



Media Release

For immediate release

Samling Group's Response to Allegations Made In Al Jazeera Article

13 July 2021, Miri, Sarawak - We refer to your report titled "***Malaysia Indigenous communities 'hopeful' on logging dispute***" which was published on your website on 6 July 2021. While we appreciate that your Asia-Pacific editor Kate Mayberry had reached out to Samling Group for our comments, we are nonetheless exceedingly disappointed that the article was littered with unsubstantiated allegations and incorrect information, all of which you could have easily verified with us.

For a start, the sensational opening paragraph of the article alleges that logging conducted by the Samling Group covers an "area of forest roughly equivalent to the size of Luxembourg". This is incorrect. The hectarage that you have cited in your article actually refers to the total combined hectarage of the two Forest Management Units in question – Gerenai and Ravenscourt, and not to the area that is being harvested.

The article further states that the communities "say they have received letters from Samling allegedly threatening them with legal action for speaking out about their concerns". We would like to ask Al Jazeera whether you have viewed Samling's letters and if you had, you surely will not have suggested that Samling Group "allegedly" threatened legal action against local communities. Samling Group had, in its email response to Kate Mayberry, stated clearly that the Group's claim is against Save Rivers and its team. It appears to us that Al Jazeera is not concerned with accurate and responsible reporting and is content to accept unsubstantiated allegations made against the Group, as long as it suits Al Jazeera's narrative.

You also claim that the Malaysian Timber Certification Council (MTCC) supposedly 'took action' by way of a dispute resolution process following complaints from 36 communities in relation to "alleged flaws in its certification of two logging concessions", as if suggesting Samling Group has allegedly failed to comply with MTCC requirements. In fact, if Al Jazeera is concerned about accurate and responsible reporting as it should be, Al Jazeera should have been aware of MTCC's clarification regarding the process involved in granting the certification to Samling Group. As clarified by MTCC, prior to the decision made by SIRIM QAS to grant certification to the Group, the process was subjected to review by a panel of independent experts. There is nothing sinister in SIRIM QAS's participation in the certification process.

In discussing the MTCC complaint mechanism, you have chosen to quote a "California-based" NGO as saying, "The complaint mechanism has been tricky to figure out even for organisations and people with reliable access to the internet and email – how could people living in the interior, without access to these tools, be expected to understand the complaint mechanism?" Surely, a more responsible approach would have been to reach out to MTCC to clarify any concerns you may have had on MTCC's process. Yet, there is not one single comment from MTCC, notwithstanding the allegations made against them by the "communities" and even the NGO.

Al Jazeera's article is clearly intended to give the impression that Samling Group has ridden roughshod over the communities by not seeking their approval and not gaining their consent for its activities.



In your attempt to do so, it would appear that Al Jazeera has conveniently disregarded the fact that under the Malaysian Certification Scheme's "Malaysian Criteria and Indicators for Forest Management Certification (Natural Forest)", indicator 3.1.2 states: "Management and use of such lands and resources are controlled by indigenous peoples unless they delegate control with free, prior and informed consent to other parties." The verifier for this indicator is the "Record of consultation with representatives of aborigines/natives" as well as "Record of delegation of control with free, prior, and informed consent by aborigines/natives, if any." This is information that is readily available on the MTCC website. For Al Jazeera's information, Samling Group has complied with these criteria. For the record, the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) conducted on behalf of Samling clearly indicates that Samling has consulted representatives of the communities as part of the process, all of whom are duly recognised by the State Authority as representing the community members.

Is Al Jazeera expecting the Samling Group to obtain consent in writing from each and every member of the community in order to meet Al Jazeera's definition of "adequate consultation"?

The report also cites "allegations" that the communities have not been given access to either the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) or the SIA. Samling Group maintains its stance that we have not received any formal request from the communities or the NGOs concerned – even the California-based NGO – for access to either the EIA or the SIA.

Finally, for Al Jazeera to actually cite alleged Penan leader Komeok Joe's demand that Samling Group release all its logging activity records is quite astounding. An international news agency must surely understand that such information is confidential and no company is obligated to allow access to all its business activities by NGOs simply because they demand it. Has Al Jazeera verified, as it should have, that the NGOs cited in its article do indeed represent the views of the communities? Has Al Jazeera verified if these NGOs have "consulted adequately" with the communities to really know what they want?

Samling Group has been present in the Baram region of Sarawak for the past 50 years. We have progressed and developed with the communities by building roads to improve the communities' access to health clinics and schools. We believe that all communities deserve the right of access to education and health. We believe in the empowerment of the communities through education. We believe that the communities should be empowered to speak up for themselves instead of relying on California-based NGOs."