

MEDIA STATEMENT – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

9 July 2021

Badan Warisan Malaysia (BWM) wishes to highlight urgently, the imminent forced closure, eviction and possible destruction of the century-old Sakyamuni cave temple and monastery with its unique contents located at Gunung Kanthan, north of Ipoh in Perak. This limestone outcrop is on the verge of irreversibly losing its priceless geological, biological, cultural, tourist and recreational values to quarrying for limestone to use in the production of cement by the current owner of the land on which Gunung Kanthan is situated. Together with the other limestone outcrops, it forms the distinctive karst landscape surrounding Ipoh. Gunung Kanthan is one of the geological heritage geoparks comprising limestone hills in the Kinta Valley National Geopark.

Cave dwellings are natural spaces where humans have lived in since time immemorial. In the case of Perak, human inhabitants have lived in the caves of its ancient limestone hills, as evidenced by the discovery of the intact skeletal remains of 'Perak Man' in 1990, found amidst burial artifacts which date back to about 11,000 years ago, in the Lenggong Valley. The present Buddhist and Hindu temples and monasteries constructed within the nearby Gunung Kanthan echo those ancient ones found in India and China, and these buildings are attached to the natural caverns in the limestone hills and outcrops of Perak. The natural beauty of these weathered karst formations over millennia has led to favorable comparisons to the famous karst landscape of the Guilin Hills of China, with their unique rounded silhouettes in the natural landscape. The Buddhist and Hindu cave temples around Ipoh together with the dramatic karst landscape are famous tourist attractions for local and international visitors, and are priceless heritage worthy of preservation.

Badan Warisan Malaysia is deeply concerned and therefore, appeals to the relevant authorities, especially the Department of Lands and Mines (Pejabat Tanah dan Galian) to intervene, save and protect the priceless heritage of the Sakyamuni Cave Temple and Monastery from destruction, as well as Gunung Kanthan with its unique endemic flora and fauna from being reduced entirely to rubble, for the sake of producing cement commercially. The portion where the heritage cave temple and monastery are located, should be kept intact and safe for human inhabitation for future generations to appreciate. We advocate the need to preserve these priceless cultural, natural and architectural built heritage from being lost forever.

This issue is one of national significance as the heritage value and interest go far beyond the state of Perak - the temples, caves and limestone hills belong to all Malaysians. They must all be saved and protected as a whole, from deliberate destruction for posterity.

About Badan Warisan Malaysia

Badan Warisan Malaysia (The Heritage of Malaysia Trust) is the leading national heritage NGO established in 1983, as an independent registered charity. BWM works to raise awareness of heritage issues and advocate for a conservation-friendly environment in Malaysia. BWM works throughout Malaysia, cooperating with community groups, institutions, the private sector and all levels of Government to promote the conservation and preservation of our historic buildings and places. BWM plays a pivotal role in advocacy through a range of activities including heritage education, and we initiate research and documentation of our heritage assets and contribute to debates at international, national and local levels, on the quality of our built and cultural environment.

For more information on BWM, please visit badanwarisan.org.my.