

Penans tell Suhakam: Blockade to continue
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Tony Thien

Attempts have been made to remove their blockade but the Penans are not budging. They declared that they will continue to block the road in order to protect their ancestral land.

This was the message the Penan community at Long Benalih in Ulu Baram, Sarawak, delivered to Suhakam commissioners and officials during a dialogue in Miri on Wednesday.

They said they are determined to continue with their road blockade to try and stop logging on their ancestral land inspite of recent action taken by a timber company with the support of police to forcibly remove the blockade.

"They want to log on our land. We will not allow that. The blockade will be up again if the situation warrants," the Penan delegation told Suhakam.

The government can, however, construct an alternative road access to the villages but not the logging company as their only interest is to take the timber, Suhakam was told.

Exercising our rights

The blockade at Long Benalih was dismantled by the authorities recently. The Penans claimed the dismantling was done without their knowledge and consent, and they were very upset by it.

"We do not oppose the government or development. The blockade is necessary and we are merely exercising our rights to the land, and the majority of our tribe support the blockade and oppose logging in our area," they told Suhakam.

During the dialogue, the Penans also refuted allegations that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were behind them or instigated them in setting up the road blockade.

Suhakam fact-finding chairperson Dr Dension Jayasooria said a report would be tabled to the full commission meeting.

He said there were 'gaps' and 'contradictions' obtained after the dialogue sessions with the Miri Resident Office, the logging companies and the Penans.

"The authorities said a lot of dialogues were held but the Penans said there was no such discussion at all," he said, adding that "the situation calls for meaningful dialogues and discussion, and that the state government should do more to win the hearts and minds of the Penans".

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