

Kayan community seeks PM's aid over native land
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Angered by the Sarawak government's decision to give their customary land to a plantation company, the Kayan community of Long Bemang want Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to help them to reclaim their land.

In the memorandum submitted to Najib's aide last Sunday, when the premier visited Miri, the community said they had settled in the Sungai Apoh area, located within Baram district, since the 1940s.

With the encouragement of the then-colonial government, they established their communal boundary with the other Kayan and Penan communities in the area, the memorandum says.

The subsequent Malaysian government had also supported them throughout the years by providing them with a primary school, a health clinic, piped water supply, power generators, a road and agricultural subsidies for their paddy, rubber and pepper crops and fruit trees.

"We inherited the customary land according to our customary practices from our ancestors. The land is like our blood and life," the memorandum, signed by Apoh community leader Penghulu Ajang Jok, said.

However, in 1989, the Kayans found out that the customary land had been given to Pusaka KTS Forest Plantations Sdn Bhd (PKTS) by the state minister in charge of resource planning and management and the director of the Sarawak forestry department.

Since a large part of their customary land consists of farmland, the transfer of land to the company has affected the livelihood of the community, the memorandum adds.

The community therefore asked that Najib intervenes to effect the exclusion of all their customary land from PKTS-licensed areas.

They also want the government - with the full participation of representatives of the community - to survey, demarcate and gazette the boundaries of their land.

The government and its agencies and the private companies should, in their process of consultation, uphold the principle of free, prior and informed consent before implementing any development projects within the community's native customary rights (NCR) territory, in accordance with the principles in the United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the memorandum says.

On the Petronas' Sarawak-Sabah Gas Pipeline Project which cuts across the Long Bemang territory, the community called for the state petroleum firm to be responsible for the welfare of the communities affected by the project.