

The fight for the forest by the Seberuang Dayak of West-Kalimantan

A small Dayak village bravely fights the overwhelming outside palm oil forces surrounding it. Even the hero of this story a small built man named Antonius Lambung reminds me of the brave and smart hero Asterix in the famous comics, except that what is happening in West-Kalimantan right now is no laughing matter!

The Seberuang Dayak live around the Saran forest complex some 80 kilometers south of the district capital Sintang. This traditional Dayak forest has been protected by the tribe for a long time and is the most beautiful rain forest I have ever set foot in during my 34 years of extensive work in tropical forests. It has virtually all what Borneo's nature has to give, as spectacular as the still surviving giant Rafflesia flowers there.

I attach a document written by the just mentioned Antonius Lambung, a leader of the Seberuang tribe, who is fighting to keep his people united against the outside forces. He can state it much clearer as I can what it is that drives this tribe to continue to stand up against the mighty oil palm companies. I find his words deeply touching.

The Seberuang Dayaks are using the forest as a source of water, food, materials, medicines and simply love to hear the voices of the birds and gibbons. Their electricity comes from micro hydro plants that they build themselves and they know that electricity depends upon the water of the forest.

They kicked out the mighty Barito logging company of former president Soeharto, directly facing guns from the army that protected the operations, and stopped earlier efforts of oil palm companies to take their land and forest. And they built alliances, amongst others with a shrewd formerly Dutch missionary, who already dedicated 44 years to the plight of the Dayak tribes. He is like the smart druid with a potent magical drink, the famous tuak that brings in powerful allies. The Masarang Foundation and OONL are two of the organizations that are helping the Kobus Foundation that manages the Sintang Orangutan Center and is helping the Dayaks of West Kalimantan.



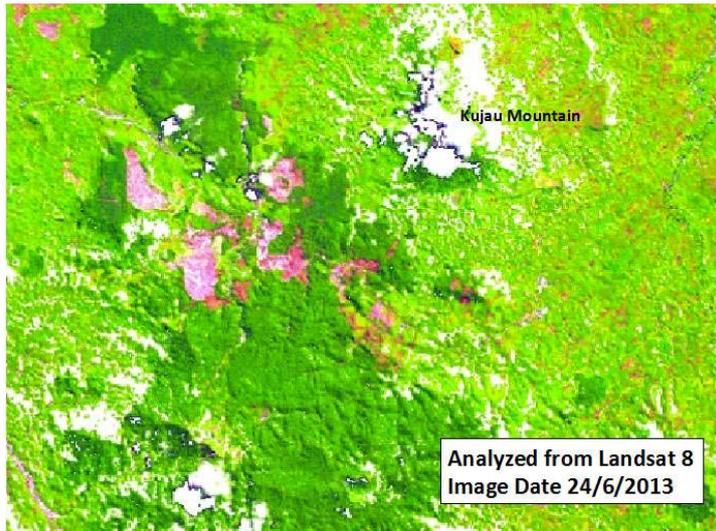
In this picture you see three key players in the ongoing drama of struggle for the Saran forest. Antonius Lambung stands on the left, Father Jacques Maessen in the middle and Sinyam, the man that could not be bribed and that led the Seberuang Dayaks through the cordon of armed soldiers to stop the president's company from taking their traditional forests, standing on the right.

What is the concrete reason for this release? Despite the brave efforts of the wise leaders of the Seberuang Dayaks and their efforts to ask the government to stop the illegal activities of the PT Kencana Alam Permai and PT. Prima Sawit Andalan oil palm companies belonging to the PT Dharma Satya Nusantara (DSN) group, the logging of virgin forests goes on. This goes against anything Indonesia is saying about a moratorium on logging and respecting local rights.

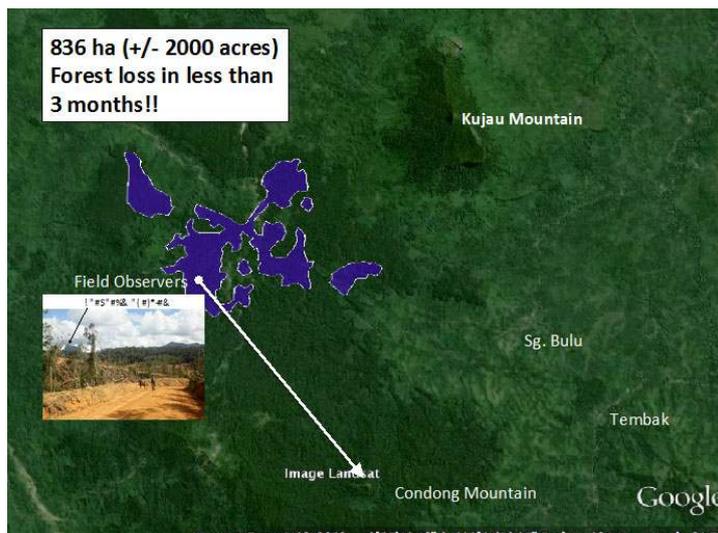
Here are some pictures, with thanks to Dr. Eduardo Dias of Earthwatchers for the processing of the recent Landsat image, that tell the dramatic events that are now taking place and that are pushing the Dayaks to the protests and demonstrations putting pressure on the local officials and the governor.



This image shows the most northern part of the Saran forest complex. The dark green areas are still virgin forest of an incredible biodiversity. This image was taken on April 10th, 2013.



This image is another Landsat (8) image in which the contrast between good forest and degraded forest has been enhanced. The red areas have been recently cut and stand out clearly. Almost all of the clear cutting took place in virgin forest!! With lots of valuable wood. This image was taken 75 days after the first one.



This image shows the deforested areas in the less than three-month period in purple. An area of almost one thousand hectares deforested!!! The picture shows the view towards the Condong Mountain from the deforested area. The following picture shows the picture completely from ground level clearly showing that it is virgin forest being cut.

Condong Mountain



The picture below shows the typical land preparation in the form of terraces for the oil palm plantations. The people of this village had already rejected the same oil palm companies several times and rejected the invitation to come to a “special meeting” in the big city. The permit to explore the area for possibilities also had long expired and the company just “created” ways in with, so I was told by the villagers, paying local people 250.000 Rupiah (25 USD) per hectare to cut down and burn virgin forest so that the company could then take over the area. The damage of that forest loss will cause flooding, silting up of the rivers that provide electricity, drinking water and fish and most likely a change in local climate. Worst of all, it creates conflicts between members of the tribe!

Illegal logging by PT Dharma Satya Nusantara
Palm Oil Company in virgin forest in June 2013



The Seberuang Dayaks work together with the Kobus Foundation to make the forest that is now being destroyed into a permanent conservation forest for orangutan releases. They received training in participatory mapping from us and we are helping them with the satellite images to check on their forestland from space, since they were blocked from checking out the damage there by people from the oil palm company while trying to enter by road. It is really the local people that move this process, while we only support them through our network and small technical support.

On behalf of the Seberuang Dayaks please help.

Sintang, June 22nd, 2013
Willie Smits