



Media Release

For Immediate Release

Press Statement in Relation to an article titled “United Civil Society Calls on Samling to stop the SLAPP” posted on Bruno Manser Fonds (“BMF”) website

19 April 2023, Miri Sarawak - Two of Samling Group’s companies, namely Samling Plywood (Miri) Sdn. Bhd. and Samling Plywood (Baramas) Sdn. Bhd. (“Samling”) have been put under unnecessary scrutiny as a result of the numerous articles posted by a non-governmental organisation, SAVE Rivers Sdn Bhd (“SAVE Rivers”) on its website since 23rd June 2020. The articles sought to question the forest management certification issued in favour of Samling in respect of the Gerenai Forest Management Unit (“Gerenai FMU”) supposedly because, in the words of SAVE Rivers, there were ‘bogus’ consultation with local communities.

It is unfortunate to note that these accusations have constantly been made without any basis and/or proper fact-checking made with Samling. These accusations were made and continued to be levelled against Samling notwithstanding the certification process itself has been completed to the satisfaction of the Malaysian Timber Certification Council (“MTCC”). MTCC as the certification body was satisfied that the certification process has complied with the Malaysian Timber Certification Scheme (“MTCS”) when issuing the certificate to Samling. As a result of the defamatory articles posted by SAVE Rivers, Samling’s reputation has been seriously harmed and tarnished. The articles had gained a lot public attention both locally and globally, which caused a lot of embarrassment and distress to Samling.

Samling is compelled to put into correct perspective events leading to legal action being taken against SAVE Rivers and the parties responsible for publication of the articles. There is no question of Samling filing the claim as a strategic litigation as claimed by BMF. On the contrary, Samling had taken all efforts possible to address and clarify any misunderstanding and misinformation with SAVE Rivers prior to commencing action against SAVE Rivers. Some of Samling’s efforts includes reaching out to SAVE Rivers and persons responsible for SAVE Rivers to clarify matters, which were flatly refused by SAVE Rivers, engaging in discussions with the leaders of the local community and SAVE Rivers and organising a seminar to brief to the local community and SAVE Rivers on the forest management certification process under the MTCS. The seminar, which was conducted on 25th September 2020, was supported by all relevant department and agencies involved in the certification process such as the Forest Department of Sarawak, the Malaysian Timber Certification Council, the SIRIM QAS International Sdn Bhd, the World Wide Fund (WWF) Sarawak and the Universiti Putra Malaysia (Bintulu campus).

Despite that, SAVE Rivers continue to level the same accusations against Samling, seriously harming and tarnishing Samling’s reputation as a result. Samling had no other option but to resort to filing the claim. Samling attempted amicable discussions with SAVE Rivers and those responsible for about a year before the claim was filed. Indeed, this decision to finally commence the claim comes with a heavy heart and it was a decision made a day before the expiry of the one-year limitation period to file an action on defamation, given that SAVE Rivers persistently refused to engage in any amicable discussions with Samling. While Samling has been and is always open



to engagement with stakeholders, this must necessarily be balanced against unjustified and irresponsible statements without fact-checking with Samling. Surely fact-checking is the least that

can be expected of any publication meant for public consumption. It would be plainly irresponsible not to do so. Having made such defamatory claims, it is abhorrent that instead of justifying their position in Malaysian Court, SAVE Rivers and those responsible have now resorted to external and overseas pressure tactics to force a withdrawal of the pending claim in our Courts.

In the circumstances as explained, Samling must deny any allegations that its decision to commence the legal suit is a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation ('SLAPP') as alleged by BMF. It is disappointing that the civil society sought to stifle Samling's rights to seek appropriate legal remedy in this manner, without properly appreciating the context that leads to the current position, in particular SAVE Rivers' refusal to engage Samling on the accusations made.