



JARINGAN ORANG ASAL SEMALAYSIA
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES NETWORK OF MALAYSIA

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PRESS STATEMENT

13 August 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JOAS condemns arrest of Committee Member, reiterates call for moratorium on development projects

JOAS condemns the arrest of Matek anak Geram early this morning by the police for the crime of allegedly restraining the workers of an oil palm plantation. He was taken into custody by ten fully-armed police personnel at 8.45am and detained for two hours at the Mukah Police Station and charged for allegedly wrongfully restraining the workers of an oil palm plantation company, Saradu Plantations Sdn Bhd. under section 341 of the Penal Code before being released on bail.

Matek, an Iban farmer, a member of TAHABAS (Sarawak Native Customary Rights Network) and Committee Member of JOAS was unarmed when he was arrested by the fully-armed police. For over a year, Matek and his immediate family have been guarding their property against Saradu Plantations who have been encroaching on their native lands. In individual shifts, they have blocked an access road built on their land. JOAS questions the heavy use of force and intimidation against one unarmed man and calls for neutrality of the state infrastructure in this legal dispute between the private company and indigenous peoples.

Saradu Plantation Sdn. Bhd. is a Sarawak oil palm company, which has been given 15,000 hectares of land by the state government to develop oil palm in Balingian. Saradu is also linked to the Sarawak Chief Minister as his brother-in law, Robert Geneid and sister, Raziah Mahmud are majority shareholders of the company.

Matek Geram's case is just one of hundreds of land encroachment and conflict cases between indigenous peoples and oil palm plantation companies in Sarawak. In light of this, JOAS reiterates its support for the recent call from TAHABAS and other indigenous peoples organizations for a moratorium on plantation development projects. JOAS reiterates its position that the State Government-issued provisional leases are encroaching illegally into our constitutionally-recognized customary lands and forests. Until the government moves towards a meaningful solution with the full and effective participation and consent of indigenous peoples, incidences like Matek Geram will

continue to take place throughout the state, to the detriment of the rights of indigenous Sarawakians, the sustainable development of the Sarawakian population and the image of the state of Sarawak and Malaysia.

HELLAN EMPAING CHI TUNGKAT
SECRETARY
JARINGAN ORANG ASAL SEMALAYSIA

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The 9 August 2009 statement by TAHABAS, JOAS, BRIMAS and other Indigenous Organizations is attached.

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