



**YB BARU BIAN**  
Ahli Dewan Undangan Negeri Sarawak  
N70 Ba' Kelalan



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Malaysia

11 September 2012

Ms Sally Begbie, ombudsman  
Special Broadcasting Service  
Locked Bag 028 Crows Nest  
New South Wales  
Australia 1585

Dear Ombudsman Sally Begbie,

I lead the opposition PKR party in Sarawak, part of the coalition of opposition parties which achieved 44% of the vote at the last state election, despite extensive bribery and vote rigging practices by the incumbent regime.

I have also for the past 25 years, as a lawyer trained in Australia, acted as a native rights advocate in the state, specialising in defending Sarawak's indigenous communities from rapacious land grabs and the effects of deforestation of their territories sponsored by the greed of politicians in this government. Suffice it to say that in almost every case that we have brought to court, the natives have been vindicated against such practices, although the state has always appealed.

The recent Dateline programme, Last Frontier, gave the people of Sarawak who have suffered so much from the self-interested policies of this government a very rare voice. Opening with the current issue of the displacement of thousands of people by the Bakun Dam (where Hydro-Tasmania has taken over the role of advising the Sarawak Energy Board) the programme illustrated the disastrous lack of planning and consultation involved in such projects in Sarawak. Ten thousand people were denied the compensation they were promised and many have therefore returned to their now floating homes on the new lake. Since the area has been ruled out of bounds by the authorities, the courage of your team in reaching and photographing these homes deserves our heartfelt thanks as the scenes they produced caused outrage in Malaysia and the Sarawak government has now capitulated and offered more of the compensation that was promised.

On this matter alone the Dateline programme has fulfilled an immense role in countering injustice. However, there were many more truths brought to light that others have been long attempting to suppress. It was important for Australians to know that the same Hydro-Tasmania is now giving key professional advice and lending respectability to the next raft of similar projects that will cause even more displacement and distress to the people, as well as disastrous environmental destruction, for no proven benefit since Sarawak has already exceeded its electricity capacity many times over with Bakun.

But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! Amos 5:24

The nature of business in Sarawak, which is operated through a nexus of the Chief Minister Taib Mahmud's personal family members, who also hold key public offices and political positions, was also well illustrated in this programme. This system of rule by family and close politicians has caused great harm to the people. Hamed Sepawi is one of these characters who has been used by Taib Mahmud to take control of huge areas of state and native owned land through such companies as Sarawak Plantation Bhd (Chairman and major shareholder), Ta Ann (Chairman and major shareholder), Grand Perfect (Director and major shareholder) and the construction giant Naim Cendara (Chairman and major shareholder) - Sepawi is a Director and shareholder of at least 84 major companies in Sarawak at last count, most of these profiting mainly from favoured status in the state through the handing of contracts and concessions by Taib Mahmud.

Thanks to the Dateline programme, viewers gained a glimpse into the true nature of the plight of the people of Sarawak and also the origins of the company Ta Ann Tasmania that is now extracting from wild forests in that state. This is corruption that has had a devastating impact on Sarawak and its people and to see Australian companies like Hydro-Tasmania becoming involved has been a major setback in our struggle for justice. The entire dam-building programme is yet another self-enrichment programme by Taib Mahmud, already a multi-billionaire, and the commissioning of these dams through Sepawi's Chairmanship of SEB is merely another formality to thinly disguise how our country is being milked dry by one family in power.

It is therefore with great grief that I and my fellow assemblymen, human rights campaigners, NGOs and Christians in Sarawak have heard that SBS has started to issue apologies for this programme on the basis of a perceived lack of balance and fairness. The programme only touched on a monstrous injustice and yet this was enough to trigger a violent response from those powerful forces who are not used to such exposure.

Our understanding is that there is a view that Hydro-Tasmania's role was 'exaggerated' in its importance. I can assure it was not and their role is most important in terms of crucial professional advice and also enhancing the respectability of Taib's dam projects. Why is Australia lending such help and respectability to such corrupted projects?

We also learn that there is a view that it is a coincidence that Hamed Sepawi is both Chairman of Ta Ann and Chairman of SEB. It is not. Sepawi has acted as a proxy for his cousin in numerous positions in business, politics and in key public offices such as the control of SEB.

Finally, I understand that there is pressure not only to increase these apologies to Ta Ann, SEB and Hydro-Tasmania but to even now accept their demand that SBS remove the programme altogether, disown it and accept that this whole issue was one that was 'not worthy' of being reported on at all by the Dateline programme.

Should you accede to such demands, my shock and that of others fighting for justice in Sarawak would be complete. It would mean that a programme that had begun by bringing such benefits and by opening the eyes of so many would now be treated as another stick with which to beat the poor oppressed people of my state, who are now struggling to prevent 12 more dams being built and the doubling of plantations on their remaining forested areas.

We urge you to think more carefully about the wider interests in this programme and not just the interests of the companies who have so loudly protested at this brief encounter with a call for accountability.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Baru Bian', with a stylized flourish above the 'i'.

Baru Bian  
State Assemblyman  
N70 Ba' Kelalan  
Sarawak  
Malaysia