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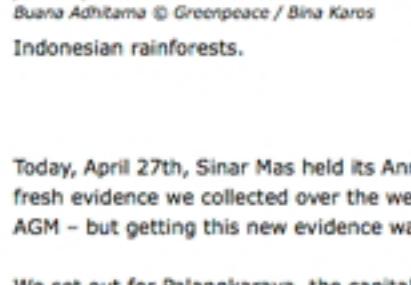
## Fresh evidence of forest destruction in Indonesia

Blogpost by Ruben - April 29, 2010 at 4:24 PM

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Originally posted by Laura on April 27, 2010 1:45 PM

Guest blogged by Joko Arif - Forest Campaigner, Greenpeace Indonesia



Land is ready to begin planting for expansion of palm oil plantations in the concession area of PT Buana Aditama © Greenpeace / Bina Karsa

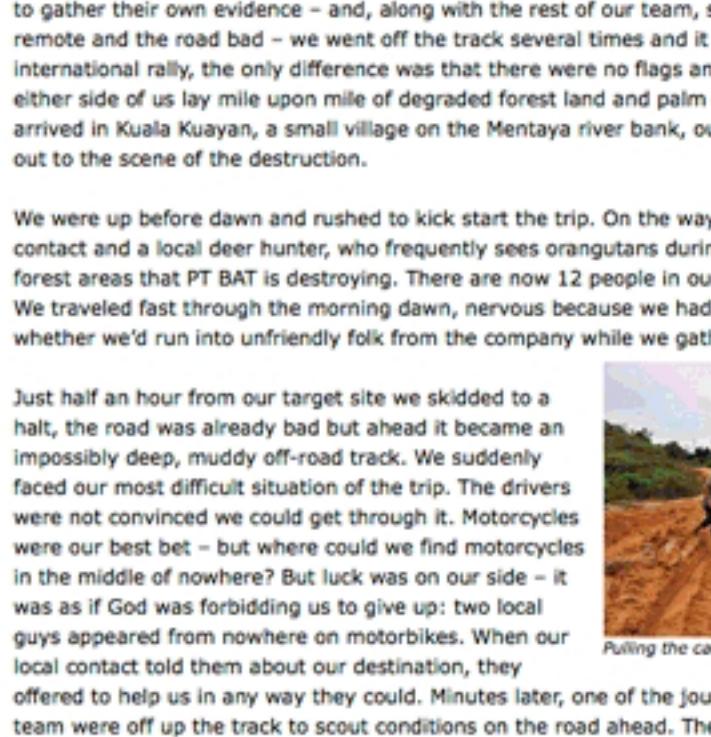
Indonesian rainforests.

Vast, bald, deforested areas surround us, while in the background we can see the wall of surviving forest. Evidence of forest clearing is all around us so we have what we came for – but strangely we haven't caught anyone red-handed today. There are no workers in sight. Our scouting team go ahead to track down the company in the act of destroying the forest while the rest of us stay behind to bake in the extreme heat. There's not a single tree left, so there's no shade. It's noon on Friday April 23rd and we have found fresh evidence that palm oil supplier Sinar Mas is still in the process of destroying

Today, April 27th, Sinar Mas held its Annual General Meeting in Singapore and we presented the fresh evidence we collected over the weekend at a press conference just before the start of the AGM – but getting this new evidence was not easy.

We set out for Palangkaraya, the capital of Central Kalimantan in Indonesia on April 23rd to meet other NGO friends to exchange information and to gather more data on what PT Buana Adi Tama (PT BAT for short), a subsidiary of notorious forest and climate destroyer, Sinar Mas, has been up to in the area.

See the latest evidence of Sinar Mas' forest destruction on Al Jazeera:

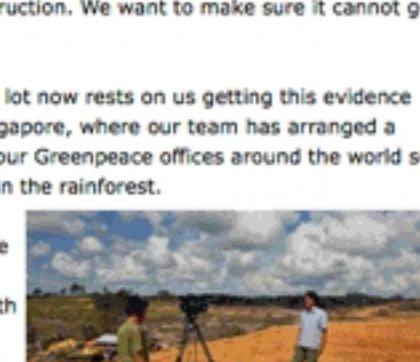


After hours of pawing through documents, we found out that the company was – as we suspected – illegally clearing the forest without a timber cutting permit until 2008, and from what we saw, we strongly suspected that it is still operating illegally. Sinar Mas has broken its promise to stop this sort of destruction – again. The area the company is clearing also overlaps with orangutan habitat and it has already cleared some areas where orangutans have been frequently spotted. We're going to catch them red-handed.

We wasted no time. The following day, we picked up some journalists who wanted to come with us to gather their own evidence – and, along with the rest of our team, stepped on the gas. It was remote and the road bad – we went off the track several times and it felt as though we were in an international rally, the only difference was that there were no flags and people waving – and that on either side of us lay mile upon mile of degraded forest land and palm oil plantations. Finally we arrived in Kuala Kuayan, a small village on the Mentaya river bank, our final stop before we headed out to the scene of the destruction.

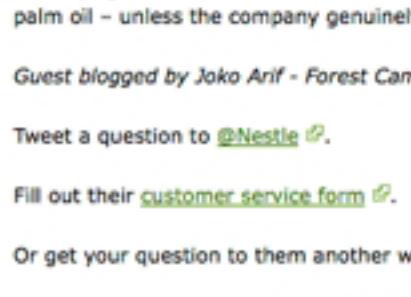
We were up before dawn and rushed to kick start the trip. On the way, we picked up our local contact and a local deer hunter, who frequently sees orangutans during his hunting trips, near forest areas that PT BAT is destroying. There are now 12 people in our group, including two drivers. We traveled fast through the morning dawn, nervous because we had no idea of what awaited us or whether we'd run into unfriendly folk from the company while we gathered our evidence.

Just half an hour from our target site we skidded to a halt, the road was already bad but ahead it became an impossibly deep, muddy off-road track. We suddenly faced our most difficult situation of the trip. The drivers were not convinced we could get through it. Motorcycles were our best bet – but where could we find motorcycles in the middle of nowhere? But luck was on our side – it was as if God was forbidding us to give up: two local guys appeared from nowhere on motorbikes. When our local contact told them about our destination, they offered to help us in any way they could. Minutes later, one of the journalists and a couple of our team were off up the track to scout conditions on the road ahead. They returned with bad news: there are two big ditch-like paths that we'd have to pass to get to the location. It was too hot to hike so we had no choice but to try and move on.



Pulling the cars

We were all holding our breath as the first car drove in to the muddy and deep pathway – but it got through and this gave us enough bravery to try the other one. We had to haul it out of the mud with ropes but we did it – the old saying proved right, if you already have the courage to overcome one big obstacle and you succeed, that success will guide you to beat the others. And with that optimism we overcame the other two obstacles, although we had to pull the cars all the way.



By noon we had reached the location where the clearing was taking place, but no workers were there. To solve the puzzle, we headed off to the worker's barracks, hoping to find someone brave enough to tell us what was going on. There were only two people there, a worker and someone from a village adjacent to the area the company is destroying. The truth of what was happening rolled out: there was no land clearing today because yesterday some people from the community had attacked the workers as they destroyed the forest.

It appears that the company has spurred a land conflict with the community from the adjacent village. We know of many cases of these kinds of social conflicts, particularly when Sinar Mas is involved, and they often become very violent – the villager did not want us to get him on record saying this.

Again, Lady Luck smiled upon us. A guy appeared who introduced himself as an elder from the village and a victim of the conflict. He was willing to be interviewed. According to him, one guy tricked several of the villagers into giving him their letters of land ownership, which he then gave to the company. He had said they would develop the land into a community rubber plantation but then a big palm oil plantation appeared instead.

We not only had our evidence but also an insight into how the company is operating in the area. Exhausted – we headed back to base and by midnight were preparing the fresh visual evidence of Sinar Mas breaking its promises to stop this sort of destruction. We want to make sure it cannot get away with telling its lies again.

We know a lot depended on our investigation and that a lot now rests on us getting this evidence out to everyone – we have until morning to get it to Singapore, where our team has arranged a press conference in advance of Sinar Mas' AGM, and to our Greenpeace offices around the world so that we can show everyone what this company is up to in the rainforest.

The evidence got to our press conference on time, where international media outlets and journalists were able to see it, but we also wanted to make sure we shared it with you: our online supporters.

We want Nestlé to stop buying palm oil from destructive companies like Sinar Mas. Since we launched our Kit Kat campaign, Nestlé has canceled its direct contract with Sinar Mas but it still buys palm oil from the company via Cargill. Nestlé says it expects Cargill to decide whether it will sever its contracts with Sinar Mas by the end of this month.



Joko on location collecting evidence of new forest clearing by Sinar Mas

We're not against palm oil plantations but we can't let companies like Sinar Mas get away with destroying our rainforests. With this evidence, how can Nestlé justify carrying on buying Sinar Mas palm oil – unless the company genuinely cleans up its act?

Guest blogged by Joko Arif - Forest Campaigner, Greenpeace Indonesia

Tweet a question to [@Nestle](#).

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Henry\_Catty\_Greenpeace says:

"I'm an Indonesian, staying in Italy. I feel so sad about what sinar mas is doing. They keep destroying our forest that is very important for our future, the forest which is the home of orang-utan and the other animals. To sinar mas: Please stop destroying the forest! Orang-utan deserves to live in peace! We gotta keep the ecosystem in balance, otherwise disasters are coming to our earth, to the people as well."

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