

PRESS RELEASE FOR SARAWAK HERITAGE SOCIETY (MAY 2008)

(To local press, Badan Warisan Malaysia and Penang Heritage Trust newsletter)

Sarawak Heritage Society (SHS) has elected a new committee for year 2008-2010 during the Second AGM held on the 28th March 2008. Ar Mike Boon was elected to succeed Datu Aloysius Dris as the new President. The committee members are as follows:

Vice President : Joseph Ingai

Secretary : Bong Siak Khiun

Treasurer: Peggy Wong

Committee members : Chai Phay Yung, Hong Boon Kheng, Ian Thomas Parker, Rahah Bt. Hassan, and Rose Au Nyat Jun.

Since its formation in 2006, SHS has been trying to gather information on the conditions of cultural heritage conservation in Sarawak. In the process, guidance and support from established network like Badan Warisan Malaysia and Penang Heritage Trust were valuable to shorten the learning curve.

SHS has been actively promoting conservation by giving talks and providing consultancy advices to the local communities, while carrying out joint venture projects with professional bodies and other organizations. The Kuching Heritage Trail is an on going project in partnership with PAM Sarawak Chapter (PAMSC). Brochure for this self guided trail is available at RM3.50

through selected bookshops and craft shops in Kuching. SHS and PAMSC are preparing to offer guided trail by members who were trained under UNESCO endorsed programme conducted by Penang Heritage Trust.

As part of Sarawak State Library's programme, the "Sarawakiana Talk with SHS" series was launched in February this year. This series was conducted for members, college students, school teachers and public. The principles, process and practice of heritage conservation were introduced through lectures, heritage walks, case study and site visits. It is intended to be a continuous education and awareness programme that can be adopted as a 'training-of-trainer' module or simplify to suit specific target group.

SHS has also drafted a proposal to set up a State Heritage Committee (SHC) acting as an advisory body to the government on heritage conservation matters in Sarawak. This initiative is taken up by the Ministry of Urban Development and Tourism (MUDT), where the kick-off meeting held on the 27th of September 2007 was chaired YB Dato Sri Wong Soon Koh. The members are made up of representatives from the relevant government agencies, NGOs, professional bodies and individuals knowledgeable in conservation.

SHS as NGO where members are volunteers have always been struggling with limited human resources to carry out scheduled activities that require intensive research and planning in this field of work. What the society has experienced so far is best expressed by the immediate past President, Datu Aloysius, saying that "SHS is still very young, I have found out that public expectation from us is very high. However, the awareness of cultural heritage conservation among the public is low. But when it comes to assistance and commitment, it was very hard to come by."

The new committee has ensured their best endeavor to carry on with the work where foundation was laid by Datu Aloysius. From what has been learned in the past, the society will focus on three main agenda in the next two years.

Capacity building, public awareness and education to strengthen the understanding on cultural heritage conservation remain as priority. Affection to our heritage has always being expressed emotionally, thus the public shall be well informed of the subject so that discussions and commentaries on conservation issues are cohesive and relevant.

The effort to form a model of cooperation will be enhanced by working closely with the State Heritage Committee, in identifying the critical issues, set the criteria and guideline, and to develop the system to manage the diverse natural, tangible and intangible cultural heritage in Sarawak. It is important to note that conservation movement will not be

effective without the support of the people and the government.

SHS will continue to advice on conservation issues when being consulted while maintaining focus on tangible cultural heritage projects in collaboration with others interested parties. A few potential projects have been identified subject to availability of fund and committed personnel to see them through.

SHS is glad to inform that, in March 2008, the Registrar of Society (ROS) has approved SHS's appeal to amend its constitution to allow Malaysians and non-Malaysians residing in Sarawak to joint the society. A new student's membership category has been created and reduction of membership fee has also been introduced with immediate effect. The society always welcome members who wish to contribute to the cause of heritage conservation in Sarawak.

SHS can be reached through email at sarawakheritagesociety@gmail.com or be contacted at 082-246810.