

Sabah coal plant: Najib refuses to listen to rakyat
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Dear Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak,

I write to you as a deeply concerned and saddened citizen of Malaysia. For most of the 45 years of my life, I have been proud to be Malaysian. Recently, I have become heartbroken to be Malaysian.

I am profoundly grateful to write this with the support of both my local communities in Sabah, Malaysian Borneo and California, USA, and a larger world community. That said, I take full ownership of and sole responsibility for the views articulated in this letter; I express them from my stand as a mother, an earth citizen and a leader.

I founded and lead a public charity and non profit organisation both in Malaysia and in the US, to bridge between worlds and build partnerships for ecological conservation. I have been at the front lines of the founding and mobilisation of Green Surf (Sabah Unite to RePower the Future), the civil society movement opposing the construction of the 300 megawatt coal-fired power plant in Lahad Datu, Sabah, on the edge of the Coral Triangle, one of three of the world's most bio-diverse ecosystems.

You know. You signed the 6-nation declaration between Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, East Timor and Solomon Islands to collectively protect this 1.6 billion acres of ocean. You also know of course of your pledge at Copenhagen to reduce carbon emission intensity by up to 40 percent by 2020.

You likely also know that the plant will displace fishing communities who have been there for a long time - irreparably contaminating their livelihoods forever. And if you have listened, you would also know that they do not want the 'development' that your government is imposing on them.

One of the priorities of Green Surf was to study clean energy alternatives to the coal-plant, and propose them to the government. We collectively invested tremendous time and resources to identify and commission the expertise of Professor Daniel Kammen at Renewable and Appropriate Energy Laboratory of University of California, Berkeley to conduct the Clean Energy Options for Sabah report.

We had no notion of the outcome of the study, and results showed that Sabah is in an exceptional position to shift towards clean energy due to the availability of natural resources. We are in fact in an opportune position to lead the nation and the region in clean energy - the kind of leadership the world so urgently needs now.

I wonder if you know that Sabah is the last coal power-free frontier of Borneo. For your information, the five core NGOs in Green Surf are amongst the largest, oldest and most recognised conservation groups in Sabah and Malaysia - collectively responsible for most of the conservation work in the nation, with partnerships that span the world.

We have tried every avenue available to communicate to you the results of our findings and to engage in discussion about the future of energy for Sabah. After months of unsuccessful

attempts to meet with you, I can only conclude that you do not want to meet with us. This confuses and disturbs me.

Your words in public are about listening to the rakyat (people) and hearing their views. A sizeable portion of the rakyat of Sabah has been doing everything within their power to be heard by you. To no avail.

We have given you the benefit of the doubt that word is not getting to you, and yet we have met with those around you who promised they would convey our message to you. Many months, memos, reports, letters, faxes, emails and phone calls later, and we have not received a single response from you or any member of your administration.

We also did our best at state level government, and have huge support from within the government but ultimately the message is that this is untouchable because, "ini Najib mau" (Najib wants this).

Sir, my most consistent experience of your administration is stone walls, arrogance and insincerity. I am shocked by the behavior of the leadership of my nation. I find it patronising, archaic, oppressive, blatantly and self-righteously elitist and top-down.

I do not experience your administration as democratic, transparent, open, accountable or responsible. There is a deep incongruence between what you are projecting externally and what we have experienced internally. I can only surmise that you intentionally run your administration in this manner. Otherwise, it would mean that your leadership is incompetent and ineffective.

I am angry, and I am not willing to accept systemic disempowerment of our people. I am writing this open letter as a last resort. Sabahans are speaking up because we are deeply troubled and scared about the fate of our ecological and cultural legacy, and what we will be able to hand down to our future generations.

Please show true leadership and listen. You and your administration have much to do to regain a modicum of respect amongst many Sabahans. If 1Malaysia is more than a PR campaign and is truly intended "to provide a free and open forum to discuss the things that matter deeply to us as a Nation", please walk your talk.

Yours sincerely, for our children.

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