

Najib urged to uphold rights of Sarawak folk
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Gerakan Anak Sarawak (Gasak) is requesting Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to uphold the rights of natives and people of Sarawak that have been violated by both public and the private sectors.

The call was made during a procession in Kuching today celebrate International Human Rights Day.

Processions were also held in other cities and towns in Sarawak.

In Kuching, some 300 Gasak members took part in the procession, which was closely monitored by the police.

Gasak comprises several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Sarawak Dayak Iban Association (Sadia), Borneo Resources Institute Malaysia Sarawak (Brimas), Sarawak Indigenous Lawyers Association (Sila), Save Rivers Network Sarawak (Save Rivers), Baram Protection Action Committee (BPAC) and Sarawak Native Customary Rights Network (Tahabas).

Organising chairperson Peter John Jaban (left) told a media conference that Gasak is writing to the prime minister, Sabah Chief Minister Musa Aman and Sarawak Chief Minister Adenan Satem in conjunction with International Human Rights Day, asking them to respect the rights of the natives and the people of Sarawak.

“This letter is to demonstrate our collective outrage at the forcible dispossession of the natives of Sarawak from their customary rights and ancestral lands due to the development of plantations, logging, mining and mega dams,” Peter said.

The prime minister, he asserted, should exert his influence over public sector entities, along with the Sarawak and foreign companies operating locally.

He must hold them accountable to the federal constitution with special attention to articles which outline the rights to property, life and equality before the law.

'Free, prior and informed consent'

Gasak also expects the prime minister to include the international commitments made by Malaysia under the United Nations' declaration on the rights of the indigenous people, in decisions affecting their rights, he said.

Among other things, Peter said Gasak wants the prime minister to order a halt to

commercial projects that do not have the “free, prior and informed consent” of the affected indigenous people. This includes the proposed Baram Dam, Baleh Dam and other mega dams in Sarawak.

It also wants the government to return the NCR lands that have been acquired for the proposed projects in which “free, prior and informed consent” of the affected people have not been obtained.

Gasak, Peter said, called on Najib (right) to order investigations into logging, plantation, mining and power companies which are associated with claims of corruption from the affected indigenous people and other stakeholders.

He added it held Najib responsible to implement the recommendations made by the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) and recognise indigenous customary rights to land, as well as remedying and redressing land loss.

“We want you also to address land development issues as well as future threats of NCR land encroachment by respecting the principle of ‘free, prior and informed consent’,” Peter added.