



For Immediate Release



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PHOTO EXHIBITION CAPTURES BEAUTY AMID ADVERSITY OF LIFE BY SARAWAK'S RIVERS

Kuala Lumpur, July 8 – The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Sarawak Rivers Board (SRB) will hold a photo exhibition, themed, *“A Journey Through Sarawak’s Rivers - A Human Development Perspective”* at 1 Utama from July 25 to August 10. Showcasing over 60 beautiful photographs covering the major riverscapes of the state, the exhibition explores the intricate links between the rivers and the communities of Sarawak.

The subject matters are centred around how rivers have helped to shape human development in the state, functioning as corridors of mobility, connecting people to markets, towns and social services; helping to reduce rural isolation and poverty; unlocking human potential; avenues of fun and play for families; and keeping communities together.

The exhibition also highlights some of the major development challenges facing Sarawak including ensuring environmental sustainability and improving equity and collective well-being.

“Through this exhibition, we hope to provide an honest and touching perspective of life by the rivers of Sarawak, which is one of the most culturally diversified states in Malaysia. There are 27 distinct indigenous ethnic groups that speak 45 different languages and dialects, and each community is fascinating,” said Ginny Ng, UNDP Programme Manager.

“For generations, the rivers of Sarawak have been the lifeblood of its communities and an integral part of the state’s heritage. Any discussion on human development in the context of Sarawak is incomplete without taking into consideration the historic role that rivers have played in the lives of communities.”

Ng added that there are 55 navigable rivers and a total of 5,000 kilometres of waterways in Sarawak, and the rivers have been a unifying force among the many indigenous and local communities of the land, imbuing in them a sense of belonging to a larger society.

“Human development is a process of enlarging people’s choices and opportunities. The photographs paint a picture of how these vital waterways have given rural villages access to the resources needed to build better lives for themselves and for their children, for example health and education services.”

UNDP statistics reveal that from 1976 to 2004, the number of households living below the poverty line in Sarawak fell from 60% to just 8%, the vast majority of which are indigenous communities living in rural areas. However, these households are among the

worse off when compared to the rest of the country, and often face considerable hardships including securing land rights and other basic rights to development.

Many of the state's indigenous communities have low human capital, lack ready access to basic amenities and facilities, and because the physical infrastructure is underdeveloped in the areas where they live, they remain poorly connected to markets. Ibans and Bidayus account for the large majority of hardcore poor.

The photo exhibition is an activity under the education and awareness component of the Sarawak Inland Waterway Transport System (SIWT) Study, which seeks to enhance river transportation in the state and support more effective use of water and related resources to alleviate rural poverty, while improving environmental management and contributing to the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The images are the work of amateur and semi-professional photographers who have been involved with the project or who have lent their time and efforts on a pro-bono basis. They contain excerpts from a coffee table book, titled, "Reflections from Sarawak's Rivers," which was launched recently to elevate awareness on the importance of preserving the rivers as a heritage.

The exhibition will be held at the Ground Floor, Promenade, New Wing (outside Burger King), 1 Utama Shopping Centre. Admission is free to the public. For more information on the exhibition, please contact Lilei Chow at +603 2091 5154 or lilei.chow@undp.org

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About the Sarawak Rivers Board(SRB)

The Sarawak State Government established the Sarawak Rivers Board (SRB) in October 1993 under the Sarawak Rivers Ordinance 1993. The functions of the SRB stipulated in the Ordinance include multi-purpose river basin planning, control and regulation of river traffic, provision and improvement of ports and navigation facilities, protection and restoration of river banks, implementation of safety measures and river environment management.

About UNDP

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