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MediaTitle	Borneo Post (Kuching)		
Date	03 Oct 2018	Color	Full Color
Section	Business	Circulation	62,583
Page No	B3	Readership	187,749
Language	English	ArticleSize	371 cm ²
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 5,059
Frequency	Daily (EM)	PR Value	RM 15,177



Malaysia, Switzerland form expert committee on palm oil

BERNE, Switzerland: The Ministry of Primary Industries, Malaysia and the Swiss Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER) will form a special joint committee comprising experts from both nations to cooperate in issues relating to palm oil.

This was agreed upon during a meeting here between Malaysia's Minister of Primary Industries, The Honourable Teresa Kok, and Federal Councillor of the Swiss Confederation, The Honourable Johann Schneider-Ammann, who is Head of the Swiss Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research on Oct 1, 2018.

The special expert committee will explore palm oil related opportunities towards sustainability, bilateral trade, exchange of relevant scientific technologies and possible collaboration in downstream palm oil industry applications.

The ministers agreed that this would go a long way towards addressing the many negative sentiments associated with palm oil in Switzerland and would also



Teresa Kok

be an important tool to assure local Swiss rapeseed farmers that imported palm oil will not pose a threat to their livelihood in the future.

Kok expressed her satisfaction with the bilateral meeting since it will ensure continued export of palm oil to Switzerland and could even possibly help attract direct Swiss investments through technology providers for various palm oil downstream activities.

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The meeting was held at a crucial time since on September 25, 2018 the upper house of the Swiss Parliament narrowly defeated a motion to restrict importation of palm oil and its applications into Switzerland.

The Swiss motion was triggered by their concern that palm oil was produced unsustainably while contributing to deforestation. Such misinformation propagated by a strong NGO anti-palm oil campaign had succeeded in creating a major negative perception around palm oil.

Switzerland is however a comparatively small importer of palm oil. In 2017, a total of 29,100 tonnes of palm oil and palm products were imported and primarily used for various food applications.

The Malaysian delegation was also informed during the meeting that the Swiss authorities were desirous of maintaining at least one third of their local consumption for locally-produced rapeseed oil and to support the local Swiss rapeseed farmers.

These concerns coupled

with the sustainability debate triggered the motion on palm oil in their Parliament.

Kok explained that Malaysia already produces nearly 42 per cent of the global certified sustainable palm oil; yet this is not fully taken up by the European industry. In addition Malaysia's overall goal to have its entire palm oil supply chain certified through MSPO was also explained along with scientific investments through genome research that open avenues for higher yields in oil palm plantations.

These factual explanations were well received by the Swiss Minister and his experts, who expressed that they were glad to be updated on such positive steps already taken by Malaysia.

Kok is leading a palm oil mission to Switzerland and the European Union from Sept 28 to Oct 6. She is accompanied by officials from the ministry, Malaysian Palm Oil Board, Malaysian Palm Oil Council, Malaysian Palm Oil Certification Council and Forest Research Institute of Malaysia.

— Bernama