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International Workshop on Cultural Diversity in Southeast Asia

Organized by: Kota Kinabalu Liaison Office, ILCAA in TUFS

Date: sunday, September 11, 2011

Time: 14:00-18:00

Venue: Manukan Room, Le Meridien Kota Kinabalu,
Jalan Tun Fuad Stephens, Sinsuran, Kota Kinabalu, 88000, Malaysia

Diversity and peace in Malaysia: A commentary

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It is inevitable to discuss sociological diversity in its various renditions from a negative perspective, emphasizing the differences, contradiction, contestation and conflict between and within the different social collectives (ethnic, religious, and the like). The overwhelming fear that diversity could cause and end in violence underpinned the negative perspective invites intense study on the various sociological fault lines generated by diversity in the hope a better understanding could be developed and conflicts avoided. Thus very rarely one finds analyses on diversity (cultural, political, religious and the like) and its relation with peace, in the sense that diversity is seen as something positive and possesses and generates internal dynamics which help to build social sustainability and resilience of a society. Using the Malaysian case, this paper argues that although, epistemologically, diversity features 'difference, dividedness, and distance', it also contains strong integrative centripetal elements that dilute or negate the potentiality of a breakdown. Good governance, sensible economic management and openness to openness reinforce the positive elements in diversity. Thus a good balance between the negative and the positive in a society endowed with diversity creates peace and social cohesion that, in turn, brings longevity to the society and its social system. Empirical evidence from Malaysia shall be presented to support this argument.

Brief BIODATA

Shamsul A.B. is Distinguished Professor of Social Anthropology and, currently, Founding Director, Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia. He has researched, written and lectured extensively, in the last 25 years, on the theme "politics, culture and economic development," with an empirical focus on Malaysia and the Southeast Asian region. His award-

winning monograph **From British to Bumiputera Rule** (1986, reprinted 1990, 2nd edition 2004) is a study on the phenomenology of class and ethnic relations in a Malaysian rural community. His academic activism takes many forms: conferences and lecture tours in Asia, Europe, North & South America & the Oceania; public policy formulation in Malaysian higher education; museum re-conceptualization projects; and as a political analyst on Malaysia current affairs in local and international media (Channel News Asia, National Geographic, Aljazeera, Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the BBC). Recently, he was awarded the prestigious ACADEMIC PRIZE 2008, of the Fukuoka Asian Cultural Prize, Japan.