



**WWF** *for a living planet*®

## Press Release

**WWF International**  
Avenue du Mont-Blanc  
1196 Gland  
Switzerland

Tel: +41 22 364 9111  
Fax: +41 22 364 8307  
www.panda.org

Embargoed for 00:01GMT on 10 August 2005

# World's largest oil palm plantation could spell disaster for upland forests of Indonesian Borneo - WWF

Jakarta, Indonesia – Plans to create the world's largest palm oil plantation in Kalimantan along Indonesia's mountainous border with Malaysia could have a devastating impact on the forests, wildlife and indigenous people of Borneo, warns WWF, the global conservation organization.

The proposed scheme, funded by China, is expected to cover an area of 1.8 million hectares (equivalent to about half the size of The Netherlands). Most of this mountainous region, part of the "Heart of Borneo", still holds huge tracts of forests, where threatened species such as orang-utans and the Borneo bay cat live, and 14 out of the island's 20 major rivers originate from. According to WWF, new species have been discovered there at a rate of three per month over the last ten years making the area one of the richest on the globe in terms of biodiversity.

WWF stresses that infertile soil and steep areas, such as those in the Heart of Borneo, prevent the development of oil palm plantations. According to experts, oil palm is not recommended to be planted in areas above 200 metres sea level, because of low productivity at these levels. Furthermore, oil palm plantations should be restricted to areas where the incline is less than 30 percent. Most of the Heart of Borneo border area is between 1000 and 2000 metres high. Research carried out in 2004 by the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) in the Heart of Borneo area, showed that out of 200 sample sites, none were suitable for the cultivation of oil palm.

"It doesn't make commercial or conservation sense to rip the forest out of the Heart of Borneo to plant a crop which cannot grow in mountainous conditions," said Dr Mubariq Ahmad, Chief Executive Director of WWF-Indonesia. "Such a project could have long-lasting, damaging, consequences for the people who depend on the area and its massive water resources, which feed the whole island."

Despite the Indonesian government assurance that the project would not harm the environment, WWF insists that development of palm oil plantations should follow strict sustainable and environmental principles which exclude the destruction of forests of high social and biological importance. According to the global conservation organization there is plenty of degraded, non-forested, land on Kalimantan where oil palm plantations could be established.

WWF is part of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) which, together with other stakeholders, such as the Indonesian Palm Oil Commission (IPOC), is working to develop palm oil plantations in a sustainable way. "We only support the establishment of oil palm plantations that are based on sustainable and environmental principles. Since IPOC's task is to promote a positive image of the Indonesian palm oil industry, large scale deforestation is a very sensitive issue. Consumers do not want to be associated with the destruction of rainforests", said Dr Rosediana Suharto, Executive Chairman of IPOC.

"We are calling on the Indonesian government to work only with serious and responsible palm oil investors who support sustainable palm oil," added Dr Mubariq Ahmad. "Borneo needs sustainable development not short-term economic measures which will accelerate the loss of the remaining natural forests in South East Asia."

WWF aims to assist Borneo's three nations (Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia) to conserve the Heart of Borneo – a total of 220,000 sq km of rainforest – through a network of protected areas and sustainably-managed forest, and through international co-operation led by the island's governments and supported at the global level.

### For more information:

Stuart Chapman, International Coordinator - Heart of Borneo, tel: + 62 21 576 1070, + 62 813 15 50 03 14 (mobile)  
Iwan Wibisono, National Campaigner, Heart of Borneo, tel: +62 21 576 1070, +62 813 17 56 63 00  
Olivier van Bogaert, Senior Press Officer, WWF International, tel: +41 22 364 9554