

## ***PRESS RELEASE***

### **WHO IS SAVE RIVERS REALLY SAVING?**

**BARAM (SARAWAK), 17 March 2023** – Advokasi Pribumi Sarawak (APS), a non-government organisation set up to champion sustainable forest management and safeguard the interest of native communities in Sarawak, said today that the attack by SAVE Rivers against assemblyman YB Dennis Ngau is uncalled for and may potentially jeopardise the standard of living of indigenous communities here.

APS statement came following an article published on the SAVE Rivers' website that claims that there are widespread opposition to logging in the Ulu Baram area and called into question YB Dennis Ngau's comments on the assistance provided by logging companies to build road and other infrastructure and amenities around the area.

**Nigel Raymond, Executive Director of Advokasi Pribumi (Sarawak) Sdn Bhd**, said, "APS is deeply concerned about the comments made to discredit the Telang Usan Assemblyman as well as to make light of the initiatives carried out by the licensed logging companies in our area to repair key infrastructures."

"I have lived in this community all my life and I have personally witnessed the development and progress throughout the years because the logging industry has provided our people with jobs and was instrumental in building key infrastructure like roads, bridges and other amenities. The logging industry also provided free transport for children during our school breaks."

"Our standard of living has improved significantly, and I can assure you that a good number of my neighbours including myself are fully supportive of the industry."

"Does SAVE River expect indigenous communities like ours to return to a nomadic lifestyle or live hand-to-mouth by banning the logging business completely?" Nigel asked.

Nigel explained, "Sarawak is the largest state in Malaysia with a significant rural population. While we are blessed with abundant resources, the Government and the private sector must collaborate to tap these resources effectively."

"Both the public and private sector must also work together to build and maintain key infrastructure and amenities for the sizeable rural communities that covers a large area in our state."

Nigel said, "Expecting the State Government to go at it alone, funding and overseeing all road works and development projects, is inefficient and may become a huge burden on public expenses."

"So why can't the private sector including logging companies play a role in uplifting the lives of the local and indigenous communities?" he asked.

According to Nigel, APS is well aware of the environment impact from irresponsible logging and deforestation. “Nevertheless, licensed logging operators are subject to stringent sustainable forest management guidelines and have to follow very strict procedures when it comes to harvesting our natural resources.”

“Licensed logging companies also have to carry out corporate social responsibility initiatives to improve the lives of communities where they operate in as part of their licensing and concession agreements. So why is SAVE Rivers so against their CSR efforts?”

“APS is fully confident that most members of the communities in and around the Baram area is fully supportive and appreciative of the contribution made by licensed logging companies, as mentioned by YB Dennis Ngau,” Nigel said.

“We also agree with YB Dennis Ngau that those who participated in the blockade at Ba Abang village of Ulu Baram consist of a small group of people.”

“We are very well aware that this small group of people are not from within our community, generally outsiders, and have been used by certain quarters to cause political and socio-economic instability,” Nigel said.

“APS appreciates the effort made by environmental groups to safeguard our natural forest and biodiversity. However, this cannot be achieved through unfounded accusations and misinformation that can potentially harm the livelihoods and standard of living of people within our community,” Nigel stated.

“The State Government, civil societies and logging companies must be able to work together to ensure our natural forest are sustainably managed so as to continue to generate socio-economic growth while issues like illegal logging perpetrated by unlicensed syndicates be stopped once and for all,” he concluded.