Open Letter for Political Parties in Sabah for Environmental Commitments
in Party Manifestos

WWF-Malaysia is a non-partisan environmental NGO operating in Sabah since the 1970s. In this unprecedented time of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is ever more important to ensure a healthy and resilient recovery for people and nature in Sabah. In view of the possible Sabah state election, we would like to ask all political parties to include ambitious yet achievable environmental commitments in their manifestos and to highlight those that will be implemented within the first 100 days of forming the government.

Our Top 6 Asks:

1. Sabah has committed to protect and conserve its forest habitats and ecosystems as stated within the Sabah Forestry Policy 2018, in particular, i) to maintain at least 50% of Sabah’s landmass under forest reserves and tree cover for sustainable forests resources, and ii) to allocate 30% of Sabah’s landmass as a totally protected area (TPA) by 2025 for environmental services. **Now that Sabah has 26% TPA, how will you meet the 30% target, in a way that also improves the standard of living for the local communities?**

2. Sustainable agriculture production:
   a. **To diversify the economy and reduce over-dependence on a single commodity, what are your plans to spur green growth in Sabah which ensure safeguards for people and nature?**
   b. Sabah is the largest oil palm producer in Malaysia. In 2015, Sabah state government announced its intention to achieve 100% RSPO certification of oil palm across Sabah by 2025 (26% of Sabah oil palm production area is currently RSPO certified). Subsequently, in 2019, the Ministry of Primary industry also announced a policy target of 100% MSPO certification for all oil palm production in Malaysia by 2020. The government also put a cap to Oil Palm Plantation at 6.5 million ha by 2023, to dispel claims that the expansion of oil palm plantation has led to deforestation. In Sabah, 1.6 million ha has been identified as suitable for oil palms, and further expansion is on less suitable soils, so **how will your party ensure that oil palm production in Sabah is sustainable through MSPO and eventually RSPO certification, and the expansion of oil palm is capped at 1.6 million ha?**

3. What would be your plans to ensure environmental sustainability and biodiversity protection
is factored into all major infrastructure and development projects in Sabah so that people and nature can live in harmony? (e.g. road development that will not conflict with wildlife corridors, coastal resorts that will not destroy the nesting beach for turtles, and make sure mangrove is intact for climate change resilience)

4. Poaching and the killing of wildlife (e.g. poisoning of elephants, fish bombing, turtle and turtle eggs poaching, trafficking of pangolins, sun bear and other species) is a severe issue in Sabah. How do you plan to address this issue, taking into consideration some of those involved are stateless people or those living in hardcore poverty?

5. Many communities live along the coastline and are involved in the fisheries industry in Sabah, where they depend on the sea for food sources. Better management of the coastal and marine areas will directly increase the availability of nourishing food for local, state and the entire country. How do you plan to continue with the commitment of 13% or more Marine Protected Areas in Sabah to ensure thriving marine biodiversity and ecosystem resilience?

6. The possibility of zoonotic and climate change disasters in the future is real. To ensure that we will be better prepared, how do you plan to increase the resilience of Sabah’s people, nature and economy, in a way that creates jobs for Sabahans?

This Open Letter has been prepared in a neutral and non-partisan manner because it is in our mission to advocate sustainable development as a priority above party politics. By informing voters of your aspirations, plans for sustainable development and highlighting the crucial role of biodiversity on the integrity of the state, you will then allow voters to make informed decisions.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. We value your consideration to include environmental commitments into your manifestos.

Yours sincerely,

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