

UMS Faculty of Law to strengthen Sabah Native Courts

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KOTA KINABALU: The establishment of a Faculty of Law at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) is expected to strengthen the development of legal education in Sabah, particularly within the context of its multi-ethnic society and plural legal system.

Dr Henry Bating, a Research Committee Member of the Sabah Native Affairs Council (MHEANS), said the establishment of the faculty should be fully optimised and not confined solely to the study of civil law.

"From the perspective of customary leadership in Sabah, the establishment of the UMS Faculty of Law should be viewed as an opportunity to strengthen the position of customary law and the Native Court within the state's legal ecosystem," he said referring to the announcement by Chief Justice of Malaysia Datuk Seri Wan Ahmad Farid Wan Salleh.

According to him, the faculty has significant potential to serve as a strategic partner to the Sabah Native Court Training Institute (ILMAN) in efforts to enhance training, research, and capacity building for the customary judicial workforce.

"A structured collaboration between the UMS Faculty of Law and ILMAN should be established so that training for Native Court officers and customary leaders can be strengthened in

an academic, systematic, and continuous manner," he said.

Dr Henry, who is also a Senior Lecturer at UMS's Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning (PPIB), said potential areas of collaboration include the development of customary law curricula, continuous professional training, joint research initiatives, as well as the documentation of Native Court enactments and decisions as authoritative reference materials.

"Sabah possesses a rich heritage of customary law deeply rooted in the social structure of its native communities. However, this heritage must be strengthened through scholarly approaches to ensure it remains relevant, respected, and authoritative within the modern judicial system," he explained.

He further emphasised that synergy between UMS and ILMAN would enhance the professionalism of the Native Court, while also producing local legal graduates who are well-versed in civil law and possess a deep sensitivity to customary values and principles.

"The UMS Faculty of Law should be planned with an inclusive long-term vision, giving due recognition to Sabah customary law as an important and strategic field of knowledge in the state's development," he said.