

KK perfect for promoting peace in Mindanao — don

By Chok Sim Yee

KOTA KINABALU: Kota Kinabalu is a perfect place to promote peace in Mindanao due to its geographical proximity to the Philippines.

Professor Dr Kamarulzaman Askandar from the Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Heritage at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) stated this in an interview after receiving the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Recognition Award here yesterday for his contribution to JICA's cooperation and peace promotion efforts in ASEAN.

Dr Kamarulzaman said the Consolidation for Peace (COP) provides a more informal and open platform for stakeholders to discuss issues that are difficult to be voiced out in formal peace talks.

He said there were issues that might be more difficult to resolve in formal peace talks, such as division of power and wealth.

"Those are the kind of things

that you need to negotiate (and have a) dialogue in a quieter kind of way."

In a conflict situation like Mindanao, Malaysia is the facilitator of the formal peace talks, he said, but sometimes there were issues that might be harder to resolve.

"We involve a lot of other stakeholders in the formal peace talks so that the issues that are difficult to resolve in the formal talks can be negotiated informally (in COP programme)," he said.

Dr Kamarulzaman and Dr Ayesah Uy Abubakar, who both received the JICA Recognition Award, have led the COP programme in partnership with JICA since 2006.

The COP aims to provide opportunities for dialogue among stakeholders who have influence on the peace process.

Dr Kamarulzaman said the COP programme also facilitated exchanges among stakeholders

in Mindanao, Aceh in Indonesia and Pattani in Thailand.

"Our strength also comes from research in other areas, in Indonesia, Timor Leste and Southern Thailand, so that the lessons learned in other conflict areas can be applied to Mindanao."

In his speech after receiving the award, Dr Kamarulzaman said it was 'embarrassing' for him to accept the award as the peace building process was a process involving many parties.

He, however, dedicated the award to the unsung heroes of the peace building process, including the people working on the ground, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who have worked for years in the background.

Dr Kamarulzaman said he looked forward to the partnership between JICA and UMS in pushing for a permanent solution for the situation in Mindanao.