

**Najib told not to follow Shahrizat's example**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**July 15, 2010**

Prime Minister Najib Razak has been urged to work with both the state and independent NGOs to get a fuller picture on the situation of the Penan during his visit to the Baram region in Sarawak next week.

Najib is due to visit the Penan community in the Ulu Baram area in the Miri Division on July 22 in the wake of reports of new cases of rape and sexual exploitation by loggers in the area.

The Penan Support Group (PSG), which conducted a fact-finding mission and produced a report on the controversy earlier this week, said it is appalled at Deputy Women Family and Community Development Minister Heng Seai Kie's dismissal of the rape reports.

NONE According to Heng, her boss Shahrizat Abdul Jalil (left) had herself went to Baram on a fact-finding mission on Tuesday and found no new cases as alleged in the PSG report.

"We find this denial and misinformation problematic for several reasons. First, the minister's visit was not a 'fact-finding mission' to investigate the allegations of new rape cases but to merely 'have a feel of the place'," said PSG in a statement today.

"Second, the minister did not meet any of the members from the Penan communities cited in the PSG report. She spent only one hour total in her walkabout of Batu Bungan, an accessible village near the prime tourist spot of Mulu National Park, which is no where near any of three remote villages the PSG mission members visited during their investigation."

Don't forget the wider context

PSG, a coalition of 36 NGOs, said that the issue of sexual violence and exploitation of Penan girls and women should go beyond punishing the individual perpetrators.

"In areas where the state has given logging concessions to the logging companies, the power wielded by these companies over the indigenous peoples in these areas is immense.

NONE "For instance, many Penan children are dependent on logging companies for transport to school because the state has failed to provide schools closer to these communities or adequate transportation services to the nearest schools, rendering them additionally vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

"Until the state takes serious efforts to reassess its development policies and ensure the rights, welfare and protection of its people, this type of violence will continue."

PSG said that criminal investigations alone will not stop the sexual violence from reoccurring if the systematic exploitation of the Penan persists.

It blamed the problem on development policies which "allowed the encroachment of indigenous peoples lands and destroyed their livelihoods and culture, have led to dependency, impoverishment and the disempowerment of many Penans."