Fires in Kalimantan
An Urgent Need for Donations

Background

Kalimantan is situated on the island of Borneo, the world's third largest island. Shared by Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia, Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo) is often characterized as the "lungs of the world" due to its massive carbon-dioxide-to-oxygen conversion capacity, driven by its 40.8 million hectares of ancient tropical rainforest. This vast ecosystem regulates global climate patterns, captures carbon emissions, and sustains unparalleled biodiversity. Recognising its critical ecological value, the Indonesian government legally dedicated 45% of Kalimantan's entire landmass exclusively to conservation and ecosystem protection under presidential decree. And, Kalimantan is an international center for Subud – where members from many countries have come to realise Bapak's vision of Subud's contribution to improving lives and livelihoods.

There are two seasons in Kalimantan: the monsoon season with a great deal of rain, and the dry season, which can run for months. Records for the past 15 years indicate the length of the dry season can be impacted by El Nino. It is during the dry season that fires started by people to facilitate clearing land of forest and brush, can spread, and burn unchecked for months. In 2015, for example, 2.61 million hectares (approximately 6.45 million acres, a size a bit smaller than the entire state of Massachusetts) burned including peatland in Central, West, and South Kalimantan**: "***During periods of drought, the groundwater level in Kalimantan's peatlands drops drastically. Consequently, the peat dries out, becoming akin to highly flammable fuel. The fire not only burns the surface, but it also spreads underground – creating subsurface fires – making it extremely difficult to extinguish, and generating thick, toxic haze"*. The lungs of the world are burning.



Fires in 2026

The dry season in 2026 has been exceptionally long. Fires began in June and continue to the present day with no end in sight until the monsoon season starts, possibly the end of December. The toxic haze from the fires has been some of the worst on record. The Air Quality Index US (AQI) has several levels to determine particulate matter with possible impacts on humans. The

highest level of AQI is 300+ where humans should stay indoors at all times. During the week of October 6, the AQI for Kalimantan registered – daily – between 1100 and 2000. This is not a typo: the air has become extremely and dangerously toxic to humans and wildlife.



The humanitarian crisis is devastating. Vulnerable populations such as children, pregnant women and their unborn babies, and the elderly are especially hard hit. The same is true for the firefighters, who are a voluntary group, and who desperately need equipment such as masks and rubber boots as well as medicines. People confined to their homes lack basic necessities such as food.



On October 9 several SDIA members in Indonesia met with the SDIA Board of Directors. They have been working cooperatively on 5 priority areas of need: health and safety, community protection, volunteer safety, support to firefighters and community response. They are well-organized and have an accountability structure in place (left).

Please note that all areas will be addressed simultaneously and not necessarily in the order listed here. Due to the poor air quality and the need to divert resources towards firefighting and community protection, many SD projects have had to suspend their operations, including Borneo Football, YUM agro-forestry, BCU School. To see the full presentation by SD Indonesia, please use this link: https://susiladharma.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/Presentation-Karhutla-Kalteng_lowRes.pdf

Your donations are welcome!

SDIA is organizing donations to help SD Indonesia and SD projects in Kalimantan to reach the people in need: we have sent an initial donation of $2500 US from the SDIA endowment fund and an advance of $2500 US from the SDIA Emergency Fund for immediate relief. The $2500

from the Emergency Fund needs to be replaced to maintain the fund for future emergencies. Already this year, SDIA has donated to Subud's efforts to assist the victims of earthquakes in Venezuela and Colombia. The SDIA Emergency Fund is Subud's main vehicle for quickly responding to current and future crises.

Until significant changes, economic and environmental, are made, the fires will continue each year. This year, the fires are particularly destructive due to that lack of rainfall. The need is especially urgent. Please share this information with your centers, SD Nationals, wings, and Zone Representatives. Our brothers and sisters in Kalimantan need our help.

To Donate
Donations can be made directly to your SD national or to SDIA which can issue a tax deductible receipt for US donations using this link. Please be sure to indicate the donation is for the Fires in Kalimantan.

Mary Salisbury,
Board of Directors, SDIA