

# **SARAWAK CONSERVATION ACTION NETWORK**

**National Secretariat Office**

Lot 1046, Shang Garden Shoplot

Jalan Bulan Sabit, Miri

Sarawak, Malaysia.

Tel: +6 085 423044 Fax: +6 085 438580

---

Date: 15<sup>th</sup> August 2009

## **FOR IMMEDIATE PRESS RELEASE**

### **Calls for Total Ban of Forest Burnings in Bakun Dam Reservoir**

Miri, Sarawak, MALAYSIA: – The **Sarawak Conservation Action Network (SCANE)** is shocked to learn that forests have been burning within the catchments and reservoir area of the Bakun Hydroelectric Power Dam project without any action being taken against the culprit by the Government Authorities.

**SCANE** has been informed that the forest burnings were purportedly done as directed by the Sarawak Hidro Sdn Bhd to wipe-out the forest that would be impounded by the dam. The Bakun Hydroelectric Power Dam project is owned and developed by Sarawak Hidro Sdn Bhd, a fully-owned unit of the Minister of Finance Inc, Malaysia (MOF Inc).

**SCANE** found out that Sarawak Hidro Sdn Bhd has started with the work to clear the forest within the entire Bakun dam reservoir. The contracts for clear-cutting of forest have been commissioned to some contractors since beginning of the year. The forest area which will be cleared for the dam is 80,000 ha that is roughly the size of Singapore Island.

Recently the Sarawak Hidro Sdn Bhd managing director Zulkifle Osman announced that the impoundment of water catchments would start in October,

which by then the whole dam reservoir will be flooded. By July 2010, testing for electricity transmission from Bakun dam will start. The Bakun reservoir catchment comprises some 20 sub-catchments with the main river draining the catchment is the Balui, which in turn is fed by the Murum, Bahau and Linau Rivers.

**SCANE** was told that one of the conditions as stipulated in the contract is that the contractors and/or its sub-contractors, agents and/or workers are required to do burnings on the cleared and felled forest, without which they would not be fully paid for the work done and/or their contract would be terminated. Over the past few months, large tracts of forest have already been cleared and felled within the Bakun dam reservoir area.

SCANE is wondering as how the Sarawak Natural Resources and Environment Board (NREB), the law enforcer of the Natural Resources and Environment Ordinance (NREO) fails to closely monitor the actions of Sarawak Hidro when its development activities are detrimental to the environment. It is scandalous that the Sarawak Hidro does not strictly follow the Environmental Management Plan (EMP), if any, as such stated in the Bakun Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Report.

With the current long spell dry weather, the Sarawak Hidro Sdn Bhd's contractors and/or its sub-contractors, agents and/or workers have been doing a series of forest burnings. **SCANE** has received reports that there were open burnings carried out in the area. Fires were reported at different locations and sites in the area. In certain sites, where the fires were not being able to completely razed the felled trees, logs and debris, their workers are asked to gathered all the logs and reduce to ashes. SCANE was told that those workers who set the fires were not aware at all whether any permits for open burning had been issued by NREB as they merely followed the directive of Sarawak Hidro Sdn Bhd.

The unscrupulous activity of clearing and open burning of forests by Sarawak Hidro within the Bakun dam reservoir area is clearly violating to the Natural Resources and Environment Ordinance (NREO). It is such outrageous that Sarawak Hidro actions to wipe out the forest within the reservoir area without having any sense of responsibility and sensitivity toward the environment, though knowingly that its activity would cause immeasurable impacts to environment. Due to the large scale nature of such activity, burning should be ban totally before it could become an environmental crisis within Bakun dam reservoir area and beyond. Hence, it is within the jurisdiction of the NREB to take appropriate measures to ensure such activities from reoccurrence.

SCANE is extremely concerns with the environmental implications of development activities surrounding the Bakun Hydroelectric power dam project that causes drastic land-use change and deforestation of sensitive ecosystems.

SCANE warns that removing vast tract of forest, open burning and forest fires in the dam reservoir not only puts flora and fauna at risk by reducing their habitat, but also contributes to long-term environmental problems such as climate change.

SCANE strongly urges the State Government of Sarawak to put a total ban on any forest clearance and burnings in Bakun dam reservoir area until appropriate measures and management plan are in place. With immediate action, the NREB, with the conferred power and jurisdictions should take stringent action against the developer of Bakun dam project for indiscriminate burnings of forest in the reservoir area.

Thank you.

Raymond Abin  
National Coordinator  
H/Phone: 013 8449345

**Note:** Sarawak Conservation Action Network (SCANE) is a coalition of leading environmental and indigenous rights organizations in Sarawak with members include Borneo Resources Institute Malaysia (BRIMAS), Indigenous Peoples Development Centre (IPDC), Network of Customary Land Rights of Sarawak Indigenous Peoples (TAHABAS), Centre for Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Sarawak (CRIPS), Sarawak Indigenous Lawyers Associates (SILA), Serakup Raban Iban Bintulu (SRIBin), Gerempung Anakbiak Sekabai (GAS), Indigenous Peoples Institute Malaysia Sarawak (IPIMAS), Society for Alternative Living (PPU) and Native Longhouse Action Committees through out Sarawak.

SCANE, newly formed in April 2009 to work on issues related to development, conservation and environment in Malaysia, particularly the State of Sarawak.