

tong tana

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Bildmontage: BMF



No luxury hotel at the expense of the rainforest

The French ACCOR group must stop its participation in the Novotel Interhill project

“18 Bulldozers from Interhill are now destroying our last intact forest. Last week the manager of the Interhill Camp was here and threatened to bring in another 80 bulldozers.” Lakei Kusan (name changed) from Long Pakan, a small Penan settlement on the middle reaches of the Baram, speaks slowly and quietly. But the expression in his eyes reveals that he is deeply shaken by what is happening around his village.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the loggers from Interhill were already here and cutting the most valuable of the forest giants on his community lands. Now they want to come back and pick up whatever is left over. The Penan from Long Pakan, who live from hunting and the sale of forest products such as rattan, are being threatened with the depletion of their last basis of existence. That is why they are desperately resisting the exceptionally destructive activities – both ecological and social – of the timber company controlled by Hu Chang Pee and Lau Ngok Yung, businessmen from the city of Miri six hours down river.

*Name changed



Logging road blockade set up by Penan against Interhill near Long Belok in Sarawak's Middle Baram region.

The Penan from the region erected a symbolic blockade against the over-powering timber company in October 2008. But that didn't make much of an impression on the owners of Interhill. They are used to defending their interests and imposing their will on the local population. A part of the company's repertoire has long been to intimidate the Penan with armed gangsters bearing Samurai swords and guns and to shout vile threats if they resist the lumbering.

On various occasions, Interhill workers have sexually abused Penan women and girls. Since the Bruno Manser Fonds made these cases public in September 2008, investigations are being undertaken by the Malaysian police, by SUHAKAM, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia, and by the Ministry of Women, Rural and Regional Development. Interhill has still refused to respond to the accusations.



This is what the Penan are saying

“Interhill shows no respect whatsoever for us as people who are living from the forest. That's all I can say about this dreadful company. I hope that there are many people outside of Sarawak who hear about it.”

“Since Interhill advanced into our area in 1988, we have seen nothing but destruction and no positive development whatsoever.”

“When Interhill first came into our area, the company promised to respect our forest reserves, our fruit trees and our burial grounds. Then they simply levelled everything.”

“When we erected a blockade against Interhill in 2002, the loggers brought in the police to dismantle the blockade. Afterwards the company built a large camp for the loggers in the middle of our forest.”

“If no one from the outside pressures Interhill, our problems will become insurmountable. We are too weak to defend ourselves effectively against this company.”

“Interhill is polluting our drinking water catchments with motor oil and old truck batteries. They simply dump their trash into our river.”

“We are asking the government to revoke Interhill's license to log in our area. That is the only way can we survive on the middle reaches of the Baram.”

Cooperation with the French ACCOR Group

Because the present strategy of exploitation will soon exhaust the rainforest in the Interhill concession, the Group has looked for new investment opportunities. They appeared in the form of a large hotel in Sarawak's capital Kuching that is being realised in cooperation with the French ACCOR Group. The NOVOTEL Interhill (4.5 stars) should be ready for occupancy at the end of 2009. The 388-room hotel with its proximity to the world's oldest rainforest and to an orangutan rehabilitation centre is already being advertised.

The cooperation with Interhill is in crass opposition to the marketing of the ACCOR Group that extols itself as being exemplary in matters of environmental concern. With a new Environment Charter, ACCOR CEO Giles Pelisson set the goal in 2007 for the staff in all ACCOR hotels throughout the world to join in planting trees each year. ACCOR also intends to finance the planting of three million trees as part of the campaign of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Pact with the rainforest vandals

The annual tree planting ritual will soon begin even in Kuching, the capital of the Malaysian state of Sarawak. It is distressing that the ACCOR Group was unable to find a better partner for the realisation of its project in Sarawak. Since its founding in 1978, Interhill has been doing quite the opposite of what ACCOR head Pelisson is heralding with his tree planting project. Within thirty years, the timber company has succeeded in so degrading the former primeval forest of the Penan on the middle reaches of the Baram that not only a large part of the bio-diversity has disappeared but also grievous ecological and social problems will remain for generations.

With this exceptionally detrimental practice, Interhill owners Hu and Lau have managed to accumulate enormous assets that they now intend to expand with the help of the ACCOR Group. Once again the Penan are left with nothing. Now they are calling for international pressure to be put on Interhill: "We desperately need help from the outside. Please put Interhill and the ACCOR Group under pressure so that we can save our last forest reserves."

Lukas Straumann



What is the ACCOR Group?

With 147,000 employees worldwide and an annual turnover of more than 8 billion Euro, the French ACCOR Group is Europe's leading hotel and tourism company. ACCOR runs 4,000 hotels throughout the world, and owns well-known chains such as NOVOTEL, SOFITEL, IBIS and MERCURE. The Group has 47 hotels in Switzerland, including six NOVOTEL hotels in Zurich, Bern, Geneva and Lausanne.

This is what the Bruno Manser Fonds is demanding

- Gilles Pélisson, head of ACCOR, must immediately cease the cooperation with Interhill. The involvement in Novotel Interhill is in blatant contradiction to ACCOR's Environment Charter.
- ACCOR should apologise to the Penan for its cooperation with Interhill and support the indigenous communities in developing sustainable tourism for their region.
- Interhill must put an end to every form of destruction of the last rainforest on the middle reaches of the Baram and undertake immediate measures to stop polluting the water with motor oil and other toxic wastes.
- Interhill must accumulate a fund of 20 million US Dollars to compensate the Penan communities on the middle reaches of the Baram for the loss of their basis of existence and to finance the sustainable development of these communities.
- Interhill must accept the moral responsibility for the sexual abuse of Penan woman and girls by its employees and support the Malaysian authorities in their investigation.

For campaign updates visit our website

www.stop-interhill.com



News in brief

Samling withdraws from controversial logging concession

Good news for Sarawak's rainforest. After years of facing opposition, the timber company Samling is withdrawing from the controversial ancestral area of the Penan on the upper reaches of the Baram River. According to information from the Penan, the company will close the logging camp on the upper Baram and has already started to remove its bulldozers. Thus there is now the possibility that one of the Penan's last tropical forest areas can remain intact. The decision of Samling is particularly satisfying for Saun Bujang, headman of Long Benali. With its road blockade in the rainforest, his community has been hindering the advancement of Samling since 2004. The Bruno Manser Fonds (BMF) has maintained a partnership with the Penan on the upper reaches of the Baram for many years and we are exceptionally pleased with this significant result.

Sexual violence: Malaysian police working together with NGOs

Originally made public by the BMF, the Malaysian media has been reporting for several weeks on Penan women from the middle reaches of the Baram and incidents of sexual abuse by loggers. Now, for the first time, the Malaysian police have said they would work together with local NGOs and reconsider cases from the 1990s. A team from the Sexual Crime Unit of the Malaysian police, together with NGO representatives, will travel to the middle reaches of the Baram to meet with some of the victims in the first week of March. In November 2008, the BMF submitted a confidential report to the Malaysian police on the situation on the middle Baram .

Credit Suisse with new guidelines for forestry

A delegation from Credit Suisse (CS) visited the offices of the Bruno Manser Fonds last November to report on the bank's new guidelines for financing forestry companies.

According to them, the bank will no longer finance forestry companies that are logging in tropical primary forests and in forests with a high conservation value. The more rigorous interpretation of Credit Suisse's "Global Forestry Policy" is a direct consequence of our campaign in connection with Samling's initial public offering in the spring of 2007 and will be implemented throughout the world.

However, it is incomprehensible that CS considers its guidelines to be confidential. Without transparency and a public declaration of adherence to the new guidelines on the part of management, they lack the necessary credibility. The Bruno Manser Fonds will continue to monitor the situation.

Three dead after landslide in logging camp

Three dead and eight injured are the tragic result of a landslide on the upper reaches of the Limbang. According to Bernama, the Malaysian news agency, two of the three who died were Philippine migrant workers. The landslide is a direct result of the devastation of the rain forest above the logging camp. The Penan are calling for the timber companies Lee Ling Timber and Samling (Ravenscourt) to withdraw from the indigenous communities' last intact forest reserve on the upper reaches of the Limbang.



In December 2008, Headman Tirong Lawing (left) and Nick Kelesau from Long Kerong accepted the Malaysian Human Rights Award for 2008. Representing the Penan community of Ulu Baram, they were honoured by SUARAM, the human rights organisation, for their engagement in defending their traditional rights. Nick dedicated the award to his father Kelesau Naan who disappeared under mysterious circumstances a year ago and was later found dead.

Impressum

Tong Tana means «in the forest» in the language of the indigenous Penan living in the rainforest of Sarawak (Malaysia)

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