



SUHAKAM AND MALAYSIAN BAR STRENGTHEN LEGAL CAPACITY TO ADVANCE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS IN SARAWAK

KUCHING (27 OCTOBER 2026) - The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) and the Malaysian Bar, with support from the European Union through its grant project "*Advancing Human Rights in Malaysia via Strategic Approaches in Education and Awareness Raising*", successfully conducted an Intensive Human Rights Law and Litigation Training for young lawyers and SUHAKAM officers from 22 to 24 October 2026 in Kuching, Sarawak. Supported by the Advocates Association of Sarawak (Kuching Branch), the training focused on **Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Fundamental Liberties**, particularly issues affecting Indigenous communities in Sarawak.

In his opening remarks, SUHAKAM Chairman Dato' Seri Mohd Hishamudin Yunus emphasised that protecting Indigenous Peoples' rights involves more than recognising land ownership. "The protection is more than land ownership, it is the question of identity, cultural recognition and meaningful participation in various decisions on their livelihood," he said.

Through discussions, case studies, interactive workshops and a moot court, the programme aimed to build young lawyers' capacity to understand and address human rights issues affecting Indigenous communities in Sarawak, and to cultivate a new generation of lawyers equipped with the skills and sensitivity to contribute to human rights litigation, advocacy and policy development.

Participants were introduced to the constitutional, statutory and customary legal frameworks governing Indigenous rights and Native Customary Rights (NCR) in Sarawak. The training also addressed practical aspects of litigation, including procedural requirements, evidence gathering and litigation strategies in human rights cases. In addition, it aimed to strengthen participants' understanding of fundamental liberties under the Federal Constitution and the constitutional significance of the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63).

Abang Iwawan, representing the Malaysian Bar, emphasised the importance of MA63 and the Inter-Governmental Committee Report in understanding Indigenous rights in Sarawak. "The safeguards concerning religion, language and Indigenous peoples discussed when Malaysia was formed remain closely connected to the concerns communities raise today. Lawyers need to understand what was secured, how it is reflected in our laws, and whether those protections are working for the people they were intended to serve," he said.

The programme also aimed to strengthen collaboration between the legal profession, human rights institutions and Indigenous communities in advancing justice, while building and empowering human rights communities in Sarawak. Selected participants are expected to commit pro bono hours each month to a non-governmental or civil society organisation of their choice. The trainers include The Honourable Tuan Gabriel Gumis Humen, the President of the Native Court of Appeal, Sarawak.

SUHAKAM and the Malaysian Bar remain committed to developing legal capacity and partnerships that support access to justice and the protection of human rights in Malaysia.

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**Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM)
Malaysian Bar
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