



## **Statement on the Degazettement of the Kuala Langat North Forest Reserve**

**2 September 2021, Selangor** - The Malaysian Environmental NGOS (MENO) is deeply dismayed by the reports that the Selangor state government has degazetted 536.7 hectares (ha) of the Kuala Langat North Forest Reserve (KLNFR) for mixed commercial development. The total area that is approved for degazettement is 54% of the original proposed plan to degazette 931.17 ha.

Even though the most recent report states that the Selangor Chief Minister has promised to postpone the degazettement until all issues raised have been clarified, the State government has in fact already degazetted the area as notified in the Government of Selangor Gazette dated 12th August 2021, Volume 74 No. 17 Article No. 1810 and Gazette Plan No. 3018.

In a time when the impacts of the climate crisis are experienced globally, the richest state in Malaysia has taken a step backwards of converting forests into development. In fact, Selangor should play a more active role in increasing its forest cover and protection. Standing at 31%, Selangor is one of the states that have the lowest percentage, far below Malaysia's target of maintaining 50% forest cover.

As a process of degazettement under the provision of the Selangor Forest Enactment, members of MENO attended public hearings held last year and submitted our objections.

The KLNFR is mainly peat swamp forest, with smaller areas of lowland dipterocarp forest. Peatlands are critical for preserving global biodiversity, provide safe drinking water, minimise flood risk and help address climate change (i.e. important carbon sink in climate change mitigation measures).

The KLNFR is not merely a piece of land. It was gazetted in 1927, and covered almost 7,247 hectares at the time. Today, only 957.63 hectares are left, out of which the state government approved to degazette 536.7 hectares as per its proposal for mix development purposes.

In addition, it is an 8,000-year-old natural heritage site. It totals more than 7,000 ha and is a peat swamp forest that contains sensitive ecosystems. The KLNFR is an area of importance for biodiversity conservation that supports home to endangered species such as *Meranti Bunga* (*Shorea teysmanniana*) and *Meranti Bakau* (*Shorea uliginosa*), the Malayan sun bear, panther and clouded leopard. The forest also contains endemic species found only in the area such as the Selangor pygmy flying squirrel (*Petaurillus kinlochii*) and the Langat red fighting fish (*Betta livida*).



The KLNFR is underlain with a layer of 2-4m of peat which stores more than 1.5 million tonnes of carbon which has formed over the last 8,000 years old. The peat swamps contain organic materials that store a huge amount of methane, one of the most harmful of greenhouse gases. Degazetting the forest reserve for development would require draining the peat swamp forest that in turn releases the locked up methane into the atmosphere. For that reason, land-use plans such as the National Physical Plan and the Selangor Structure Plan 2035 have identified peat swamp forests as irreplaceable with respect to macrophage biodiversity and are Environmentally Sensitive Areas that should not be converted.

Up to 2,000 Temuan orang asli call the KLNFR home, and have lived there since 1886. They continue to depend on the forest resources for their livelihood and cultural identity. Converting this forest for development would mean displacing the Temuan Community from their homes. This infringes the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), of which Malaysia is a signatory.

The State government also claimed that the area is degraded and therefore is of little value. MENGO calls for the State government to be transparent and share with the public the expert opinion and study conducted by a consultant that forms this rationale.

In addition, instead of converting this restored land, the State government with the support of Selangor Forestry Department, NGOs, corporates and the indigenous community themselves should continue undertaking forest restoration and fire prevention works to bring back the value of the forest.

To replace the loss of the degazetted forest, the State government informed that a total of 581.48 hectares of land in the districts of Sabak Bernam, Hulu Selangor and Hulu Langat had been approved as replacement areas for the Permanent Reserve Forest (HSK/PRF). We wish to support the notion that these stateland forests should indeed be gazetted, but that they should not be gazetted as replacement of the lost forest in the KLNFR.

In view of its importance, MENGO calls on the Selangor state government to stop any forest clearing from happening at the excised area and reverse its decision and regazette it as a forest reserve.

Should the area continue to be degazetted, MENGO calls upon investors and financial institutions to refrain from providing financing to develop the area. The act of destroying a carbon sink landscape, biodiversity hotspots and cultural landscape go against United Nations conventions and declarations that Malaysia is a signatory to, which are:

- United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
- United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs).



It also departs from the Environment, Social, Governance (ESG) principles of doing business, which progressive companies increasingly seek to adopt to operate without damaging the environment and society.

MENGO also calls upon individual Malaysians to refrain from buying or renting the properties. Likewise, household-brand names should not place their products in a commercial area tainted with infringement against conservation and sustainable development goals held dear by us as Malaysians.

***"Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed."***

- ***Mahatma Gandhi***

***"Sustainable development is the pathway to the future we want for all. It offers a framework to generate economic growth, achieve social justice, exercise environmental stewardship and strengthen governance."***

- ***Ban Ki-moon***

Signed by MENGO members:

eHomemakers

ENSEARCH Malaysia

Future Alam Borneo

Global Environment Centre

Malaysia Nature Society

Sustainable Development Network Malaysia (SUSDEN Malaysia)

Reef Check Malaysia

Treat Every Environment Special Sdn Bhd (TrEES)

Water Watch Penang

Wetlands International

WWF-Malaysia

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