

activities and social upliftment have a strong bearing on the choice to be made; also the need to strip away all the misplaced idealism that is associated with living in forests. There is nothing exotic about human beings living in the jungle, exposed to the elements without adequate shelter, nutrition, clothing and most of all the basic elements of human rights, education and a chance to enjoy physical and social mobility. There is also nothing romantic about a life of poverty and deprivation, of high infant mortality rate, of tropical diseases and of life expectancy half the national average.

13. Nevertheless, if the choice is not to join the mainstream, the Malaysian government will respect that choice. For this, the government has set aside a total of 65,700 hectares of forest in two districts of Sarawak to enable them to practise their way of life. The government has also set aside forest reserves totalling 23,400 hectares for Penans who still wish to maintain their spiritual and traditional relationship with the forest. In addition, their right to roam the forest near where they live is also protected by law.

14. At the same time, the government of Malaysia is also committed to the goals of sustainable development. Our active involvement in the UNCED preparatory process, the Rio Summit and the post-Rio efforts are testimonies to this commitment. Malaysia is aware of the negative impacts of uncontrolled logging to the environment and to those people living in the forests. We know only too well that our forest resources are not limitless. The government of Malaysia will do its utmost in the coming years, to follow a policy that conforms with the objectives of sustainable development where forest exploitation is concerned.