

Enhancing forest restoration: UMS, Sime Darby Plantation Bhd sign Letter of Intent

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KOTA KINABALU: Despite the concern of losing Borneo's major ecosystem, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) is a step forward in enhancing forest restoration.

Yesterday, UMS which was represented by its Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation), Prof Ramzah Dambul inked a Letter of Intent (LoI) with globally integrated plantation company, Sime Darby Plantation Berhad (SDP).

Ramzah asserted through the mutual intention, UMS will work on the restoration of SDP's 267-hectare degraded forest in Sapong Estate, Tenom.

"The LoI works as an 'educational forest' for the students who are studying forest recovery, silviculture and biodiversity course. This is in line with the government vision to empower Technical Education and Vocational Training (TVET) throughout the study.

"It is also part of the UMS permanent sampling plot which help the university on forest dynamic and forest restoration long-term research.

"Additionally, it will be a platform for UMS post-graduate



Sealed ... Ramzah (left) and Faris (right) exchanging the LoI.

students to conduct site-research and discuss more on various forest conservation approaches.

"This helps UMS to enhance its industrial relationship in terms of big scale forestation project," he said adding that the university is positive the effort is in line with the National Forest Policy.

Meanwhile, Regional Chief Executive Officer of SDP, Mohd Faris Adli Shukery who represented the company during the signing hopes that the necessary due diligence process will commence and the project

will take off the ground as soon as practicable.

He noted that the Sapong estate comes with at least three fast flowing streams and has been left untouched for more than 40 years.

"Although it is a secondary jungle with low canopy and a small number of huge trees, Sime Darby Plantation is nonetheless very proud to have this piece of untouched forest in our landmark profile.

Faris added that plantation industries are incessantly marred by allegations of deforestation.

"The industry is always accused of being responsible for driving the extinction of the orang utan. These sweeping accusations also afflict responsible companies like Sime Darby Plantation.

"The existence of this substantial forest area in Sapong Estate, is testament of our commitment towards the no deforestation, no peat and no exploitation (NDPE) standards," he said adding that Sapong Estate is not the only estate where the company conserves a sizeable land bank under forest species.

He also stressed the partnership will provide a massive benefit to the environment and humankind.

"For SDP, this forest will become an in-house training ground in forest management and conservation for our staff. It will be a great platform to demonstrate our commitment and support towards the Sustainable Development Goals especially in the area of protection and restoration of natural ecosystem.

The LoI also demonstrates SDP support in contributing to the government vision in maintaining at least 50 per cent of the nation land under forest cover.