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For Immediate Release

Participants of SAVE Rivers Conference reject the construction of mega dams in Sarawak

MIRI, SARAWAK – About 150 indigenous representatives who are affected by the current and planned mega hydro dam projects in Sarawak together with local civil society organisations and indigenous peoples organisations and concerned individuals gathered for a conference in Miri, Sarawak from the 16 to 18 February, organised by the newly formed Save Rivers Network (SAVE Rivers).

The discussion in the conference centred on issues regarding the impacts of building mega-dams to the livelihoods of the affected communities as well as the adverse impacts it will create to the environment.

At the end of the conference, the participants issued a statement demanding that the government take the necessary steps to address the issues concerning them.

According to Peter Kallang, the Chairman of SAVE Rivers, “In the workshop discussions the participants unanimously expressed their clear intent to resolve these issues and continue the campaign until the demands are met.”

The participants of the conference strongly condemn the Sarawak State Government’s development plans to build an additional 12 dams after Batang Ai, Bakun and Bengoh dams. They strongly demand the State Government to scrap the said plans as well as the plans to bring in dirty industries to the state under the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE).

They are also demanding that all outstanding issues regarding the peoples affected by the dams which have already been constructed or currently under construction should be solved immediately.

The participants agreed in the conference that the government must respect the decision and the right of the people to disagree with the proposed dam projects as they are the ones directly affected.

There was a strong call to the government to promote viable energy generation alternatives which are people and environmental friendly such as micro-hydro, solar, wind and biomass.

The participants demanded that destructive activities caused by logging, plantation and infrastructure activities within the water catchment areas of all the river system in Sarawak should cease.

All the participants also agreed that the government should at the very least conduct a referendum after a full and free consultation among the peoples affected by the proposed dams.

8 speakers gave presentations during the conference. They are Detta Samen who is one of the Commissioners in the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (SUHAKAM), Gurmit Singh from the Centre for Environment, Technology and Development, Malaysia (CETDEM), Edmund Bon who is a lawyer and formally in the Bar Council's Human Rights Committee, Dr. Andrew Aeria from the Faculty of Social Science at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Adrian Lasimbang from the Indigenous Peoples' Network of Malaysia (JOAS), Dr. Ting Chek Ming who is a senior lecturer in Universiti Selangor (UNISEL), Kirk Herbertson from International Rivers and Cynthia Ong from Green Surf.

The indigenous communities include the Kayans, Kenyahs, Kajangs, Kelabits, Lun Bawang, Ibans, Penans, Bidayuhs, Kedayans, Trings and Ukits.

SAVE Rivers is a network of civil society organisations, community based organisations and associations and individuals who are concerned about the issue of mega dams construction in the state which will affect a large group of indigenous peoples and the environment.

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