their guidelines, e.g. the exclusion of virgin forest for commercial logging and guaranteeing the interests of the indigenous population, nothing should stand in the way of the project. "Low impact logging" in already degraded forests is a useful improvement if the affected population really wants it. The question remains whether the Penan, who have maintained their forests for hundreds of years, aren't perhaps the best guarantors for the sustainable management of the forest, more so than any foreign organization bringing technical development aid.



Penan-Peghulu (major representative of several village communities named by the government) handing over a petition to the Chief Minister Taib Mahmud.

Photo by James Bukitan

Indonesia/Malaysia

Indonesia: Relaxing restrictions for timber exports

edited by Roger Graf

In order to improve the income in foreign exchange in a country shaken by a major economic crisis, President Suharto pushed through a number of reforms by March 1, 1998. As the German timber trade newspaper "Holzzentralblatt" reported, the export of logs, sawn wood (planks), plywood and rattan should be made easier. To date there is a tax of 200% on the (restricted) export of logs, which has encouraged the export of the more valuable worked wood products, especially plywood. The demand for Indonesian timber products has decreased markedly due to the economic crisis in Southeast Asia, especially in Japan. The domestic demand has fallen as well. The 200% export tax will cease to apply; instead a so-called "appropriate use of resources tax" of 10% will be introduced. All other export restrictions, such as the export quotas, will disappear within three years. In future the timber concessionaires (licencees) will be allowed to export all wood as long as they sell at least 5% on the domestic market. Newest reports state that Japan will not buy wood from Indonesia anymore until the old export taxes have been abolished. Such encouragement of exports entails serious consequences and will lead to further heavy decimation of the remaining forests of Indonesia.

Why is the rainforest burning?

by Bruno Manser/John Künzli

The forests of Indonesia burned for several months last year. After the rains had brought some relief at the beginning of 1998, the forests have been burning once again since March 1998. Sarawak itself has now also been struck by forest fires. Last year the fires have destroyed at least 8,000 square kilometers of forest in Borneo and Sumatra (i.e. 20% of the area of Switzerland). Additional fires have also been reported from Sulawesi and Java. But tears were flowing mainly in Malaysia to where the southeasterly winds blew the smoke plumes. Over 10,000 people sought medical aid for their breathing problems in the hospitals of Sarawak (Borneo) alone during the first three weeks of Septem-

ber. Sarawak's capital Kuching reported the highest air pollution levels of 839 index points on September 23, 1997. Levels under 50 points are considered as good, levels of 200 to 300 as unhealthy and levels over 500 as extremely dangerous. The government considered evacuating the population. Malaysia however imposed a total news embargo at the beginning of November.

How is it possible for a rainforest to burn which as a rule cannot burn? Intact virgin forests contain enough living biomass and are so moist due to almost daily rainfalls that they have been able to resist the traditional "slash-and-burn" practices of shifting cultivation carried out by the small farmers and indigenous people for centuries. "Slash-and-burn" farming means that each family clearcuts a small area of forest, usually secondary forest which has already been farmed before within the traditional cycle, burns the cut trees a few weeks later and plants rice directly into the warm ashes. Using satellite photos the Indonesian government identified 176 companies as being responsible for the fires, not the small farmers. Among these companies 133 run plantations, 28 are timber companies and 15 are involved in resettlement projects. The agribusiness mainly consists of rice fields as well as rubber and palmoil plantations which can each cover an area of over 240 square kilometers. The accused companies had burned huge areas of the forest as a cheap method of preparing the terrain. The fires were able to encroach on adjacent secondary forest areas, i.e. forest that has already been exploited by the timber industry. This was possible because the burning sunlight could penetrate through the wide lanes cut by the bulldozers and dry out the waste wood left lying about such as branches and tree crowns. In this way the fires are continually nourished. Further problems are caused by the underground peat deposits which dry out if the protective canopy of the forest is missing and continue to smolder, breaking out again as forest fires after some time. The accused companies have now been required to prove their innocence, under threat of having

Palmoil plantation in Malaysia

Photo: "National Geographic", Aug. 1997

their logging and timber processing licences withdrawn. Malaysian investors possess shares in 43 of the companies, five are registered in Singapore, and even an American company is among the suspects. Criminal proceedings have been initiated against 27 of these and the wood working licences of 19 companies involved in the plantation industry have been withdrawn.

Extensive clearcutting is changing the climate negatively towards a dangerous direction: the amount of rainfall is decreasing, droughts are increasing. Experience shows that the last intact rainforests not only deserve absolute protection because of their species diversity and their climatic function, but also deserve protection as fire prevention areas. According to a study carried out by the WWF of Indonesia, the fires have caused horrendous damages to the local economies in the region. Although the extent of the damage cannot be estimated at present, the study concludes that in 1997 alone the damages

amounted to over 1.4 billion Swiss francs in Indonesia; in Malaysia a loss of 420 million Swiss francs can be expected. This amount could have covered the state-run social aid programs of the past three years! In what way does this fire concern us in the rich North? Responsibility lies mainly with the companies encouraging the degradation and destruction of the last remaining virgin forests, who import tropical timber, rubber and palmoil, whether they are called Marubeni and Mitsubishi of Japan, HIAG (Swiss timber importers), Bally and Pirelli (rubber) or large chains such as Coop and Migros. They are all called upon to support these countries in this time of need with offers of concrete aid. Those consumers who want to protect the rainforest should choose products made of local instead of tropical wood, use local butter or oils instead of margarine made of palmoil for cooking and refrain from using soaps containing palmoil and dishwashing liquids such as "Palmolive" products.

Most of the foodstuffs whose contents label mentions "vegetable fats" are very likely to contain palmoil. According to the Swiss law concerning foodstuffs the producer is not required to declare the nature or origin of such fats in detail. Cosmetics, cleaning fluids and pastry also often contain palmoil.

Photo: Bruno Manser



Russia

Amur tiger is being threatened by logging

by Roger Graf



Amur tiger
Photo: Zoo of Zurich

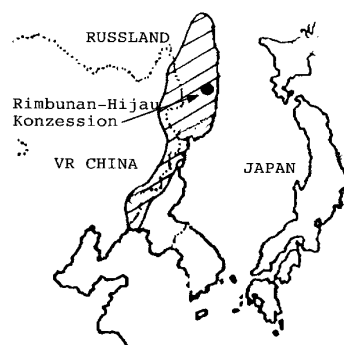
In December 1997 the government of Khabarovsk in Russia leased 3,050 square kilometers of land in the Sukpai catchment area for clearcutting. The lease is held by Rimbunan Hijau International from Malaysia! The timber giant is paying 450,000 US dollars, giving it the right to log 550,000 cubic meters of wood a year for 48 years. The Sukpai catchment lies in the Sikhote-Alin mountain region where the extremely endangered Amur tiger lives in the wild. According to a study carried out by the Russian department for the environment 150–200 Amur tigers are said to have survived by 1994 in the extreme eastern part of Russia and at the border to China. In addition, the forested area has been sustainably used for generations by the indigenous Udehe. The Udehe (also written as Udege) make a living from hunting for fur and meat, from fishing for sturgeon and salmon and by farming. Several families used to spend the winters together in wooden longhouses; in summer the Udehe moved back to their separate hunting grounds and lived in pole-supported tents covered with birch bark and fish skins. The Udehe are skilful smiths and create

elaborate leatherwork and embroideries. Chinese influence has affected their religion, but the bear and the Amur tiger are still honored and are present in myths. During the communist regime in the former Soviet Union the Udehe were resettled in closed villages. In this way the village Gvasiugi was created which is now being threatened by the logging operations of the Malaysians. The Udehe now mainly live by farming and gathering wild ginseng roots.

The Malaysian company Rimbunan Hijau, well known for its scandalous dealings in Malaysia and Papua New Guinea, has reportedly met up with the Udehe for talks and seems to have found "common interests". Apparently the indigenous people are to receive compensation in the form of eleven cars worth 100,000 US dollars. In addition Rimbunan Hijau has pledged 100,000 US dollars for the purchase of tree seedlings for the forestry administration.

Victor Borisovich Skachkov of the regional committee for environmental protection criticizes Rimbunan Hijau for ignoring the importance of protecting biodiversity. The company should carry out an environmental impact assessment and respect Russian laws. Rimbunan Hijau plans to build a road from the town of Sukpai to the port of Nelma, as the logs can only be exported profitably by sea. The road will cut apart the catchment area of the Samarga River, 8,000 square kilometers in size and covered with primary (virgin) forest. It may well be possible that in the near future further requests for additional logging areas will be heard from Rimbunan Hijau...

VERBREITUNGSGEBIET DES
AMURTIGERS



**Map of
Siberia**

News of the wood industry

compiled by Roger Graf

Well done!

Our November 1997 appeal (press conference, advertisements in all pertinent newspapers, letter to all municipalities) to renounce wood – which has been obtained by destructive means – being used in local buildings has already been successful. Prompted by our action, **197 Swiss communities** (status at editorial cut off) from all speaking areas have already taken decisions to renounce the use of wood from overexploitation. The 197 municipalities represent a population of over 2.1 million (30% of Swiss inhabitants). The BMF genuinely congratulates these communities!

Shame!

The Swiss company **Precious Woods** has received the FSC certificate which has been announced in advance for a long time for its Brazilian project "Mil Madeireira" in the Amazon region on June 1, 1997. Amazingly, hardly anything could be read about the (successful) certification in the media, although the managers had always pulled out all the stops in the past to obtain media attention (among others in the Swiss "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" in a weekend supplement several pages in length). The BMF has recently received a 21-page summary of the certification report. The assessment of Precious Woods' achievement resulted in the following marks (the meaning of the marks is interpreted by the BMF): Forest Land Security (4.0), Management Plan (3.8), Sustainable Production Management (4.0), Environmental Impacts (3.5), Community Relationship (3.1), Labor Relations (4.0), Economic Viability (3.5), Forest Potential Optimization (3.5), Tracing and Control (4.4). By the way, a mark of 3.0 means "certifiable, above average for the region, but with possibility for improvement", a mark of 4.0 means "very favorable fulfillment, clearly above average, but still with possibilities for improvement". Especially the assessment of the relations with the local population is not very favorable for Precious Woods. A total of fifty families live within the area owned by Precious Woods, each one being entitled to using the resources of the forest. These people were already living there before the purchase of the land by Precious Woods. There is no legal contract (yet) be-

tween the local inhabitants and Precious Woods clarifying the landrights. This is judged as being a potential conflict issue in the certification report. Precious Woods has always denied the existence of a local population towards the BMF except in the area of the sawmill. For this reason we are even more astonished to read about this in the certification report. The report also mentions that the monitoring of the wildlife stocks is also lacking. In addition, cutting the lianas in order to destroy them is also being criticized, especially as clear guidelines are lacking. Precious Woods has obtained the certification (under various conditions and along with additional obligations), but the marks are certainly not laurels. Could this possibly explain why hardly anything could be seen in the media during the past months on the "successful" certification of Precious Woods? The BMF supports efforts to create an ecolabel for wood from sustainably managed forests. This is feasible in secondary (already partially degraded) forests and should be encouraged. Unfortunately the FSC also allows logging in primary forests ("virgin forests"), which is unacceptable for the BMF. Opening up an intact virgin forest area by building roads, wounding the forest with bulldozers, cutting down ancient giant trees to cart them half way around the world, all the time maintaining that this protects the rainforest ("protection through use", cit. Precious Woods) is ecological stupidity.



**Pygmy-children from the threatened Congo-Bassin.
Photo: B. Manser**