

Indigenous people's rights: Msia 'best model'
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Malaysia is the best example in the Asia-Pacific region in handling the indigenous peoples' rights, Asia-Pacific Parliamentarians' Conference on Environment and Development (APPCED) secretary-general Dr Marcus Mojigoh said.

orang asli penang story 250109 Orang Asli in Kg Pos BersihHe said Malaysia adopted a proactive approach in taking care of their rights through various programmes including the eradication of poverty and illiteracy as provided for under the Federal Constitution and Vision 2020.

Mojigoh, who is the Malaysian member of parliament for Putatan, said the Malaysian government also recognised the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples with regard to the rights of indigenous families and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children.

This was evidenced by the government's seriousness in dealing with the plights of the Orang Asli community and the indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak, he said when presenting a paper titled "Indigenous Peoples' Cultural Identity and Challenges Posed by Development" in conjunction with the Asia-Pacific Regional Seminar on Indigenous Peoples in Pampanga, Philippines, today.

orang asal walk 130908 adrian lasimbangMojigoh said government policies, among others, focused on concerted development in rural areas to help uplift the living standards of indigenous peoples.

"We care for them from womb to grave. We have a lot of programmes for them. For example, housing, schools and healthcare facilities are built close to the villages of indigenous people so that they are not forced to move to urban areas.

"As a result, mortality rates have dropped and poverty is being alleviated, and through education, they have greater control of their lives," he said.

Mojigoh said many of them had grasped the opportunities afforded by education and at the same time, respect and follow the culture of their villages, proving that modern life can be compatible with traditional ways.

Going all out to develop Sabah, S'wak

Apart from helping the Orang Asli in Peninsula Malaysia, he said the NONEpresent government under the leadership of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak (left) was also going all out to develop the rural areas of Sabah and Sarawak "where most of the Indigenous peoples are found".

He said based on statistics provided by the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (JHEOA), at present there were 141,230 Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia, with Pahang having the most number with 50,792, followed by Perak with 40,856 and Selangor with 15,210.

In facing various challenges ahead, Mojigoh proposed that the responsibility for developing the Orang Asli should not be left solely on the JHEOA.

Instead, a mutli-agency approach should be adopted, with a special Orang Asli unit be set up in each of these agencies to attend to the social and economic needs of the Orang Asli, he said.

As for the indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak, he said one of the biggest challenges for the government was to resolve the dispute or conflicts over land and resources.

Mojigoh, who was representing Malaysia in the seminar, said despite the existence of laws protecting the rights to land in Sabah and Sarawak, "in practice, the state has been able to alienate large tracts of land for logging, development projects and commercial purposes".

He said the conflict could be traced back to the dual legal regimes for land that were followed prior to independence - a formal set of codified laws and another informal set of laws based on customary practices of indigenous communities.

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