

CommUnity

Communicating Unity

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2022



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JUST 30 SECONDS

We celebrated our newsletter's 1st Anniversary on 7th December 2022. Much has indeed happened and much more exciting things, I believe are in store for us. We started off with a monthly publication, then experimented with a bimonthly one (once every 2 months) and finally decided that we would set for a quarterly publication.

On the global arena, things are moving with an unprecedented pace. One piece of good news that people are very happy about was when the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared that the end of the pandemic was "in sight". Many countries abandoned the lockdowns, travel restrictions, and related measures that were imposed when COVID swept across the world in 2020. Life now is almost normal.

At the state and national level, the rakyat especially young people are exercising their democratic rights at the 15th General Election. Unity becomes a serious agenda of the current leadership and that's where YPS plays a critical role. And as an organisation that upholds unity, social concerns like mental health and the ageing population requires our attention and responsiveness.

Happy New Year 2023. Gong Xi Fa Chai.

Enjoy reading.

Thank you

Datu Aloysius J. Dris

Chief Executive
Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak

NEWS FLASH

Sowing seeds of unity, peace and harmony is every citizen's responsibility, says Anwar

POSTED ON DECEMBER 25, 2022, SUNDAY AT 8:33 AM

NATION



Anwar speaks during a press conference at Perdana Putra in Putrajaya on Dec 14, 2022. – Bernama photo

KUALA LUMPUR (Dec 25): Initiatives and efforts to sow the seeds of unity, peace and harmony is not just the responsibility of the government but rather each and every citizen must play a prominent role in continuously upholding the principles of unity.

www.theborneopost.com

YPS hails formation of unity government

by Irene C.
irene@theborneopost.com

KUCHING: Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak (YPS) commends with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong's decree for a stable government through the formation of Malaysia Unity Government.

YPS chief executive Datu Aloysius J Dris said, as a citizen, he would like to see that the country propels further under the new Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He is confident that everyone can work together despite differences in views and ideologies.

"These differences, in fact, could be our strengths since each party would bring distinct experiences, knowledge and ideas to the table, all for the benefit of the rakyat," he said in a statement yesterday.

"We could take a leaf out of Sarawak's experience as a model state of unity and harmony. Sarawak has shown that diversity is indeed strength," he noted.



DATU ALOYSIUS J DRIS

Celebrating diversity is not merely confined to festivities and observances, but more importantly, the respect and acceptance towards one another through our interactions and communications, he stressed.

Of course, this did not happen overnight. It took decades, he added.

"I believe that under our new Prime Minister and his leadership, we would together strive for Malaysia to be a model nation of unity and harmony whilst celebrating our differences."

These differences, in fact, could be our strengths since each party would bring distinct experiences, knowledge and ideas to the table, all for the benefit of the rakyat.

— Datu Aloysius J Dris, YPS chief executive

"The spirit of the Rukun Negeri is very much alive at this moment where the Yang di-Pertuan Agong as the Supreme Head of our nation is given the trust to advise and guide our leaders, whose belief in God as well as morality and good behaviours are intertwined and expected of every citizen," he said.

Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak, herewith, congratulates Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim on his appointment as the 10th Prime Minister of Malaysia.

Premier: Continuous unity, solidarity will ensure Sarawak's progress before ushering in 2030

Jan 20, 2023 @ 20:03



Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg. Photo credit: Premier's Office

KUCHING, Jan 20: Continuous unity and solidarity will ensure Sarawak has a firm grounding towards progress and advancement in the next eight years before ushering in 2030.

Sarawak Premier Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg said apart from that, it is equally important that Sarawak voice in Parliament must continue to be enhanced with the solid support of all Sarawakians.

dayakdaily.com

Borneo Post



SIGNIFICANT OBSERVANCES AND CELEBRATIONS

The United Nations allocates specific days, weeks, years and decades as occasions to mark particular events or topics so as to educate the general public on issues of concern, to mobilize political will and resources to address global problems, and to celebrate and reinforce achievements of humanity. (Please refer to <https://www.un.org/en/observances>)

Since its launch, the newsletter has been featuring selected observances and celebrations that have direct bearing not only to the nation but more importantly on YPS' roles in our society. Also, YPS believes that our microcosmic roles have long-term and definitive macrocosmic effects.



International Day of Older Persons

1st October



UNITY ACROSS THE BOARD

INSPIRATIONS

It has been quite a journey talking and listening to leaders in various capacities on the ideas and practical underpinnings of unity and harmony in Sarawak, and how we, meaning every one of us, could play an essential role now and in the future. Captured here are some advice and thoughts.

“ We can take a lot of inspirations from the flow of water from tributaries to a river and down to the sea, which depicts the common efforts of the people to develop the State and the nation. It is synonymous with the philosophy of the confluence of races through common activities that can bring about greater national unity... ”

TUN PEHIN SRI HAJI ABDUL TAIB MAHMUD

Governor of Sarawak
Chairman of Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak

“ ...bukanlah mudah untuk membina perpaduan dalam kalangan rakyat kita yang terdiri daripada pelbagai kaum dan agama tetapi kita telah membuktikan kita mampu melakukannya. We have to work together towards unity. Budaya hormat-menghormati adalah tonggak perpaduan kita di Sarawak. ”

YAB DATUK PATINGGI TAN SRI (DR) ABANG HAJI ABDUL RAHMAN ZOHARI BIN TUN DATUK ABANG HAJI OPENG

Premier of Sarawak

“ Be a role model for others - a role model for Unity, Solidarity and Keluarga Malaysia. ”

YBHG DATUK PATINGGI TAN SRI (DR) ALFRED JABU ANAK NUMPANG

Deputy Chairman,
Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak

“ Young people first of all, should be very proud to be Sarawakians, to be aware that we are a state where everybody lives together harmoniously. There are no very obvious differences between people. ”

YBHG DATUK PATINGGI TAN SRI DR GEORGE CHAN HONG NAM

Deputy Chairman,
Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak

“ The need and the desire to be united should be the key thing that holds Sarawak together. Remember this - live with it. ”

**YBHG TAN SRI DATO' SRI
EMPIANG JAB**

Advisor to Sarakup Indu Dayak Sarawak (SIDS), Founder and Chairperson of Iban Women Charitable Trust (IWCT)



“ We can use this bond of unity and harmony to overcome all adversities such as the flood and in fact achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals together, leaving no one behind. After all it's from the people, for the people. ”

**YBHG DATO SRI HAJAH ROHANI
BINTI ABDUL KARIM**



“ Our leaders and fore fathers have strived hard to build a peaceful and harmonious nation which we have inherited today and we should honour them for their effort...the best way to honour them is to continue to build on this culture of peace that they have started. ”

MR. RICHARD LON

Director, Immigration & Labour Management Unit,
Premier's Department



“ ...celebrate our differences which I believe is happening very well here in Sarawak. For me, it is important that we must be engaged in dialogues, not debates. ”

DR. ZUFAR YADI BRENDAN ABDULLAH

Executive Secretary, Majlis Pembangunan Sosial Sarawak



CONVERSATION I



Gill Raja

Accredited Mental Health First Aid Trainer at
MHAS, Committee Member MHAS

What is mental health? Is it simply the absence of mental illness?

No. The World Health Organisation defines mental health as **“a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”**.

It is helpful to think of mental health as a continuum. On people's better days they might meet that definition but there are likely to be days when we are not at our optimum and need to think how to improve our emotional well-being. Also, people who have a long-term mental health condition which is stable can aspire to that definition, just as say someone with diabetes which is well managed can live a good life. We need to attend to our mental health as well as our physical health remembering both can be affected by a range of illnesses, some which will pass and others which we need to learn how to live with.

What is your experience in handling cases of people with mental health conditions? Is it prevalent among young people in our society?

My personal experience has varied across my lifetime. Back when I lived in the UK, I studied psychology before training to be a social worker so had a range of experiences but it was not my specific specialist area though I did for several years focus on assisting elders with dementia. When I moved to Malaysia, back in 1985, I was more involved in developing services across various fields but did maintain an interest in mental health.

Since retirement from a lecturing post, I have increased my involvement with the Mental Health Association of Sarawak (MHAS) and have more direct contact as we offer people who are concerned about their mental health, or those close to them, a few appointments to listen to their problems and work out with them what paths might help them. This can include putting them in touch with the range of services and support networks which exist locally. It is so important to listen empathetically to people's experience and together work out what is contributing to their condition and

SOME KEY FACTS



to discuss the range of ways to ease their distress.

Mental health conditions are very common across all age groups. It is estimated that across a lifetime 1 in 4 people will experience some form of mental health problem – so we probably all have met people who are experiencing them and could have had, or might have in the future, a period of low mental health ourselves. It is so important the public realise this, so the stigma is removed and people are more open, understanding and supportive.

Fortunately, young people in Malaysia are showing more openness towards talking about their mental health problems than their elders. There is however an increase in the prevalence of mental health issues amongst this age group which could be in part more willingness to acknowledge the problem but also could be the pressures young people are under especially during the pandemic which increased isolation and disrupted studies and work. Even before the pandemic, the 2017 National Health Morbidity Survey of school-going adolescents between the ages of 13-17 showed the number of adolescents

contemplating suicide increased to 10% compared to 7.9% in 2012. There was also an increase in suicide attempts from 6.4% to 6.9%. A recent UNICEF report notes the second cause of death in adolescence aged 15-19 in Malaysia is suicide.

We also know some mental health conditions first show themselves in late teens or early twenties and that childhood adversity (such as experiencing abuse - including bullying - poverty, lack of family support) are risk factors for developing mental health conditions later. So, for all these reasons, we need to give special attention to our youth and ensure help is attuned to their needs and readily available. At the same time we should also be aware that elders are at risk of depression especially when facing multiple losses (for instance their roles at home or in society; loss of partner; deteriorating physical health) and find ways of reaching out which they find acceptable.

Does Sarawak (or Malaysia for that matter) have any kind of policies or interventions as regard mental health?

We are fortunate in Sarawak that the State is working with mental health specialists across agencies to reach out to a wider public to build more awareness; replace stigma with understanding and encourage people to access appropriate help early. For instance, before the pandemic, they invited MHAS to participate in their Randau programme which is a dialogue with remote rural communities and also asked us to devise a programme for other communities – which we call COMEL – to provide more basic information on mental health. They have also been supportive of the two-day mental health first aid programme we conduct which trains people how to approach and encourage people with mental health issues to seek professional help.

This training follows an internationally recognised curriculum which has been adapted to Malaysia and provides accreditation



1 in every 8 people in the world live with a mental disorder



Mental disorders involve significant disturbances in thinking, emotional regulation, or behaviour



There are many different types of mental disorders



Effective prevention and treatment options exist



Most people do not have access to effective care

(Please refer to <https://www.who.int/health-topics/mental-health>)

to those who pass, just like the more familiar physical first aid courses.

That said mental health policy in Malaysia, and across the world, still has a long way to go to meet the desired level of community-based services and support required despite policies for improvement being in place for many years, at least since 1988 in Malaysia.

There is a huge disparity between resources allocated to mental health compared to physical health although both are important and this has its roots in the misconceptions and negative attitudes which exist - even within the health system – towards mental health conditions. The pandemic has started a shift in attitudes but this needs to be translated into implementation of better policies and programmes so people are helped early and appropriately plus we also need to decriminalise suicide attempts by repealing Section 309 of the Penal Code. Before the pandemic the Ministry of Health had drawn up a national strategy for 2020-25 to advance integrated, easily accessible and acceptable assistance to all but to fulfil these ambitions there is still a mountain to climb.

Can you tell me a bit more about the Mental Health Association of Sarawak and how we can support your work?

MHAS has three autonomous branches being Miri, Sibü and Kuching with Kuching acting as the headquarters. Each branch runs public awareness programmes and tries to assist those with queries about mental health. Here in Kuching for many years we have run a small Group Home and have more recently launched a counselling service with the aim of providing a user-friendly access to help people concerned about their own or others mental health. We do not have the capacity to provide long-term therapy but do help those needing this find the appropriate help.

There is also for younger people a project called **MindBrew** which provides a safe

place to people under 35 to discuss together their mental well-being. More details of our work can be found on our website (<https://mhasarawak.com/>) or follow us on facebook.

Supporting us can be in many forms. We really hope more people, especially those managing work places or running educational establishments, will engage us to give training, such as the mental health first aid course, to their employees as this helps create more knowledgeable and supportive environments as well as dispel stigma. The funds for this training will also help us meet our overheads. These days NGOs need a core group of staff to coordinate and sustain our efforts but finding funding for salaries is always a challenge so help in raising funds is always appreciated as are people volunteering their time to advance our cause.

What crucial steps can we take or contribute towards the mental wellbeing of our society?

Everyone has a role to play. Recognising and responding supportively to those struggling with their mental health is one area but also attending to conditions which put people at more risk is important. Different conditions have different risk factors but for all of us

intense stress can have an adverse impact on our mental wellbeing. As the World Health Organisation has stated improving the conditions of daily living across the lifespan is needed especially reducing inequalities. Tackling discrimination is also important. Everyone needs to feel a sense of belonging. This includes at work; in their families, communities and wider society. Diversity needs to be embraced not vilified and marginalised.

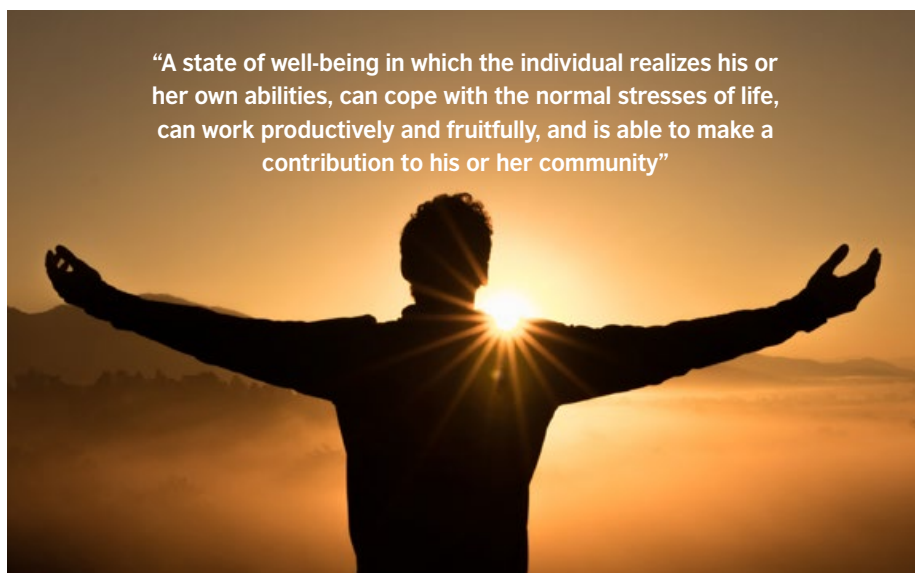
Those of you working for national unity and harmony are playing your part as you are helping to set a social environment that will promote emotional well-being. The social determinants of health – both physical and mental – are so important.

Sources

Ministry of Health Malaysia (2020) *National Strategic Plan for Mental Health 2020-2025* (https://www.moh.gov.my/moh/resources/Penerbitan/Rujukan/NCD/National%20Strategic%20Plan/The_National_Strategic_Plan_For_Mental_Health_2020-2025.pdf)

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“A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”

CONVERSATION II

SARAWAK GERONTOLOGY & GERIATRICS SOCIETY (SGGS)

Dennis Tan



President Sarawak Gerontology & Geriatrics Society (SGGS)

Gerontology refers to the study of aging and older adults.

Geriatrics refers to the healthcare of old people.

Older Malaysians

The United Nations (UN) defined an ageing country as a country where a community of people aged 65 years and above makes up 7% of the total population.

According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DoSM), Perak has the highest ageing population in 2020 with 8.9% while Kedah, Perlis (7.9%) and Sarawak (7.5%) are considered states with ageing population since those above the 65 years make up 7% of the population.

Population Aged 60 Years and Over

2022^e
3.6 Mil.
11.1%

2021
3.5 Mil.
10.7%

2020
3.3 Mil.
10.3%



Please refer to Department of Statistics Malaysia (www.dosm.gov.my)



Please share with us the roles and functions of the Sarawak Gerontology & Geriatrics Society (SGGS).

The Sarawak Gerontology & Geriatrics Society (SGGS) was registered with the Registrar of Society in 2019. Our main concern is towards healthy elderly in our community so as to enhance their Golden Years through Healthy Living Protocols. We achieved these through our activities such as health talks and seminars, field outings, camping and picnics, competitions and a host of other activities. The purpose of these activities is to **keep dementia at bay**. We have branches in Miri, Bintulu, Sibul, Kapit and we are planning for one in Sri Aman in 2023.

Does Sarawak have any kind of policies or interventions on our ageing population?

I am glad that the Sarawak Government especially the Ministry of Women, Early Childhood and Community Wellbeing Development is very far-sighted in this matter by putting in place interventions that will focus on health, economy, saving and housing in preparation for our aged nation.

Our society is collaborating with the Ministry in activities that are related to ageing.

The seniors have a lot of experiences and wisdom to share with our young people especially when we talk about

unity and harmonious relations in Sarawak. What is your take on this?

We believe and profess continuity. We may not see the harvest now but we definitely can and want to see the growth of the Sarawak Gerontology and Geriatrics Society. The younger generations are the current missing link which SGGS are nurturing. We have lowered our membership requirements to 45 years and above. We visualize this paradigm since if we start earlier, then we can harness and explore the energies of the young.

This working together between the young and the seniors, I believe is very important indeed in strengthening our unity and harmonious relations so as to ensure that Sarawak continues to be the model state in unity.

Thank you.



Conversations is a platform where we exchange thoughts, ideas and seek advice from Sarawakians of varied backgrounds on contemporary topics and how they relate to unity and harmonious relations.

2. CULTURE UNWRAPPED

CUBA Series

The **CUBA series** strive to promote unity among the younger generation by imparting values that could contribute towards conserving our culture and legacy in the present era.

History Lesson

History Lesson is about learning and participating in various cultural and traditional practices of major ethnic groups in Sarawak. There will be four episodes which cover a variety of themes such as touring traditional houses, sampling traditional snacks, guessing other nationalities' languages, and learning the traditional dance.

Note

All the videos can be accessed at Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak social media such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Youtube



3. ART AS A UNIFYING FACTOR

National Competition Workshop on Arabic and Chinese Calligraphy

Sarawak hosted the first-ever national level Arabic calligraphy and Chinese calligraphy competition workshop last year. The 3-day workshop was organised by the Sarawak Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) Kuching-Samarahan Chinese Calligraphy Society and supported by the Ministry of Tourism, Creative Industry and Performing Arts (MTCP).

A total of 210 participants from Sabah, Melaka, Selangor, Penang, Johor, Kedah, Perak, Pahang, Kelantan, Terengganu, Kuala Lumpur and Sarawak took part in the workshop and competition.

Paintings

Paintings could tell stories visually of cultural diversity and similarities through imaginations, themes, colours, compositions, media and other elements.

Our Sarawak artist Gerald Goh painted these after he attended the **Festival of Arts (Budayaw)** in the Philippines, to show the similarity in culture amidst the celebration of diversity between Sarawak and the Philippines.

SARAWAK REGATTA

Sarawak regattas started in 1872 during the James Brooke era to end racial wars or violence among the local tribes. By having boat races to prove their power, strength and speed, the regattas have since continued to bring peaceful competitiveness between the tribes in the area.

(Please refer to <https://regatta.sarawaktourism.com>)



Courtesy of BorneoTalk



Contact us

CommUnity is published by Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak. We welcome any suggestions or contributions to further improve your experience with our newsletter.

Thank you.

Yayasan Perpaduan Sarawak

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DID YOU MISS OUT ON OUR PREVIOUS ISSUES?