

*Open Letter of ARPAG for *

International Meeting UNFCCC Bangkok 2009

*Local Peoples' Initiative *

Solidarity to Save Peatland Ecology in Central Kalimantan-Indonesia

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A green landscape lying at the equator of Borneo (Kalimantan) Island Indonesia, peatland of Central Kalimantan is one of the largest and richest resources in South East Asia. Kalimantan island or well-known as Borneo laid at 4° 24' LN to 4° 10' LS and 108° 30' LE to 119° 00' LE covering an area of *approximately* 535,834 km². The Indonesia part of Borneo occupied 28 % of all terrestrial of Indonesia. The North of Borneo is Indonesia's neighboring countries, Malaysian Sarawak and Sabah, and the Kingdom of Brunei Darussalam. The political division of the island is the legacy of colonial presence in the past. The island of Borneo is rich with natural resources such as tropical forest, minerals, fresh water, and coastal resources. The richness significantly contributes to Republic of Indonesia's revenue particularly from forest and mineral resources (coal, gold, oil and gas).

Excessive exploitation of natural resources to serve the demands of rich countries in Europe, USA, Australia, Canada, and Japan bring severe impacts such as ecological destruction and social disintegration of local inhabitants of Borneo. Global development process led by Northern countries has failed, resulting in global catastrophe in the form of climate change, exacerbating the suffering of indigenous and local people, including those who live in Borneo. The failure of the existing predominant development model is due to its foundation on greediness and capitalistic economy which is exploitative and repressive to the natives and local people. In Central Kalimantan, peatland forest is shrinking following its conversion for large palm plantations, monoculture tree plantations, and mining. We are the witness of gigantic projects of peatland conversions to feed the demands of Northern countries.

Peatland forest of Indonesia is the largest tropical peatland in the world, approximately 38 million hectares (Ministry of Forestry: 1997). This natural wealth has become a curse when the New Order Regime set up Peatland Mega Project in 1997. One million hectare of peatland in Central Kalimantan was converted into paddy field. For local people, peatland is the soul of life. It provided resources for Ngaju people to continue live sustainably for centuries. For generations, the Ngaju had lived from timber and non-timber resources such as rubber sap, rattans, cultivate rice, hunting, and maintaining various fish ponds (*tatah, handil *and *beje) *to sustain their lives in sustainable way. From peatland they could earn income enough for education, health, food, housing and cultural life. Ngaju people have been practising customary rules to use peatland resources sustainably for centuries. The harmony is disturbed when the development model adopted by the regime destroyed the peatland.

Peatland of Central Kalimantan is rich with biodiversity. Half of the peatland area are rivers and wetlands with endemic vegetation. In some area of the peatland, the water colour is black, but rich with livelihood hence it is known also as black water ecosystem. Local inhabitants started to suffer when

President Suharto issued Decree no 82/1996 to convert 1 million peatland into rice-field. The project laid in District of Kapuas, Pulang Pisau, and South Barito. It also converted peatland in Palangkaraya municipality.

The project was failed totally. In the aftermath, the project didn't give any benefit to the environment and local people, but tremendous suffering instead. Peatland turned into disaster generating machine. The project displaced 82,000 local people from their homeland and source of living. Hundreds of thousands hectares of rubber and rattan gardens were destroyed, and also drinking wells, fish ponds were plumeted. Wetlands were drained by canals development and became grassland vulnerable to fire. Peaceful life turned into life full with conflicts and disasters.

Since 1997, forest and peatland fires occur in every dry season up til now. In rainy season flood has become more common and extensive. People are experiencing food iss scarcity and food security has become a critical issue. Many people lost their livelihoods because of displacement and land grabbing. The project was truly a disaster for the inhabitants of peatland ecosystem of Central Kalimantan.

Today our peatland is facing new kind of threat by being designated as carbon sink area, an environmental service of forest. This proposal comes from the government of Indonesia at the UNFCCC COP-13 in Bali, through the inclusion of the area under REDD mechanism (Reduction of Emission from Deforestation and Degradation). This project will take our land to offset carbon emission of the Northern countries who themselves are reluctant to reduce their fossil fuel consumption.

While industrial countries try to reduce their emission by shifting to alternative energy such as palm oil, the peatland of Central Kalimantan is designated to serve those needs by accommodating the expansion of large-scale palm oil plantation. On top of that, Central Kalimantan's peatland is also rich of minerals, oil, gas, coals, and gold. Some countries have been manufacturing conservation projects to sell alternative solutions to safe the planet from climate change.

We, the inhabitants of peatlands, have been living and learning from our ancestors how to live sustainably in peatland. We have been witnessing government's peatland project in Central Kalimantan destroying our livelihood since 1996.

Climate change is the ultimate indicator of the failure of global development model. With regards to climate talk of UNFCCC , we express our concerns and worries with the efforts to save the climate in UNFCCC which look more as masks, through offset mechanism such as in the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and REDD proposal, to keep the practice of 'business as usual' and, even worse, to sustain dirty and destructive industries. ARPAG call for the UNFCCC not to come up with solutions that will undermine the rights of local people to natural resources and our struggle to reclaim our rights in Central Kalimantan. We demand all parties to respect the rights of local and indigenous peoples as guaranteed in the UN Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Constitution of Republic Indonesia.

ARPAG was established in 2007 is a collective of peasant group, fisherfolks, rattan handcrafters and rubber collectors. Currently, we have 7,000 members from 52 villages.

Our aim is to reclaim our rights to protect peatland ecology and our livelihood. Our struggle is guaranteed by the Constitution, that is the right of people to natural resources, decent livelihood, and

sovereignty. We will fight for new society which is based on democracy, social justice, self determination, peace, and economic autonomy, as well as on the sustainability of peatland ecosystem. We call for the cancellation of all activities and investment that will further destroy the ecosystem and displace people, especially those pretending as conservation projects and efforts which serve as cover up to sustaining mining and mono-culture tree plantations.

We respect efforts of all parties who work for environmental and social justice. We learn together internationally and nationally about the process to reach agreement in Copenhagen in December 2009. In this light, we would like to express our view:

1. In principle, ARPAG give highly respect to international efforts to save the earth. Therefore, we continue to observe, communicate, and take position to UNFCCC processes. We demand the UNFCCC processes to find the best solution, to respect and recognise local initiatives to save the earth and prevent any effort including conservation effort which would displace indigenous peoples and local communities from their homeland.
2. ARPAG with 7000 members in 52 villages together with Yayasan Petak Danum in Kapuas, has been doing a lot of efforts to save and rehabilitate peatland ecosystem since 1999. We have replanted 50,000 hectares of endemic trees, rehabilitate rattans forest (13,000 ha), rubber forest (5,000 ha), fish ponds, re-developed traditional paddy fields, and revitalise customary forest system. We built 'peatland' school for local communities and conduct strategic dialogue with local government, central government, and NGOs in Indonesia and abroad.
3. ARPAG demand rich countries and Annex 1 countries such as the US, Canada, Australia, Rusia, France, United Kingdom, Japan, and the rest of Annex 1 to reduce their emission to "zero"² to save the earth and all humankind.
4. ARPAG urge the delegation of Republic Indonesia consists of Government officials, NGOs, and business representatives to stop negotiation that will undermine the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities across Indonesia. We demand sovereignty to control our territory and we reject any exploitation and new-colonialism by our own government and foreign countries in the name of conservation projects.
5. ARPAG firmly reject the proposal of MAWAS National Park (** 377,000 hectares), oil and gas exploitation, oilpalm plantations, and tree plantation in the area of former Peatland mega project. These projects are threats to the livelihoods of local communities and have been using oppressive tactics such as intimidation by security forces to eliminate local opposition to the projects. We believe that the proposed conservation project is a pretext to protect the interest of oil exploitation which was explored by the Dutch colonial regime in 1930s.
6. ARPAG reject the expansion of oilpalm plantation (** 360,000 hectares) in ex Peatland mega project (PLG). The project is threatening the livelihood of local people and peatland ecosystem. ARPAG aware that this project will provide raw material for food and agrofuel to Northern countries. The project will undermine people's rights to resources such as rubber forest, rattan forest, customary forest, fishponds and other natural resources.
7. ARPAG reject all form of foreign aid to save peatland that generate from carbon trading or foreign loans under the scheme of REDD or any other scheme. The "aid" will only bring severe

impact to people and peatland resources and will undermine people's sovereignty over resources. Parties who involved in the investment of offset will control, patronise, and undermine the roles of government to protect its people and peatland resources.

8. ARPAG demand UNFCCC process in COP 15 to stop all negotiations pretending as conservation efforts to stop climate change. We suspect there are a lot of interest of mining, plantations, and biopiracy involved in in the name of conservation. The on going negotiation to push conservation is a form of new colonialism of the Northern countries to Southern countries.
9. ARPAG will keep protect and preserve customary forest and peatland with our cultural and customary system, such as defining our territorial boundaries by the sound of gong (traditional metal percussion instrument) and rooster doodle do. We will preserve the area covering 5 km from the edge of any body of water (river, ponds, and lake). Our life is relying on the sustainability of lakes, peatlands, and wetlands. As long as the environment and nature are intact our livelihood will still be exist for generations.

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