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Two UMS scholars get JICA President's Commendation

KOTA KINABALU: The contributions of two Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) scholars, towards the peace process between the Philippines Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) received praise from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Prof Dr Kamarulzaman Askandar and senior lecturer Dr Ayesah Uy Abubakar, both scholars from the Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Heritage were among 22 recipients of the 10th JICA President's Commendation 2014.

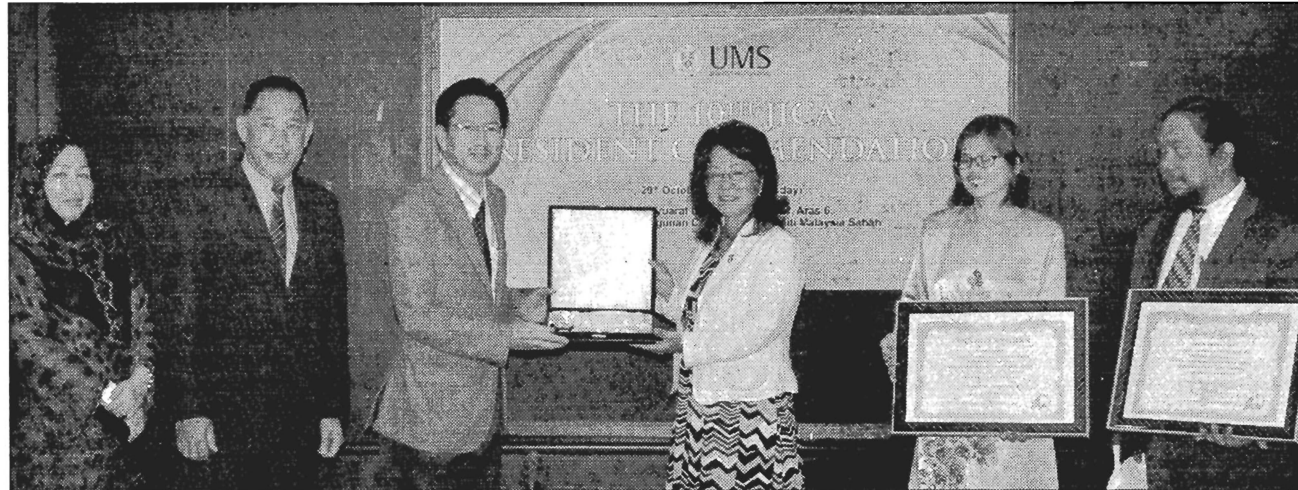
In a brief ceremony at UMS yesterday, they received the award from JICA senior representative, Kyoko Okubo witnessed by UMS vice chancellor, Prof Datuk Dr Mohd Harun Abdullah.

The peace process between the Philippines Government and MILF was formally facilitated and hosted by the Government of Malaysia in 2001 and is now known as the Consolidation for Peace (COP) programme with JICA.

Dr Kamarulzaman, 49, from Penang and Dr Ayesah, 42, a Bangsamoro from Davao City are among the people behind COP.

"The award we receive today will motivate us to work even harder," said a delighted Dr. Kamarulzaman.

"Malaysia was the facili-



Dr Harun (third left) presenting a memento to Kyoto while Dr Ayesah (second right) and Dr Kamarulzaman (right) look on.

tator of the earlier peace talks and sometimes when we were faced with difficult issues, we would discuss it in a quiet place to allow everybody to open up.

"Our role was to facilitate the discussions which also involved other stakeholders.

"We also had to monitor the situation especially the key main actors and most of our jobs were done behind the scenes. That was our con-

tribution," shared Dr Kamarulzaman.

"I feel rather shy because we have been behind the scenes most of the time and suddenly we are in the limelight now," he said.

He said issues discussing the division of power, wealth and arm struggle had been their most challenging moments and at times they had to hold the negotiation and dialogue sessions quietly.

"We also applied the lessons we learnt from the conflict areas in Timor Leste and Southern Thailand during the negotiation in Mindanao and facilitated exchange between the stakeholders in Mindanao, Aceh and Patani," he added.

Dr Ayesah said the peace process not only helped them academically but also allowed them to engage with the civil society in Mindanao.

"The involvement gave us an insider's view on the difficulties faced by both parties involved in the conflict," she said.

She said their success in the peace process was largely due to their credibility and integrity in building trust with the local people.

"The peace process will improve the economy and security in Mindanao and it will bring progress to Sabah too,"

she said.

Dr Harun said the JICA and UMS partnership started in 2002, through the Bornean Biodiversity and Ecosystem Conservation programme, a multi-agency collaboration between JICA, the Sabah state government and UMS.

The JICA President Commendation is a recognition of the outstanding contributions from selected individuals, groups and projects, towards the development of human resources, society and the economy of developing countries.

Meanwhile, Kyoto said JICA along with Dr Kamarulzaman and Dr Ayesah started their collaboration in 2005 in the field of peace building for Mindanao, Aceh and Southern Thailand.

At that time, both scholars were in the Research and Education for Peace of Universiti Sains Malaysia.

The COP was held five times in Penang before the sixth in June this year, exclusively for Mindanao, in Hiroshima, Japan following the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro in March 2014.