

# Opportunities for JICA, UMS to bring peace in region

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**KOTA KINABALU:** Partnership with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) towards achieving long lasting peace in the Philippines, Aceh in Indonesia and Patani in Thailand is a testament of the many opportunities an university can do in peace building efforts, said a JICA Recognition Award recipient.

Dr Ayesah Uy Abubakar, 42, who is a lecturer at the Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Heritage at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), said it had always been a challenge to prove how peace building programmes and projects could lead to tangible social change.

Dr Ayesah received her JICA Recognition Award for her contribution in JICA's cooperation and peace promotion efforts in ASEAN.

Professor Dr Kamarulzaman Askandar, 49, also a lecturer in the same faculty as Dr Ayesah, received the recognition as well.

Dr Ayesah hails from Mindanao but has lived in Malaysia for many years.

She has collaborated with JICA in the field of peace building in Mindanao, Aceh and Southern

Thailand since 2005, specifically in the Consolidation for Peace (COF) seminars that began in 2006 to provide opportunities for dialogue among stakeholders who have influence on peace process.

"This recognition is the best key performance index (KPI) of how academic and universities can play a role in peace building process.

"JICA said the award has indicated that the COP partnership is indeed successful."

On her peace building work, Dr Ayesah said she and Dr Kamarulzaman had been very much engaged in the peace process, particularly with the civil society community in Mindanao.

"That kind of involvement gives us an insider's view on the issues that both conflict parties find difficult."

She said there had been many attempts of larger and well-funded international organizations who wanted to come in the peace process.

"I guess we are lucky because not only we have credibility and integrity with the local people, but at the same time, we have an international partner (JICA)."

Dr Ayesah said the trust that she and Dr Kamarulzaman earned from the people was the 'real currency' that they gained in doing peace building projects.

"Once the trust is broken, nobody wants to work with you.

"So it is important to have a balance between the parties; we cannot be seen as biased, pro-government or pro this or other groups.

"Of course there is no such thing as non-biased, but we have to be as neutral and professional as possible."

Dr Ayesah said Malaysia has a lot to offer in peace and peace building in the region and other places.

She expressed hope that the partnership with JICA could blossom in UMS and throughout Malaysia.

Dr Ayesah also believed that better things could be achieved in Mindanao with the peace process, and she hoped it could bring good impact to Sabah in terms of security and economy.

"When there is a stable Mindanao, there will be a more progressive Sabah.

"You cannot help that we are neighbouring countries," she said.