
Malaysia: Logging company encroaches and abuses Penan villagers

Long Lunyim is a Penan community from Sungai Pelutan, Baram, located in the Miri Division of the state of Sarawak, Malaysia which used to be a part of another village called Long Tepen. The people of Long Lunyim decided some years ago to leave the village of Long Tepen and establish as a separate longhouse altogether slightly further away over disputes with the Long Tepen's headman on the encroachment of logging activities onto their customary land.

The logging company Lajong Lumber, a subsidiary of Rimbunan Hijau, has been showering the chief of Long Tepen with cash and his sons with jobs with the company in exchange for the people's land. The company's operations started to get nearer and nearer to Long Lunyim and eventually encroached onto its individual farms and communal forestland. When the Long Lunyim people went to the company to complain and to demand Lajong Lumber to stop their operations, the company would simply reply that it had already paid their chief and that he had allowed them to enter the land.

The Long Lunyim community had written several letters from 2000- 2003 to several local authorities and the company itself asserting among others, that they no longer belonged to Long Tepen or the authority of its chief and committee and since they far outnumbered the latter the company had no right to buy their consent from Long Tepen.

In August 2003, a blockade was put up by Long Lunyim which was then dismantled after six days when the protestors were invited to see the General Manager of the company in Miri, who showed receptive to all of their demands.

However on September 4, the police came looking for a member of Long Lunyim, Mr. Semali Sait, promptly arrested him and confiscated his father's gun, which by the way, does possess a valid licence. They handcuffed him all the way to the Marudi Police Station, a journey by land and river which could have taken some 6-7 hours.

His fellow villagers became highly traumatised in the process, a bad thing when you are about to begin your planting season. The next day his father Sait Kiling went to the nearest police station to demand explanation and he too was then arrested, handcuffed and brought to the Marudi lockup. Both father and son were under remand for 8 days and were then wrongfully charged under Section 506 of the Penal Code for alleged criminal intimidation. They are now out on bail.

The arrest and charges were based on a police report lodged by Lajong Lumber's Camp Manager and a worker who claimed that they were threatened and intimidated by five Long Lunyim villagers, including Semali and his father. The two of them however vehemently denied the accusation and they have proof to back their claims.

But the company acted cold blood. While the people were either in jail, worried sick in Marudi for the two and the other three who were never detained but named in the police report, or scared to death back at home, the company managed to push in 10 tractors, 2 units for road construction and 8 for logging, into the people's forest reserve area, to grab all the timber there very quickly. "As-is"

business.

If you wish to express your support to the Penan struggle, please visit:
<http://www.wrm.org.uy/alerts/october03.html#2>

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