

## **BORNEO'S FOREST LARGELY UNTOUCHED**

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KOTA KINABALU: Borneo still enjoys a friendly and beautiful environment because of its large area of untouched forest, which is a contradiction to a claim by a foreign non-governmental organisation that almost all of its forest has been cleared.

Minister of Tourism, Culture & Environment Datuk Masidi Manjun said such claim was totally inaccurate because it was made by people who had not seen by themselves the real situation in Borneo.

He said this when met after clarifying the matter to Marta Szigeti Bonifert, the executive director of Regional Environment Centre (REC) based in Hungary, at the Luncheon Talk entitled "Transition to sustainability through cooperation" at Shangri-La Tanjung Aru Resort & Spa yesterday.

"I feel happy that today we have the opportunity to explain to Bonifert on claim that almost all forest in Borneo had been cleared or deforested. I had explained to her that in fact, 53 per cent of Sabah has been gazetted as forest reserve and wild parks for near extinct animals.

"The map on Borneo that she claimed to have received from an NGO showed almost all parts of Borneo had been cleared but I dare to say that 80 per cent of Kalimantan has not been explored, what more to say about clearing them for development," Masidi said.

He added that it was also explained that the information that Bonifert had received on Borneo and Sabah in particular was absolutely wrong.

"How can we get a statistic and picture that claim almost all of Borneo has been deforested? This is the chance for us today because we are able to exchange information and to tell them the right picture on the status of our forest.

"In her talk, she briefed us on environmental problems, especially global warming due to the rising of the atmosphere temperature, that had befallen the earth. This reminds us to take care of our environment so that we do not experience the problems faced by many developed countries."

An instance, Masidi added, was the big fire that razed Australian forest as well as the low temperature in Europe.

He said these were signs that the world was facing a big problem in term of climate change. This urged the population to take some necessary actions to reduce carbon emission to the atmosphere because this was what contributed to the global warming.

In her talk, Bonifert said a study showed that by 2050 there would be immense impact on the planet earth due to energy demand and climate change.

“This has called us to carry out sustainable development but such act requires a long-term thinking. It needs decades for us to turn it into positive actions. Change has to come from us mentally and we need to act fast before it is too late wherever we are,” she said.

The luncheon talk was jointly organised by the ministry and Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF). Also present were assistant minister Datuk Elron Angin, Mayor Datuk Iliyas Ibrahim, Sabah Tourism Board chairman Tengku Adlin Zainal and Sabah cultural Board chairman Datuk Madius Tangau.

Meanwhile, ASEF seeks to promote a better mutual understanding and closer cooperation between the people of Asia and Europe. This is done through greater intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

These exchanges include conferences, lecture tours, workshop, seminars and the use of web-based platforms. The major achievement of ASEF is the establishment of permanent bi-regional networks focused on areas and issues that help to strengthen Asia-Europe relations.

ASEF was established in February 1997 by partners of the Asia-Europe meeting (ASEM) and reporting to a board of governors representing the ASEM partners. Malaysia is a partner to the ASEM.