

The government says that it is bringing us progress and development. But the only development that we see is dusty logging roads and relocation camps. Their so-called progress means only starvation, dependence, helplessness, the destruction of our culture and the demoralisation of our people.

The government says it is creating jobs for our people. But these jobs will disappear along with the forest. In ten years the jobs will all be gone ; and the forest which has sustained us for thousands of years will be gone with them. And why do we need jobs ? My father and my grandfather did not have to ask the government for jobs. They were never unemployed. They lived from the land and from the forest. It was a good life. We had much leisure time, yet we were never hungry, or in need. These company jobs take men away from their families for months at a time. They are breaking apart the vital links which have held our families and our communities together for generations. These jobs bring our people into a consumer economy for which they are not prepared.

The Penan, the Kelabit, and the other Dayak peoples view the forest as their home. When we see a thief enter our home, we try to defend what is ours. That is why we have been protesting for so long against the loggers. That is why, when these protests fell on deaf ears, we began to blockade the logging roads. Since 1987, our people have been arrested and imprisoned for taking part in these peaceful blockades. An old man I know once asked a policeman why it was he could not blockade a road on his own land.

The policeman told him that Yayasan Sarawak had been given the licence to log the forest, and so the land belongs to the company. This is what the old man said in reply : "Who is this Yayasan Sarawak ? If he really owns the land, why have I never met him in the forest during my hunting trips over the last 60 years ?".

A woman I know who has seven children once came to me and said : "This logging is like a big tree that has fallen on my chest. I often awake in the middle of the night, and I and my husband talk endlessly about the future of our children. I always ask myself, when will it end ?".

A high government official once told me that in order to have development, someone must make a sacrifice. I replied, why should it be us who must make this sacrifice ? We have already given so much. We have already become poor and marginalized. Now there is nothing left for us to sacrifice except our lives !

For defending our way of life, we have been called greenies, pirates, traitors, and terrorists. Our lives are threatened by company goons. Our