

**JOINT PRESS RELEASE:
19 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS DEMAND END TO ONGOING VIOLATIONS OF
ORANG ASLI LAND RIGHTS IN PAHANG**

[Versi BM [sini](#) ; Tandatangan Sokongan di bawah]

30 September 2026 - We, the undersigned civil society organisations and individuals, are deeply concerned by the situation confronting the Orang Asli of Pahang in general, and of the communities of Tasek Bera in particular, who are facing eviction, harassment, arrest and are being treated as a scapegoat for ongoing deforestation.

Background: Violations in Tasek Bera

In June 2026, approximately 20 Orang Asli villages in the Tasek Bera area received eviction notices from the Pahang Forestry Department, ordering them to vacate their settlements and farmland. These kampungs, including Kampung Kuala Serting, Kampung Lubuk Tiang, Kampung Tambangan, Kampung Lenguin, Kampung Gakuyah, Kampung Pathir, Kampung Limbahan, Kampung Mahang, Kampung Ibam and Kampung Buloh Nipis, lie within the Tasek Bera Permanent Forest Reserve (Hutan Simpan Kekal). In response, the communities acted collectively, erecting blockades to protect their customary lands and monitoring activities within their territories.

On 14 September 2026, officers from the Pahang State Forestry Department and Wildlife Department arrived at Kampung Pathir, stating their intention to conduct land surveying. The communities refused them entry pending a resolution on the eviction notices, with Tok Batin Amir Noor Tan of Kampung Pathir calling for the eviction notices to be withdrawn. This standoff escalated, resulting in the arrest of five Orang Asli, four of them women, on the same day. They were subsequently released on 16 September 2026. Another similar incident involving police and communities within Tasek Bera also took place in Kampung Kuala Serting on 23 September 2026.

These recent developments are not an isolated case and form part of a growing trend of land grabs in Pahang. For example, outside Tasek Bera, on 9 February 2026, 21 Orang Asli villagers from Kampung Jemeri in Rompin, Pahang, were detained by police following a complaint from a company claiming rights to develop land allegedly owned by the Sultan of Pahang. According to a community statement, the Sultan had obtained title to the 718-hectare oil palm plantation, developed by Orang Asli smallholders, less than a month earlier, on 26 January 2026. The land in question forms part of the Traditional Territories of Jakun smallholders who had opened their smallholdings there 10-13 years ago.

Orang Asli Are Not a Driver of Deforestation

Since early 2026, we have observed the development of a narrative in Pahang portraying the Orang Asli as groups that are scheming with outsiders to convert forest reserves into agricultural land. For example, while the above events were occurring in Tasek Bera, mainstream and state media repeatedly circulated claims that more than 7,000 hectares of forest within the Tasek Bera Ramsar site, which spans 38,446 hectares, had been illegally converted. This conversion was attributed to six Orang Asli families who allegedly used outsiders to exploit customary land rights in carrying out the encroachment.

This narrative fails to accurately depict the drivers of deforestation in the state. A recent article by RimbaWatch found that at least 72,000 hectares of forest are under threat in Pahang, driven primarily by the expansion of monoculture industrial timber plantations in forest reserves, a program¹ supported by both the State and Federal governments. Measured against this scale, traditional forest utilisation carried out by Orang Asli communities is minor. Yet it is their communities, not state and corporate drivers of deforestation, that are being singled out and blamed.

Orang Asli Traditional Territories have existed for generations, predating Independence and their later gazettment as timber production areas. Research has continuously shown that safeguarded indigenous territories exhibit remarkable ecological resilience and biodiversity outcomes.

Arrests of Orang Asli community members, ongoing harassment, and the undue stress of receiving eviction notices or discovering that their land now belongs to outsiders all point to a troubling reality: as rights to their Traditional Territories are denied, the Orang Asli in Pahang are becoming outsiders on their own territories and scapegoated as drivers of widespread deforestation.

Federal Court Consistently Rules That Orang Asli Have Proprietary Rights to Their Traditional Territories

The Federal Court and Court of Appeal have repeatedly recognised that Orang Asli possess native customary land rights, a form of proprietary right protected under Article 13 of the Federal Constitution, provided a substantial connection to the land in question can be proven (*Rosli Jendut*, [65]). These rights pre-date both the Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954 and the National Land Code, and do not depend on any document of title.

The rights are not limited to settlement areas. As the Federal Court in *Rosli Jendut* makes clear, these rights also extend to lands which are central to the Orang Asli's cultural way of life, such as tombstones and grave sites (*Rosli Jendut*, [99]).

¹ Referred to by State governments as 'Ladang Hutan' or 'Forest Plantations'.

As such, despite the lack of gazettements and formal documents of title, the proprietary rights of Orang Asli communities in Tasek Bera over their traditional territories should be recognised and respected according to the Federal Court.

Recommendations and Call to Action

The gaps between the judiciary and the executive are glaring and deeply concerning. While the courts have, time and again, affirmed the proprietary rights of the Orang Asli to their Traditional Territories, this recognition is not reflected by executive action. Communities like the Orang Asli in Tasek Bera, while actively fighting to protect their Territories, are bearing the cost of this disconnect through evictions, arrests, and the destruction of their lands.

We urge the Federal Government to intervene immediately to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of the Orang Asli, as recognised by our Federal Courts and the constitution. We call for an end to the misleading and negative portrayal of the Orang Asli community. Furthermore, we call upon the following measures:

- The Pahang state government must withdraw all eviction notices issued to the Orang Asli Communities in Pahang, particularly those grounded solely on the claim that the communities are residing within permanent forest reserves.
- The Pahang state government and their agencies must conduct genuine Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) consultation with affected communities for any decisions that will affect them, in line with Malaysia's commitments under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).
- SUHAKAM must conduct an independent inquiry into the conduct of the Tasek Bera enforcement operations and findings made public and acted upon by the Federal and Pahang State Government without delay, vis-a-vis recommendations made in the 2013 National Inquiry on the Land Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Malaysia being adopted and implemented.
- The Pahang state government and its agencies (e.g. JAKOA) must accelerate and make transparent the gazettement of Orang Asli Traditional Territories, with clear timelines for the villages still pending survey.
- The Federal Government must halt the ongoing amendment process of the Orang Asli Act 1954 until legally binding recognition of Traditional Territories is guaranteed.

Endorsed by the following organisations / DISOKONG OLEH (organisasi):

1. RimbaWatch
2. Centre for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC)
3. SAVE Rivers
4. Pertubuhan Wanita Orang Asal Malaysia (PWOAM)
5. Alliance of River Three (ART!)
6. Gabungan Darurat Iklim Malaysia
7. Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia (SABM)
8. University of Malaya Association of New Youth (UMANY)
9. Amnesty International Malaysia (AIM)
10. Greenpeace Malaysia
11. Teoh Beng Hock Association for Democratic Advancement (TBH-ADA)
12. SeDARJAT
13. Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER)
14. Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM)
15. Gabungan Marhaen
16. Kemban Kolektif
17. Greater Equitable Measures (GEM) - Malaysia
18. Center to Combat Corruption and Cronyism (C4 Center)
19. Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ)

Endorsed by the following individuals / DISOKONG OLEH (individu):

1. Kennedy Michael
2. Dr Nadirah Babji
3. Ng Yap Hwa
4. Sachpreetraj Singh Sohanpal
5. Thulaja Thessa K Vasudhevan

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About RimbaWatch

RimbaWatch is a regional, independent watchdog conducting research and analysis on climate-related issues.

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