

**Squatter colony fire: Arson rumour quashed**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**October 26, 2010**

Sabah Umno's Sepanggar division has advised victims of a major fire last Monday in Kampung Lembaga Padi not to be taken in by a rumour that their squatter colony was torched by arsonists.

If there is any evidence of criminal doing, it said, the police will act.

The colony of over 600 houses in Kota Kinabalu has long been known as a black area notorious for syabu (methamphetamine hydrochloride) cases. Most of the residents are undocumented immigrants.

"We don't think there is any criminal element. Most probably the fire was due to human negligence. What is important is that nobody was hurt," said Sepanggar Umno chief Jumat Idris.

He was commenting on widespread speculation about the cause of the fire which started in one of the few unoccupied houses and razed nearly half the houses in the colony.

Jumat said his priority is to get the locals resettled in a People's Housing Project in nearby Telipok and Telipok Ria "if City Hall and the Tuaran District Council can be persuaded to relax the procedures on downpayment".

The foreigners affected by the fire would have to fend for themselves, he said.

The victims are all currently housed at the Kampung Cenderamata Dua mosque and at the Kampung Likas multi-purpose hall. The two venues appear to be insufficient to accommodate the large number of people affected.

Fire and Rescue Director Khirudin Drahman pointed out that the houses were a fire hazard, as they were built close to each other and there was no proper entrance to the area.

"The fire engines could not access the area and we had to use three mobile water pumps. My men had to slip the water hoses into other homes not affected by the fire. Moreover there were damaged power cables around."

Half the colony was razed by the time the fire was brought under control in about two hours.

A City Hall spokesperson confirmed that it had recorded 603 houses in Kampung Lembaga Padi during a census in March.

Link to court order?

The arson rumour has been linked to a court order issued on Nov 23 last year which gave 300 residents in the colony two weeks to vacate their premises.

The court order was on behalf of two of the three owners of the Kampung Lembaga Padi land. At the time of the fire, many of the houses were still being occupied.

Sepanggar Umno, it is learnt, had requested an extension of time to enable an orderly evacuation of the affected residents. The plan then was to get them to move to Telipok Ria further up the west coast in the neighbouring Tuaran district.

Meanwhile, a lawyer linked to Karambunai state assemblyperson Jainab Ahmad had been working on an injunction against the court order before the fire.

The sticking point was that each family would have to pay about RM 780 to move into the houses in Telipok Ria. Many of the families were reportedly unable to pay the amount.

Kampung Lembaga Padi, spread over 15 hectares, has been settled since 1978. Three individuals who had applied for the land had their application approved in 2003, it is learnt.

Local residents took the matter to court in 2004 and apparently won the round. The case was again successfully taken to court in 2007 by the three landowners and in 2008, the affected villagers learnt that they had lost.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.  
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/146460>