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Passing of Native Courts Bill shows commitment to customary institutions

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By Jenne Lajiun

KOTA KINABALU: The passing of the Native Courts Bill 2026 in the State Legislative Assembly (DUN) has been hailed as a historic milestone by the Sabah Native Customary Community Organisation.

Organisation president Shalmon Sanangan said the Bill demonstrates the Sabah government’s strong commitment to recognising and elevating the dignity of Sabah’s native customary institutions to a higher standard of professionalism, transparency, and structured governance.

“We record our deepest appreciation and sincere gratitude to the Honourable Chief Minister of Sabah and the Honourable Minister of Local Government and Housing Sabah for their farsighted leadership.

“This initiative clearly demonstrates that the government places great value

on the dignity of customary practices and the cultural rights of the indigenous communities of this State,” said Shalmon.

As the formal body representing customary leaders from all 46 ethnic groups across Sabah, the Sabah Native Customary Community Organisation now functions in a more systematic manner as the official platform for stakeholders, he said.

According to him, the passage of the Bill provided a strong foundation to ensure that future legislation and the governance of customary affairs consistently reflect the genuine aspirations of grassroots communities.

The existence of this well-structured representative framework enables cooperation between the government and customary leaders to be carried out harmoniously, complementing one another in an effective and constructive manner, he said.

On the implementation and

continued strengthening of initiatives following the passage of the Bill, Shalmon emphasised the readiness of the Sabah Native Customary School (SAANS) to serve as the principal bridge for strategic collaboration between the state government, academic institutions, and grassroots communities.

On SAANS capabilities and achievements, he said it has been in operation for seven years, expanding to various districts throughout Sabah, and serving as a centre of reference for native customary education.

He said SAANS has developed 19 specialised subjects designed jointly with customary experts representing all 46 native ethnic groups of Sabah, and maintained formal collaboration with the Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Borneo Institute for Indigenous Studies (BorIIS) and the Institute for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ITBC) to strengthen research, documentation, and the

preservation of ethnobiological heritage and native customary law.

SAANS is also currently at the final stage of obtaining official Unesco recognition under the ‘Best Safeguarding Practices’ category for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

“The Sabah Native Customary Community Organisation reaffirms its full commitment to maintaining close collaboration with the relevant ministries, the Native Courts, and local authorities in support of the implementation of the Native Courts Bill 2026.

“With a robust legal framework, strong academic collaboration, and the support of the Native Customary School education system, we are not only preserving our native customary laws but also nurturing a future generation of Sabahans who possess a strong cultural identity, sound knowledge, and respect for the laws of the state,” he added.



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SUMMARIES

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