
Sarawak: indigenous rights ignored

The Sarawak State government and the Ministry of Resource Planning have recently proposed to constitute Protected Forest and/or Forest Reserves in the State, that would encroach on areas claimed as Native Customary Right (NCR) lands by the various native communities. The risk exists that the natives will find that their rights to their ancestral lands and forest will be extinguished in the process, without having been consulted. Moreover, most of the Protected Forests and Forest Reserves previously constituted have been licensed out for logging to timber companies, which have depleted them. On the contrary, native communities of Sarawak have proved they can utilise, manage and conserve the forest resources in a truly sustainable manner. Malaysia has ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity, whose Article 8(j) calls the governments to “respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity...” Nevertheless, these recommendations have not at been implemented at all.

On September 16th the WRM International Secretariat addressed Malaysian authorities to express its deep concern for this situation and to ask them to reconsider this polemic proposal and to expedite the approval of all applications by the native communities for Communal Forest Reserves.