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JOINT PRESS RELEASE

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United civil society calls on Samling to #StopTheSLAPP

160 groups and local communities rally behind grassroots NGO SAVE Rivers through letters and an email petition demanding timber company Samling withdraw its abusive lawsuit, which goes to trial in May at the Miri High Court.

(Miri/Sarawak/Malaysia) 160 global civil society organizations sent a solidarity letter demanding timber company Samling withdraw its lawsuit against SAVE Rivers and its board members. The letter was sent to Samling on Monday, marking one month before the start of the trial scheduled for May 15th at the Miri High Court. At the same time, [an international email petition was launched](#) that can be signed by individuals who want to join the call to action.

Samling is suing SAVE Rivers for allegedly defamatory statements with regards to consultations of local communities in the context of the certification process under the Malaysian Timber Certification Scheme MTCS, endorsed by PEFC International. Samling is seeking an apology, an injunction stopping SAVE Rivers from reporting community claims, and damages in the sum of 5 million ringgit or 1.1 million US-Dollar — approximately 45 times SAVE Rivers' annual budget.

Organizations that signed on to the letter include many international leaders on climate justice and the environment such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Rainforest Action Network, and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Netherlands. The list also includes prominent national human rights and conservation organizations such as SUARAM, RimbaWatch, Freedom Film Network and Teoh Beng Hock Trust for Democracy. The Gerenal Community Rights Action Committee GCRAC, uniting all communities within Samling's Gerenal Forest Management Unit (FMU), sent a separate letter of solidarity as well. The letter recognizes that most of the allegedly impugned articles that Samling deems defamatory were the result of their pursuit for inclusivity, due information, and clarity.

The [United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), and the [Business and Human Rights Resource Centre](#) have recognised that this suit may be classified as Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP). “It is SAVE Rivers’ defence that this suit by SAMLING is a SLAPP suit,” said Simon Siah, Counsel for SAVE Rivers.

“SLAPP suits are regularly used around the world to silence and bankrupt civil society organisations,” said Jettie Word, Executive Director of The Borneo Project. “This show of support from around the world demonstrates Sarawak civil society is not alone in this struggle.”

Boyce Ngau and Erang Ngang from GCRAC explain that the SLAPP against SAVE Rivers has been very harmful to the dialogue as “any active participation of stakeholders within an FMU (although it is the rights of the stakeholders to do so) can easily be deemed as defamatory in which legal action can be taken by the FMU ... It is in GCRAC opinion that this lawsuit against SAVE Rivers should be dropped if the FMU is sincere in its efforts to fully engage all stakeholders as per required through the Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) standards. We stand in support and solidarity of SAVE Rivers' plights and causes.”

The email campaign starting this week also asks Samling to withdraw the SLAPP and can be signed by individuals here: <https://stoptheslappsamling.good.do/>.

- Ends -

Attachments:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/av80719vh39y1lyiw4frn/h?dl=0&rlkey=6w82v6qy6h7k0l4qci55gx2w>

- Joint letter to Samling from global CSOs
- GCRAC/community letter to Samling
- Pictures of the #StopTheSLAPP Social Media campaign: Members of the public showing solidarity

The Swiss-based **Bruno Manser Fund** (BMF) is committed to protecting the threatened tropical rainforests and the rights of the Indigenous peoples, especially in Sarawak, Malaysia.

The Borneo Project brings international attention and support to community-led efforts to defend forests, sustainable livelihoods, and human rights.