

MEDIA STATEMENT – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

13 September 2023

Badan Warisan Malaysia (BWM) would like to express our deep concern on the Court of Appeal's decision involving the forced eviction of the occupants of Dhamma Sakyamuni Monastery 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 (Associated Pan Malayan Cement, a subsidiary of YTL) on which Gunung Kanthan is situated. Together with the other limestone outcrops, it forms the distinctive karst landscape surrounding Ipoh.

Gunung Kanthan was identified as one of the four most important karst hills in the Ipoh Local Draft Plan 1997-2020 by Ipoh City Council, and the Malaysian Nature Society Year-long Multi-disciplinary Survey of Kinta Valley Limestone (1991). This natural geological heritage must be protected and preserved for many generations to come because:-

- Biodiversity Conservation : Pristine ecosystems are home to a diverse array of plant and animal species such as population of the serow or kambing gurun as well as other huge trees, birds, reptiles, and amphibians.
- Balanced Ecosystem : This heritage geopark plays a role in mitigating climate change and maintaining ecosystem stability which are vital for the survival of all beings.
- Cultural and Historical Significance : It holds cultural and historical importance, offering insights to the evolution and development in both biodiversity and socio economy.
- Tourism and Recreation : Natural heritage sites attract tourists and outdoor enthusiasts, contributing significantly to local economies. It offers beauty and serenity that can have profound effects on mental and emotional well-being.

There were findings in 2014 by the Mineral & Geology Department that showed idle ex-mining land has 6.3 times more limestone subsurface than above ground, this alternative can avoid the exploitation of surface limestone from the limestone hills and the irretrievable irreversible damage to the million years of creation. To date, there have been 3 quarries that are using the subsurface mining method and its feasibility has been proven at the 29th International Congress for Conservation Biology in Kuala Lumpur in 2019 through a study by Petronas University of Technology (commissioned by Lafarge Malaysia). With these crucial findings, BWM believes that it is unfair to sacrifice the natural beauty of these weathered karst formations to the quarry industry.

The Dhamma Sakyamuni Monastery was established over 100 years ago when the founder discovered this wonderful cave, amidst the ancient limestone hills around Ipoh, which goes back millions of years to its formation, to be most conducive for meditation, spiritual cultivation and enlightenment. All these events of the founding of the monastery happened long before the Federation of Malaya became an independent nation in 1957, followed by the formation of Malaysia in 1963.

It is a harsh and cruel reality when these monastic inhabitants of this ancient cave woke up one day and found themselves to be deemed squatters in their own space, because of a much later Malaysian land code of laws imposed upon them, callously disenfranchising them from their own architectural and natural heritage as law-abiding citizens of Malaysia.

BWM calls for all the relevant authorities and agencies to save and protect our natural heritage. The use of sub-surface mining method must be enforced in certain circumstances and these necessary measures must be taken to ensure that the priceless heritage of the Sakyamuni Cave Temple and Monastery as well as Gunung Kanthan with its unique endemic flora and fauna is preserved for future generations to appreciate. The eviction of Dhamma Sakyamuni Monastery will pave the way for further destruction of it with its surroundings at Gunung Kanthan. Once destroyed, they will be lost forever.

A recent petition addressed to His Royal Highness Sultan Nazrin Shah (Ruler of the state of Perak), and the Chief Minister of Perak was launched by the Dhamma Sakyamuni Monastery Gunung Kanthan to oppose the project, and has garnered over 28,500 signatures thus far: <https://tinyurl.com/ycxree34>. More information of the situation is available in the petition's details.

Lim Wei-Ling, President, Badan Warisan Malaysia & 2023 Council of Badan Warisan Malaysia

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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.