

## ***Anye Apuy Speaks*<sup>1</sup>, “The life of a Kenyah Customary Chief in the HoB”**

(Adapted by CE from the **Autobiography of Anye Apui, Kepala Adat Besar Hulu Bahau**, District of Malinau, East Kalimantan, Indonesia)

### **Aristocratic lineage**

I was born in Long Kemuat (Hulu Bahau), the third of eight children, on 31 december 1943. My father, Apuy Enjau, was a highly respected traditional leader of the Kenyah Lepo Maut peoples, well known in Indonesia as well as in Malaysia (Sarawak). As customary when announcing the birth of a boy into an aristocratic family, guns were fired first followed by the beating of gongs. Our longhouse, the longhouse of the Chief, was bigger and taller than other longhouses, with wooden planks 20 meters long. The big verandah could accommodate many people during important ceremonies like the naming of a child.

Getting an education in those days was a challenge, but I was able to attend “community school” in my village and then pursue higher education in other villages along the Bahau and Kayan rivers, and later in Tanjung Selor, the main town of the Bulungan district. I still remember the names of all my school mates and teachers. Some of them have become important political figures in Malinau and Bulungan.

### **Tana Ulen: conservation the Kenyah way**

My father was an aristocrat of high lineage. In his capacity as respected and influential leader, he owned an area of virgin forest along the Nggeng River, near our new settlement of Long Alango (Hulu Bahau). The area was rich in forest products, game and fish. However, no one was allowed to go there on a daily basis, hence the name *tana ulen* or “restricted area.” Only in case of a special event held in the community, a celebration or a ceremony with many guests and attendees, people were granted permission by my father to go hunting and fishing along the Nggeng River, where they were ensured plentiful harvest.

The *tana ulen* tradition of forest management of my ancestors continues to this day. As Kenyah peoples, we are very proud of this unique tenure system that has contributed to sustainable management of forest resources in the the Heart of Borneo. Nowadays, the community, rather than the aristocratic chief alone, is in charge of regulating the *tana ulen*. In Long Alango, *tana ulen* is the collective property of the village and there is a special committee to oversee it called Badan Pengurus Tana Ulen(BPTU).

### **Hero and Leader at the Border**

In the interior of Borneo, it was a common tradition for Dayak young men, and some women, to go to Sarawak on an expedition (*peselai*) in search of good fortune. This was as much an economic venture as a rite of passage to become an adult, a bearer of higher responsibilities in the community of origin. In my young days, I also left my village for Sarawak and walked five days and nights across the mountain range to the upper Baram area, on the other side of the border. I stayed with the Customary Chief, the famous Temenggong Laway Jau. After some time, I decided to go back to my village, and asked for permission to leave. Conditions might be

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<sup>1</sup> As per [title of the famous book on the life and deeds of a Lakota Chief, book](#), “Black Elk Speaks”

more difficult and harder in Indonesia, but I loved my village and did not want to stay in Malaysia for ever.

The people in the community asked me to become the head of the village in 1963. I was the youngest of all village chiefs in Hulu Bahau. That was also the time of "Confrontation" between Indonesia and Malaysia, and young and strong men were recruited locally to help fight for our country, the knowledge of the forest and area along the border being crucial to the troop movements and our defense. I became a volunteer. The Army General in Kalimantan, asked me to put together a group of 100 men and lead them on the frontline near the international border with Malaysia. Life as a volunteer commander was tough as I was part of some very dangerous missions.

Right after the 'Confrontatio, in 1965, a General invited my father and myself to Jakarta... Jakarta, the Indonesian capital, it was beyond my imagination that I would go to the capital. For one entire week, my father practiced how to walk with shoes. My father was a famous leader among Dayak people, but wherever he was going in the forest and rivers of the interior he used to walk bare foot.

In Jakarta we stayed at the Hotel Indonesia, top floor, and from there we were looking down on the traffic around the famous roundabout where cars looked like were going around and around endlessly... we visited all landmarks (some still under construction) and other cities in Java. They took many pictures of us and we were on TV almost every day. My father was the attraction, a real traditional Dayak Chief wearing a hat woven with pandanus leaves, long hair and elongated ears.

On August 8th we met with President Sukarno at the presidential Palace. The atmosphere was friendly and relaxed, the president hugged my father and myself, he looked at the photos from Long Alango. My father mentioned that he had already been to Jakarta in 1901, but the name was Batavia then. Everybody asked where he was staying at that time, and my father replied, "HOB Gelodok" (---which was the location of the prison), "That was my palace then" he added. Everybody laughed. My father spoke to the president of his satisfaction and gratitude for having the chance to visit Jakarta (*"I have been to paradise, now I can die in piece, with no regrets"*) and asked the President to come to Borneo and meet the people of the interior. "*Mr President,*" he said, "*There is no need for you to send special troops from Java to the border, send us weapons and we (my child and I) will defend our country.*"

### **Transmigration plans looming**

Back in Long Alango, shoes he was wearing in Jakarta and I continued my responsibilities as village chief until 1971. I was also offered to become member of the local parliament in Bulungan in consideration of my role during "Confrontation" and the influence I had on my people, but I refused.

In 1967, the Trasmigration scheme had under way in Indonesia. Migrants from Java were moving to Kalimantan and settled in the Tanjung Selor area. The communities of the interior were encouraged to move out to the lowlands to benefit from economic development and were promised logistical support. Several people did, others stayed behind. I was also personally called upon and asked if I wanted to move from the interior. In the eyes of the local government

officials, this would have been a strong signal to the rest of the people to move downriver. But I did not move. Can you imagine a freshwater fish survive in the sea? No, it won't survive. My life is in the interior, I am a farmer, I know the rice fields, forests and rivers of the interior, I feel out of place in the lowlands and coastal areas.

### **Logging starts along the rivers of the interior**

In the late sixties, hundreds of people started to be involved in what was called "floating logging." Mature trees growing along the two main rivers, Kayan and Bahau, were cut and floated downriver. There were three companies operating in the area that I remember. I was responsible to measure and mark the logs for one of the companies (CV Sinar Rimba). It was easy in those days to make lots of money for those involved. But the quick and high money also caused theft and quarrels. My job was tough. I had to measure the logs cut by several groups before they were rolled down from the side of the mountain to the river. I used my own boat and engine to go up and down through the rapids. I ate and slept by the river for almost two years. My reward was equivalent to the value of ¼ of the timber cut, measured, and floated down, plus additional benefits. It was not bad. However, I did not receive a salary, my money was stored with the company in Tanjung Selor. Sometimes, before falling asleep, I thought about the money I had already earned, and felt good about the future, my savings, and starting a family back home. But as sweet as a dream might be, reality sometimes hits hard. The company I was working with went bankrupt, all assets were seized, and the head of the company was put under house arrest. I never saw my money and could not do much about trying to get anything back, except take a long breath, bite my fingers, and remember those days of very hard work.....

### **A community leader and family man with many responsibilities**

In 1971, two years after the death of my father, I was appointed to replace him as Customary Chief of Hulu Bahau. I was still very young to be a customary chief, but this was the will of the people. I was lucky in the beginning to be advised by the elders who helped me rule on social disputes between villages and individuals in wise and appropriate ways. It was also an opportunity to meet with a lot of people from Indonesia and abroad, the government, WWF and other NGOs, researchers and tourists. I learned a lot and provided hospitality to all the guests as well as I could. If one thing I learned in my life is that the more you open up and meet people, the more you earn friends all around the world.

My first child, a daughter, was born in 1969, the first of eight children with my first wife, whose father was the head of the village in Apau Ping. My good life together with my wife and eight children was ended abruptly in 1984 by her sudden death. Back in Long Alango, I became a single father trying to raise my small children as well as I could. I had to learn how to cook well for them, take care of them when sick, and motivate my eldest daughters to continue school instead of coming back home to take care of their younger siblings.. I remarried in 1986 with a lady much younger than me. We had four children together.

### **The Lalut Birai Research Station and WWF: Long Alango goes international**

In 1991, a foreigner and his team<sup>2</sup> came to Long Alango. They wanted to build a "camp" along the Nggeng River in what used to be my father's *tana ulen*. They said that this would help the people in Long Alango take care of the good forest in the Nature Reserve and also improve the welfare of the people. After I agreed, the team built a research station with all the necessary equipment (solar power, radio, etc), a dormitory, a kitchen and dining room for people to stay.

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<sup>2</sup> The team was from WWF Indonesia, Kayan Mentarang Nature reserve project.

Local people were concerned about the Nature Reserve in the nearby forest. The status of Nature Reserve did not allow for people to live in the forest nor use forest resources in the area. What would happen to the people who had been living there and managed the forest for a very long time?

The *tana ulen* tenure system and the presence of WWF contributed to the preservation of this beautiful forest along the Nggeng River. Many researchers from abroad started to come and study the flora and fauna of the area. I did not realize how well known the place had become internationally until one day someone gave me copy of the New York Times with my interview and photo. It must have been the outcome of the visit of an American journalist to Long Alango a few years ago, at a time people here and around the world were concerned about plans for oil palm development along the border.

The Lalut Birai Research Station attracted several important guests. One day, we got information that the US Ambassador to Indonesia would be coming with his family to visit the forest and Lalut Birai. They arrived, however, a bit unexpectedly when many people were not in Long Alango. We made the best of it and additional police officers came from Long Pujungan to ensure his safety. The ambassador and his family had a great time and experienced everything “Dayak”: the forest, the river, the traditional hornbill dances, the *arak* and the friendly embrace of the community. After going back to Jakarta, the ambassador sent me letters and books.

Another very important guest to Lalut Birai was the Minister of Forestry, Bpk Jamaludin, who came in 1994. He spoke of the importance of conserving the forest of the national park and managing sustainably all forest resources. I gave him a traditional Kenyah name, the name of a fighter for the good of his people: *Bawe Sigau Lian Bulan*. He donated a hydroelectric power unit to our village.

### **Development in the interior**

The development of Hulu Bahau and the well-being of my people has always been high on my mind. It is important, however, to understand what we need by development, and what is good for us in the long term, instead of taking any offer that is economically tempting. The people of the interior together built the current airstrip used by MAF with a lot of hard, volunteer work. It took them five years and it was inaugurated in 1981 by the MAF pilots. With the same kind of “right” development on my mind, I led a group of people from Long Alango on foot across the border to Sarawak to see if the people and companies there would be willing to help with building a road to the border. A road is important to break the isolation of the area and open access to market and other essential services. If I continue to convey the aspirations of the people to the government and the Ministry of Forestry and fight for economic development, however I also know what kind of offer to reject because it is not going to be good for my people. For example, I was asked by a timber tycoon to work with him to start logging activities in Hulu Bahau, and was promised lots of money if I had agreed. Yes, timber is ‘gold,’ but this is not the kind of gold that is good for us. I want to protect the forest in my area, as the forest provides us, Dayak peoples, with everything we need. As much as I can, I support the national park which occupies the western part of Hulu Bahau.

### **A Customary Chief and environmental hero**

My efforts to maintain the *tana ulen* of my father and traditional regulations in support of sustainable forest management earned me a prestigious national award (*Kalpataru*) by the

President of Indonesia in 2009, together with four other environmental heroes. It was also in the name of the importance to protect the environment, that the artist and singer Nugi has come to see Long Alango and the Lalut Birai research station, and even dedicated a song to my village.

Because of my age and life experience, I would like to advise the younger generations on many things. I will say this out loud, that we should support the plan of the Malinau District to become a Conservation District, and secure a sustainable future for all of us by protecting the forest and managing wisely the natural capital we have. I still remember when I visited a small village, Batu Puteh, in Sabah, several years ago. There was no forest left in the surrounding area except for a few pockets along the river. . “They *took the forest from us*” the people there told me “*do not let them do that to you, if you still have forest in your village. Forest is life.*”