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PRESS RELEASE

LARGE MALE ORANGUTAN RESCUED FROM THREATENED TRIPA PEAT SWAMP FORESTS, ACEH, INDONESIA

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A large, fully adult male Sumatran Orangutan weighing around 90 kg was rescued yesterday (14/10/12) from an isolated forest fragment in the Tripa Peat Swamp Forests in the Nagan Raya District of Aceh Province, Sumatra, Indonesia, as illegal destruction of this unique ecosystem by rogue palm oil companies continues.

Thanks to the cooperation of a team of experts from the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme (SOCP) and the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry's Department of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (PHKA), the orangutan, later named Seuneam after the nearest village to where he was found, was evacuated safely and later released early on Monday morning (15/10/12) at the SOCP's specialist Orangutan Reintroduction Centre in the Jantho Pine Nature Reserve in northern Aceh. Seuneam had been monitored in the field by SOCP staff for several days and had to be rescued as he was trapped in a small fragment of forest surrounded by palm oil plantations, isolated from the rest of the Tripa swamp forests and the rest of Tripa's surviving orangutan population, estimated today to be only around 200 individuals, and declining fast. Local informants even stated that there was a plan to poison him very soon if he continued to destroy young palm oil seedlings.

The team in the field comprised SOCP veterinarians, staff of BKSDA Aceh (the Government's provincial Conservation Agency), staff of the Indonesian Sustainable Ecosystem Foundation (Yayasan Ekosistem lestari, or YEL) and local community members.

Head of BKSDA Aceh, Mr Amon Zamora MSc, stated on Sunday evening "BKSDA Aceh strongly supports this orangutan rescue and I hope that other orangutans facing similar threats in Tripa can also be rescued before they are killed, or die of malnutrition. Evacuation efforts like this are essential to our efforts to save the Sumatran orangutan and reduce conflicts with local communities. It's a sad fact that orangutans are often regarded as pests by people and plantation companies, as when they have no other food to eat they can and do eat and damage agricultural crops.

Meanwhile, head of the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme, Dr Ian Singleton stated "We are always happy to see a successful rescue take place, but these activities are expensive, logistically challenging and also dangerous, for both staff and the orangutans themselves. There is always a serious risk of injury to the animals during capture, especially when they fall from the trees after being anaesthetized. We would much prefer not to have to intervene in this way and in reality we should not be having to rescue orangutans from Tripa, as it is part of the Leuser Ecosystem, now a protected area under National Spatial Planning laws. In fact, several of the palm oil companies

operating in Tripa are already under investigation for breaking Indonesian Law and one plantation has even be cancelled. But regrettably, forest clearance, drainage of the peatlands and burning of the land continue unabated, so we have no choice but to rescue orangutans when they will clearly die if we don't".

"Both locally, and Globally, people were inspired recently by the strong leadership of new Aceh Governor, Dr Zaini Abdullah, when the Aceh Government revoked an illegal oil palm plantation permit granted to PT Kalista Alam. But despite this, it is still clear to see that rogue palm oil companies are continuing to destroy Tripa's remaining forests, creating more conflicts between human and orangutan, and other wildlife. It's not the orangutans that should be leaving this area, it is the palm oil companies who are breaking the law." Dr Singleton added.

Drh Yenny Saraswati reiterated during a quiet moment after Seuneam's eventual return to the wild. "Rescues like this are not something we enjoy. There are serious risks of injury and even death to an orangutan like this during capture, however good modern equipment and drugs are these days. No matter what you do, orangutans climb higher when afraid, and then fall all the way to the ground. We have had several break bones in the past as a result of falls, even though we always try to get a capture net underneath them beforehand. As a veterinarian, its not pleasant to have to take such risks with an animal's welfare".

The Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme (SOCP; www.sumatranorangutan.org) is a collaborative programme involving the Swiss based PanEco Foundation (www.paneco.ch), Indonesia's Yayasan Ecosystem Lestari (www.yelweb.org) and the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry's Directorate General of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (DitJen PHKA; www.dephut.go.id)

Main activities of the SOCP include:-

1. Confiscation, quarantine, and reintroduction to the wild of illegal pet Sumatran orangutans
2. Research and monitoring of remaining wild Sumatran orangutan populations
3. Habitat protection and conservation
4. Conservation education and awareness raising

To date the SOCP as returned to the wild more than 180 illegal captive orangutans and rescued a number of orangutans in similar situations to Seuneam.

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