

**SUHAKAM CALLS FOR URGENT HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED RESPONSE TO
ESCALATING TRANSBOUNDARY HAZE CRISIS**

KUALA LUMPUR (17 SEPTEMBER 2026) – For more than three decades, transboundary haze has remained a persistent environmental and public health challenge in Southeast Asia, repeatedly exposing communities to harmful levels of air pollution and threatening their health, safety and well-being. The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) expresses grave concern over the worsening haze situation affecting Malaysia, particularly in Sarawak, where several areas have recorded hazardous air quality levels. The current episode has caused severe air pollution in affected communities, necessitating emergency measures, including the closure of schools.

SUHAKAM reiterates that access to clean air is fundamentally a human rights issue. Haze pollution directly threatens the enjoyment of a range of human rights, including the rights to life, health, education, information, safe and healthy working conditions, and a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The current situation is a stark reminder that transboundary haze is largely a human-induced problem. Its underlying causes include unsustainable land-use practices, peatland degradation, agricultural expansion, land and forest fires, and inadequate accountability and environmental governance mechanisms. While weather conditions may intensify haze episodes, they should not obscure the need to address these underlying and preventable causes.

SUHAKAM is particularly concerned about the public health consequences of prolonged exposure to haze pollutants, especially fine particulate matter (PM2.5), which is associated with respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses, increased hospital admissions and premature mortality. Previous severe haze episodes have also resulted in school closures, disruption to livelihoods, loss of economic productivity and significant healthcare costs.

While environmental degradation affects everyone, its impacts are not experienced equally. Children, pregnant women, older persons, persons with disabilities and individuals with existing health vulnerabilities may face greater health risks. Outdoor workers and lower-income communities may also have fewer options to reduce their exposure, particularly where their livelihoods require them to remain outdoors or where access to adequate protection, healthcare and information is limited.

The right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is one of the key areas of SUHAKAM's work. In 2025, SUHAKAM launched its report, *Silent Enemy: Haze Pollution and the Right to Clean Air*, which examined the causes and human rights impacts of haze pollution and identified gaps in Malaysia's legal and institutional framework for environmental governance. This year, SUHAKAM further advanced the discussion through its Forum on Human Rights, Business and Climate Justice 2026, highlighting the responsibilities of both States and businesses in addressing environmental harm and protecting human rights.

In light of the current situation, SUHAKAM reiterates its calls and urges the Government of Malaysia to:

- i. Uphold its duty to protect the right to life and other fundamental rights under the Federal Constitution, while advancing Malaysia's commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2025 ASEAN Declaration on the Right to a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment.
- ii. Strengthen access to environmental justice by reviewing and amending the Rules of Court 2012 to facilitate locus standi in environmental proceedings, ensuring that affected individuals, communities and legitimate public-interest litigants are not unduly prevented by procedural barriers from seeking judicial protection and effective remedies for environmental

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harm. Expedite the Clean Air Act that establishes legally enforceable ambient air quality standards and recognises the protection of public health and environmental rights as central objectives.

- iii. Strengthen regional cooperation through ASEAN mechanisms, including the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (AATHP), to address the root causes of transboundary haze and enhance transparency, information-sharing, hotspot monitoring, prevention, enforcement and accountability.
- iv. Fully implement the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAPBHR), including measures to strengthen corporate accountability and responsible business conduct in relation to environmental and human rights impacts.
- v. Accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those relating to health, sustainable communities, climate action and environmental protection, through stronger institutional coordination and meaningful stakeholder participation.

The recurring haze crisis demonstrates that the right to clean air cannot be protected through reactive measures alone. A coordinated, rights-based, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach is urgently needed to address the structural causes of haze pollution and ensure that public health, environmental sustainability and human dignity are not sacrificed for short-term economic interests. SUHAKAM stands ready to work with government agencies, civil society organisations, affected communities, businesses and other stakeholders to advance meaningful and lasting solutions to this recurring crisis.

Ultimately, the air we breathe and the environment we depend upon know no boundaries of gender, race, religion, nationality, legal status or socioeconomic background. Environmental harm in one place can have consequences far beyond its source. This shared vulnerability demands shared responsibility. We must therefore act collectively and without delay to protect the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, not only for those affected today, but for our children, grandchildren and generations to come.

Silent Enemy: Haze Pollution and the Right to Clean Air can be accessed via the QR below:



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Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM)
17 September 2026