KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

# KERATAN SURAT KHABAR

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# 'Stop sale of peninsula forest land'

## Groups claim vast tracts are being sold via online ads and want a probe

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**KLANG:** Twenty-nine entities made up of civil society groups, residents associations as well as environmental and interest groups want the authorities to halt the commercial sale of forest land in the peninsula.

In a joint statement, the groups highlighted several alleged online advertisements offering these tracts of land for commercial sale.

The groups demanded the respective mentris besar, state forestry departments as well as all relevant departments linked to land administration to investigate the purported commercial sale of forested areas in Peninsular Malaysia via online advertisements.

Their claim was made based on a survey carried out by Rimba Disclosure Project (RDP), which is an independent initiative promoting the protection of Malaysia's rainforests.

"We are concerned over the likely conversion of forested lands being advertised for sale in Perak, Selangor, Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan, which will result in Malaysia being 'locked-into' further deforestation that will exacerbate issues of biodiversity loss and land degradation, climate crisis and flooding," the statement read.

It also called for the mentris besar as well as the relevant departments and agencies to prioritise the protection of forests in their respective states.

The statement added that RDP has identified and verified 43,539ha of land in forest reserves, central forest spine (CFS) habitat linkages and indigenous customary land on sale through 28 listings on several websites including Facebook in 2021 alone.

"The vast majority of these listings are advertised for conversion to agriculture land with a 99-year lease," said the statement.

Besides wanting the authorities to investigate the alleged advertised sales and land use conversion, the group demanded that findings be made public and appropriate action taken if any laws have been broken.

"All state governments must ensure relevant laws, policies and conservation practices are respected with the purpose of halting deforestation and biodiversity loss, as expressed in several national policies and commitments," said the group.

It added that the state governments must also emphasise forest protection as a safeguard against climate change and deforestation caused by sale of stateland forest areas to private companies and the degazettement of gazetted forests and subsequent conversions of such land into other uses.

The group said several of the listings described the land put up for sale as being virgin forests.

Some of the sale listings offered land that were within forest reserves and at least one listing offered land directly within a CFS habitat linkage for sale.

Others were located within the Greater Taman Negara CFS Forest Complex and the Main Range CFS Forest Complex.

"The alienation of forests into private land will lead to reduced state control over forests, which are essentially public assets," said the statement.

The group also said that the alleged sale included land located within ecologically sensitive areas, such as the Ulu Tembeling region which is highly prone to annual flooding, Gua Musang and Terengganu which are becoming increasingly prone to human wildlife conflict including livestock and human predation by tigers, and Lojing which is susceptible to landslides.

The group also claimed that there were legal irregularities in some of the listings which wrongfully described land located within forest reserves as empty or agriculture land.