



PRESS RELEASE

SAVE KUALA LANGAT NORTH FOREST RESERVE FROM DE-GAZETTEMET

Halt the de-gazettement and development. It is not the right answer to solving issues of fire-prone forests, experts say

For Immediate Release

SELANGOR, 16 APRIL 2020: As the country is mired in COVID-19 crisis, the situation of the Kuala Langat North Forest Reserve (KLNFR) remains unknown. The Coalition for the Protection of Selangor's Forests had demanded through its press statement on March 26 that the de-gazettement process for the KLNFR to be suspended due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The current Movement Control Order (MCO) has made it impossible to have any proper assessment of impacts or dialogue on the proposed de-gazettement. The Coalition also disagrees with the justification provided by the Selangor state government that the land is being developed because it is "fire-prone".

Leela Panikkar, Director of Treat Every Environment Special (TrEES) and coordinator of the Coalition said, "The extension of the MCO to April 28 has made it impossible to undertake any detailed environmental and social impact assessment as it will involve site visits and consultation with all related stakeholders. Local communities are still unaware of the proposed project. The Selangor state government until now has not provided any explanation of how the proposed development will benefit the indigenous people living near KLNFR and other stakeholders. This needs to be formally clarified publicly to all stakeholders".

Faizal Parish, Director of the Global Environment Centre (GEC), a Coalition member, added, "a mixed development project is not the solution to solving the issues of fire-prone forests in Selangor. A peat swamp forest in its natural condition is wet, with high water tables. Fire only occurs when the ecosystem has been disrupted by human activities. At KLNFR, the Friends of Kuala Langat North Peat Swamp Forest, comprising of Orang Asli communities living near the forest, have been working with the Selangor Forestry Department and other organisations in carrying out rehabilitation and conservation activities of the area since 2015. They have planted more than 10,000 trees, blocked drainage canals and supported natural forest regeneration as well as undertaking the fire patrolling and monitoring works. As a result, more than 300 hectares of the degraded forest area within the forest reserve which was affected by the earlier fires is now recovering well. There has been only one fire incident in the past five years. This is the best way to solve the forest fire issues and not through development which will likely make the problems worse and also lead to loss of habitat and wild species."

Prof. Dr. Ahmad Ismail, President of the Malaysian Nature Society further commented, "KLNFR is a unique mix of lowland forest and peat swamp forest that holds much larger value if we utilise it sustainably. It is home to rare, endemic and endangered species of flora and fauna. It is also critical to the culture and tradition of the Temuan Orang Asli that have lived in the area for hundreds of years with the earliest photographic documentation found in 1886. Besides being home to a broad range of species, KLNFR plays an important role in mitigating climate change. It has the capacity to store carbon up to 1,600 tonnes of carbon per hectare. The total carbon stock of KLNFR is approximately 1,500,000 tonnes of carbon. An estimated 5.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions can also be avoided if the KLNFR is not developed and maintained as a Permanent Reserved Forest. These values cannot be replaced with money. Entire ecosystems, habitats and species that have existed for many thousands and in some cases millions of years and cultural heritage could disappear if the Project goes ahead" added Prof. Dr. Ahmad Ismail.



During the State Legislative Assembly sitting on March 17, the Selangor Chief Minister said the Selangor Government hopes to receive a premium of up to RM323 million (or RM3.2/square foot) if KLNFR development project goes ahead.

“The Coalition is puzzled as to why the state government would plan to destroy its heritage just for such a small amount of money”, said Meena Raman of Sahabat Alam Malaysia. “If the state government is concerned about monetary resources, there are international funds available for keeping peat forests intact such as from the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility. Such international funds are available to all developing countries who protect forests for biodiversity preservation and to curb climate change. The state should be exploring these approaches, which will benefit the public for generations to come.”

“We need to compare the proposed small one-off income to the state from land premiums, compared with the priceless value of biodiversity and cultural heritage as well as potential future revenue if the site is conserved and managed for small-scale ecotourism or other sustainable uses. We also need to consider the value of environmental services that will be eliminated as a result of the proposed development and the cost of disaster management that may result from the development. The total value of this vital ecosystem is much higher than the premiums requested by the state government and is irreplaceable,” she added.

“Humans and forest ecosystems are in constant interaction” said Nagarajan Rengasamy of GEC. “While forests and other natural ecosystems have nourished and supported humans for thousands of years - short-term development creates large imbalances in the biosphere. The new mixed development proposed by the Selangor State Government is not in-line with the Sustainable Development Goals, or the gazetted state and district land use and development plans that have been recently approved by them. To this day, all residents of the surrounding areas have received and used the services of the KLNFR ecosystem for their daily living. We hope that the state will reconsider the plans for this area and focus on truly sustainable options. “

END

Notes

The Selangor State Government through the Selangor State Forestry Department had placed the proposal notice on the February 5, 2020 inviting stakeholders in the Kuala Langat district to voice their objections to the proposed degazettement, which prompted various environmental and social NGOs and the public to join the Save KLNFR campaign. Formed in response to the notice, the Coalition for the Protection of Selangor’s Forests, comprising of seven environmental and social NGOs, collected 43,502 objections from the public and local residents of Kuala Langat district in just 20 days and presented to the State government on 4th March 2020.

The proposed de-gazettement of KLNFR is also not in line with the National Action Plan for Peatlands (2011-2020), the National Policy on Biological Diversity (2016-2025), the Land Conservation Act 1960 (Act 385) related to conservation and protection of environmental resources and Local Plan for Kuala Langat District 2030 as well as Malaysia’s obligations under international agreements and conventions.

KLNFR is an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA/KSAS) - Rank 1 under the Third National Physical Plan (RFN-3) and Disaster Risk KSAS under Development Goal Policy 16 (MP16) in the Selangor State Structure Plan 2035 (RSN). It is also designated as a conservation area under the recently gazetted Local Plan for Kuala Langat District. Under these plans, no development is allowed in Environmentally Sensitive Areas Rank 1 – to avoid serious environmental, economic and social impacts



About the Coalition for the Protection of Selangor's Forests

The coalition of seven environmental organisations was formed due to our concern that Selangor is going to lose a very important peat swamp forest reserve that is rich in biodiversity and home to indigenous communities. The coalition advocates for the protection and conservation of forests in Selangor by working abreast with alliances, allies and networks to highlight the global importance of forest ecosystems and biodiversity for climate control and natural sustainability. The coalition also promotes respect for the rights and identity of indigenous communities that have been coexisting with the forests in Malaysia for thousands of years.

For more info about the Coalition, visit:

<https://www.facebook.com/Coalition-for-the-Protection-of-Selangor-Forests-102562088005138/>

Members of the Coalition are:

- Center for Orang Asli Concerns Malaysia (COAC)
- Global Environment Centre (GEC)
- GRASS Malaysia
- Persatuan Aktivis Sahabat Alam (KUASA)
- Malaysian Nature Society (MNS)
- Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM)
- Treat Every Environment Special (TrEES)

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