



Press Release

Preservation of Wehea Dayak Culture and Traditions Tied to Orangutan and Habitat Conservation

The Wehea Dayak community living in Muara Wahau District, East Kutai, have long collaborated with the Borneo Orangutan Survival (BOS) Foundation and engaged with the Orangutan Habitat Restoration (RHO) Program, in the conservation of orangutans and their habitat. The Wehea Dayak people firmly believe that conserving nature goes hand in hand with preserving their own culture and traditions.

Samarinda, 21 October, 2020. Just like nature and all the living creatures on Earth, the traditions and cultures that have influenced human life for centuries also need to be protected and preserved. The BOS Foundation continues to collaborate with and provide strong support to the Wehea Dayak community, one of the Dayak sub-tribes of East Kutai Regency. In the subdistrict of Muara Wahau, East Kutai Regency, there are around 6,000 Wehea Dayak people spread across six villages in the area: Bea Nehas, Diaq Lay, Dea Beq, Nehas Liah Bing, Diaq Leway, and Long Wehea.

For five years, the BOS Foundation, through its RHO Program, has worked with the residents of the Diaq Lay, Dea Beq, and Bea Nehas villages to develop their public health programs, provide formal and non-formal education, create and foster alternative income streams, and strengthen the traditions of the Wehea Dayak.

Dr. Ir. Jamartin Sihite, MSc., BOS Foundation CEO, said; “The culture and traditions of indigenous peoples, in general, support the principles of nature preservation. Damage to nature started in modern times, when the demand for natural resources grew exponentially, and humans failed to maintain a balance between the consumption and preservation of these natural resources. With this in mind, we at the BOS Foundation, through the RHO Program, support efforts to empower and increase the capacity of the Wehea Dayak indigenous communities living in and around our working area. We hope that conservation efforts for orangutans and their habitat, as well as for the culture and traditions of our Wehea Dayak brothers and sisters, work hand in hand to achieve a level of success both sides can be proud of.”

One of the ways the BOS Foundation provides support through the RHO Program is by participating in the Kaltim Expo 2020. Through this event, the BOS Foundation is able to introduce and promote the cultural heritage of the Wehea Dayak people through handicraft exhibitions, and traditional Wehea Dayak dance and musical performances.

Dr. Aldrianto Priadjati, RHO Program Manager, added; “We at the BOS Foundation, through the RHO Program, have worked closely with the Wehea Dayak peoples, and staunchly believe that their customs and traditions strongly support the values of nature protection and preservation. Therefore, together we need to help keep Wehea Dayak culture and traditions alive, in order to also support the conservation of orangutans and their habitat. The more that people know about the Wehea Dayak’s customs and traditions, the greater the success of orangutan and habitat conservation.”

Eng Doq, Wehea Cultural Ambassador for Nehas Liah Bing village, warmly welcomed the participation in this year’s Kaltim Expo; “There are many arts and traditional products made by the Wehea Dayak community that we want to show people outside our villages. We still have very strong



customary institutions; we have dances; we have a lot of beautiful, strong, and functional handicrafts; and we also have a Wehea Dayak language dictionary, which we created together with our friends from the BOS Foundation.”

The BOS Foundation extends its deepest gratitude to the East Kalimantan Provincial Government for organising the 12th Kaltim Expo; the East Kutai Regency Government; the Muara Wahau Subdistrict Government; the Wehea Dayak Customary Institution for their support and cooperation thus far; and Save the Orangutan, our partner organisation, and CISU, the project funding body, for supporting the BOS Foundation in promoting Wehea Dayak culture at the Kaltim Expo 2020.

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Editor’s Note:

ABOUT BOS FOUNDATION

Founded in 1991, the BOS Foundation is a non-profit Indonesian organisation dedicated to the conservation of the Bornean orangutan and its habitat, working together with local communities, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry of the Republic of Indonesia, and international partner organisations.

Currently, the BOS Foundation is working to rehabilitate more than 400 orangutans, with the support of 440 highly dedicated staff and experts in the fields of primatology, biodiversity, ecology, forest rehabilitation, agroforestry, community empowerment, communications, education, and orangutan welfare.

For further information, please visit www.orangutan.or.id

ABOUT PT. RHOI

PT. Restorasi Habitat Orangutan Indonesia (RHOI) is a company that was established by the BOS Foundation on 21 April 2009, solely to acquire a Utilisation of Forest Timber Products Licence (IUPHHK-RE), also known as an Ecosystem Restoration Concession (ERC).

As a non-profit organisation, the BOS Foundation is not permitted to apply for certain licences due to government regulations. Hence, RHOI was established. The permit gives RHOI the authority to manage a concession area - in this case, a forest area – which is imperative in the planning and implementation of orangutan releases.



On 18 August 2010, RHOI was issued an ERC permit by the Ministry of Forestry, for an 86,593.65 hectare section of rainforest in East Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan. This ERC provides a suitable, protected, and sustainable habitat for orangutans for at least the next 60 years, with the option of extending for another 35 years. The funding to purchase the permit, which cost around USD 1.4 million, was received from donors and the BOS Foundation's global partner organisations in Europe and Australia.

The forest's name, 'Kehje Sewen', translates as 'forest for orangutans' in local Wehea Dayak language. By name and nature, the Kehje Sewen Forest has become a forest for orangutans. For further information, please visit <http://theforestforever.com/>

ABOUT WEHEA DAYAK

Wehea Dayak is a Dayak sub-tribe of East Kalimantan. There are around 6,000 Wehea Dayak people living across six villages in Muara Wahau Subdistrict, East Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan. The six villages are Bea Nehas, Diaq Lay, Dea Beq, Nehas Liah Bing, Diaq Leway, and Long Wehea.

Wehea tribe ancestors are believed to have inhabited the Muara Wahau region for dozens of generations, and even claim to be the oldest Dayak sub-tribe to inhabit the area. According to oral histories, the ancestors of the Wehea tribe originated from mainland China.

The Wehea Dayak peoples share the same language and beliefs. Their daily life is filled with rituals and traditional activities that are conducted annually. The Wehea tribe also highly values and upholds farming practices and the cultivation of rice. As many as 38 traditional rituals are conducted in a year, including rituals for planting and harvesting rice, children, traditional weddings, and death rites. Every year, the Lom Plai (Mbob Jengea) customary tradition is carried out collectively by all in the community, to celebrate the rice harvest.

The Wehea Dayak uphold the tradition of managing and regulating the use of forest resources. This tradition adheres to customary law. While time has influenced changes in the structure of customary institutions, the Wehea Dayak people still abide by their customary laws and conventions.