

9 December 2003

### **Politician in Sumatra arrested for tiger trading**

On the afternoon of Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> December, at approximately 5pm, police arrested a senior political figure in North Bengkulu district who was in possession of a Sumatran tiger skin.

Rabihil Kanel is the senior member of the local parliament for Bengkulu Utara district and also the district head of the Golkar political party in that area.

The arrest took place at a beach hotel in Bengkulu shortly after Mr Kanel arrived with the tiger skin that he was proposing to sell.

Bengkulu police conducted the arrest very professionally and the Provincial Head of Police has advised that this case should be processed notwithstanding this man's political position. A formal request for his parliamentary immunity to be lifted has been made.

Background:

This operation started approximately five weeks ago when an informant of a member of the WWF Tiger Trade Monitoring group received a report from a member of a local NGO that Kanel had a tiger skin in his possession.

Members of the PHS team were in the area at the time (scouting lay of the land for the new units now under formation) and a senior member of the PHS team joined our two friends to visit Kanel and seek to confirm the report positively. This was done.

No immediate response could be made because the identities of the WWF trade monitor and the local NGO member were known (although their work was not known)

On Tuesday, Mr Kanel decided to go to Bengkulu city to sell his tiger skin at a beach hotel.

This was the first time we have used the body mike transmitters bought late last year and these allowed the arresting team to monitor the situation in the hotel room where the transaction was scheduled to take place and to confirm that the tiger skin had indeed been brought to the hotel.

This is the first arrest of a tiger dealer/poacher in the northern part of Bengkulu province for almost 10 years.

Although Mr Kanel is not a professional tiger or endangered species dealer, the arrest yesterday is significant because *penjabat* - senior government officers and politicians - are a very significant market for endangered species such as Sumatran tiger

Rabihil Kanel had brought this skin about 3 months ago from a villager - identity not yet known - and was proposing to either sell it or to use it as a gift to higher ranking politicians etc.

I do not expect Mr Kanel to stay in police custody long - but we have been promised this case will be processed seriously and that it will indeed go to trial.