**PRESS STATEMENT**

**TUESDAY 5TH APRIL, 2016**

**FOUR BETONG HEADMEN PRODUCE OFFICIAL EVIDENCE THAT OVER 52 LONGHOUSES IN LAYAR, PADEH, AND SPAK IN BETONG HAVE BEEN GAZETTED UNDER SECTION 6 OF THE LAND CODE.**

1. Four longhouse headmen from Layar in Betong, in a press conference held this morning at PKR Betong headquarters, have come forward with documentary evidence that their NCR lands have been declared Native Communal Reserves under Section 6 of the Sarawak Land Code. According to them, they were presented with framed copies of maps and the Sarawak Government Gazette Vol. LXVIII No.21 (Swk. LN. 130-132) published on 26th July, 2013 which stipulated that their NCR lands have been ordered to come under Section 6 of the Land Code and the Order was deemed to have come into force on the 18th of January, 2011.
2. “When we were presented with this beautifully framed map and the official looking certificate in a ceremony officiated by YB Tan Sri Datuk Patinggi Alfred Jabu anak Numpang in early 2014, we were led to believe that this is our longhouse land title. However, written at the top of the frame are the words ‘Pewartaaan Rizab Gunasama’ (Gazette of Communal Reserve) and this means the land is ‘Tanah Galau Bekunsi’ in Iban. Were we intentionally deceived by the BN Government?” asked a representative of Tuai Rumah Timang Geramong from Rantau Lelayang longhouse in Spak.
3. “Based on Section 6.3 of the Land Code, these lands have always been State Lands; are we therefore ‘Orang Tumpang’ (squatters) living on our own lands since 18th of January, 2011?” questioned Tuai Rumah Ambu Kadukom from Lempaong longhouse, also in Spak.
4. “According to Section 6.4, the BN Government can take these lands from us anytime without our consent since we are only ‘Pemegai Lisin’ (licensees), and the compensation amount is at the discretion of the Government. This means we have no absolute rights whatsoever over these lands, correct, unless they are converted to Section 18? If the BN is sincere, then give us Section 18 straightaway, why Section 6 first?” demanded Tuai Rumah Merundie Lindang of Batu Pesok longhouse, also along the Spak river.
5. All nineteen longhouses in the Spak tributary have been gazetted under Section 6 in the Sarawak Government Gazette Vol. LXVIII No.21, Swk. L.N.131, published on 26th July, 2013 and were listed in the Order published on 26th July, 2013; Nanga Tapih, Gerugu, Batu Pesok, Kabok, Temedak, Mujau, Jelang, Engkalat, Mupoh Atas, Mupoh Baroh, Nanga Muman/Teguyu, Luing, Kerapa, Lempaong, Perdu, Rantau Lelayang, Ijok, Melanjan and Penyuin.
6. In the Padeh, eighteen longhouses have been gazetted under Section 6 in the Sarawak Government Gazette Vol. LXVIII No.21, Swk. L.N.132, and were listed in the Order published on 26th July, 2013; Keron, Pedanum, Nanga Geraji, Sungai Engkabang, Meribong, Buloh Antu, Bungkang, Ajong, Geraji Atas, Nanga Buai, Buai Melanjan, Pelepok, Nanga Lawing, Sungai Sibau, Gawis, Merunjau, Pakoh and Kaki Wong.
7. Tuai Rumah Esley Bedindang, a retired Officer in Charge of Police District (OCPD) of Song (Kapit), from Stambak Ulu Asal, Layar, raised a glaring point and asked, “Since our Temuda farmlands have been perimeter surveyed without our prior consent or knowledge and gazetted under Section 6, what about the larger communal NCR lands that have not been surveyed at all, which we consider our Pemakai Menua where we hunt, fish and gather jungle produce and our Pulau Galau which we keep fallow as large pockets of untouched forest reserves; are our Pemakai Menua and Pulau Galau now automatically State Lands, like what has happened in Machan and other Dayak areas all over Sarawak where there are ongoing disputes over land rights? The most recent case is in Bekelit, Bekenu, where local Ibans had to defend their NCR lands from gangsters allegedly sent by companies. ”
8. Unding Ringkai, a retired Government Senior Welfare Assistant from Nanga Tebalau in Middle Layar, said many of these longhouses in the Spak and Padeh were involved in the Getah IRAD scheme, including many other longhouses in the Middle and Lower Layar. “Many, many longhouses in Betong were offered free rubber seedlings, free fertilizers, free pesticides, free construction of access dirt roads to the farmlands, free training and participants under this scheme were also paid a salary to work their rubber farmlands, but the catch was that they had to have these Temuda lands perimeter surveyed.” He further said many of the participants were not aware that their farmlands were perimeter surveyed by contractors appointed by the Agriculture Department and RISDA in order to determine the boundary between each plot and the main boundary with the larger NCR lands shared communally by the residents known as Pemakai Menua and Pulau Galau. “Although it was not conducted by the Lands & Survey Department, the Temuda were perimeter surveyed by contractors and the Minister himself confirmed the status of these surveyed land as falling under Section 6 of the Land Code,” reiterated Vernon Aji Kedit, Divisional Chief of PKR Betong.
9. In a report published in the Berita Iban Section of the Utusan Borneo, dated Tuesday 15th March, 2016, the Minister of Plantation Industries and Commodities and MP for Betong, YB Dato Sri Douglas Uggah Embas, confirmed that all Temuda farmlands under the Getah IRAD scheme in Betong were perimeter surveyed and gazetted under Section 6 of the Land Code.
10. “This is an extremely serious matter as all the Temuda lands of longhouses along the Layar that participated in the Getah IRAD scheme, including the eighteen longhouses of Padeh and the nineteen longhouses of Spak, have been gazetted under Section 6 of the Land Code, and many longhouse residents are still unaware that their NCR lands have been perimeter surveyed and that the unsurveyed NCR lands like Pemakai Menua and Pulau Galau have automatically become State Lands. In legal terms, the landowners of Layar that do not possess ‘Pala Tanah’ (titled lands) have all surrendered and lost their customary rights over their NCR lands, including those with JOT lands that were fully recognised during the Rajahs and the British colonial periods pre-1963,” stated Kedit who is also PKR State Information Chief.
11. “Many Betong longhouse residents are under the impression that their NCR lands are still safely theirs; the exact opposite is true. The BN government keeps telling them that the Opposition is lying and that the Government will not take their NCR lands but today we have produced irrefutable evidence gazetted by the Government itself that the entire Spak, Ulu Layar and Padeh are under Section 6 with effect from 18th January in 2011. As for the Getah IRAD scheme participants in Layar Tengah and Layar Ili, their Temuda were surveyed and gazette under Section 6 when they participated in the scheme. The Minister himself confirmed this! Nevertheless, I am at the service of my people to explain in detail the ramifications of this repugnant law and will advise them on what they can do as a remedy to take back our lands which were clandestinely appropriated,” advised Kedit, the PKR candidate for N.36 Layar.
12. Besides the Padeh, the Spak, Lower and Middle Layar which all fall under the Layar constituency, ten longhouses in the Upper Layar which are situated in the Bukit Saban constituency such as Nanga Mara, Temawai Tinting, Melabu Bair, Raba Tiput, Nanga Penebak, Tanjung Paoh, Mutok Tabau, Jambu Kerampak, Nanga Mutok, Nanga Tiga, Selangking, Nanga Linsum, Penyulok, Penebak Ulu and Nanga Sela have also been ordered and gazetted under Section 6 of the Land Code in the Sarawak Government Gazette Vol. LXVIII No.21, Swk. L.N.130, published on 26th July, 2013.

~ Ends ~

PHOTO

Unding Ringkai (far right, holding the framed Sarawak Government Gazette), Tuai Rumah Ambu Kadukom (2nd from right, holding the framed Sarawak Government Gazette), Tuai Rumah Merundie Lindang (3rd from right, holding the ), Vernon Aji Kedit (4th from right), Tuai Rumah Esley bedindang (3rd from left, pointing to the Sarawak Land Code), Timbalan Tuai Rumah Nelfrus Samban Unjie (2nd from left), ex-Sargeant Reghinold Bandang (far left, holding the framed Sarawak Government Gazette).