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GREAT STEP FORWARD IN HERITAGE PRESERVATION FROM STATE GOVERNMENT – CM'S CALL

Sarawak Heritage Society and PAMSC (Malaysian Institute of Architects Sarawak Chapter) are pledging their support for Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Adenan Satem in his decision to conservethe surviving 14 forts of Sarawak during the opening of the newly restored Fort Alice on Saturday in Sri Aman. His calls support his speech at the STF Tourism Forum held on the preceding Thursday in which he stated that the 'unique features' of the State's history, including the rule of the 'White Rajah' was of great interest to visitors to Sarawak. Both NGOs strongly believe that the series of forts are part of a narrative that would delight tourists and be a definitive step forward in any drive to list under UNESCO World Heritage. They also commend his call to preserve all remaining trees on the site.

Pic 1 - CM pointing at trees on site and instructing not to cut down any more that are green

Pic 2 - A keen historian, CM verifies the facts on display

Out of thirty forts built across Sarawak, stretching from Lundu to Lawas, only 14 remain in different stages of dilapidation. Even Fort Alice had fallen into serious disrepair before the RM5 million project under Jabatan Muzium Sarawak to restore it to its former glory. PAMSC Chairman and Conservation architect Mike Boon said: 'Many of the forts have been demolished or even have fallen into the river. We thank the Chief Minister for his support in this pursuit to preserve our cultural heritage for future generation before they are totally forgotten."

Sarawak Heritage Society President, Karen Shepherd, backed up PAMSC's sentiment by offering the support of both NGOs in helping the museum to prepare a plan for their conservation. "*As NGOs, we have been campaigning for a multi-stakeholder approach to heritage conservation in the state. We will do anything within our resources and expertise to help push forward this initiative.*"

Pic 3 - Enjoying all the Museum's period objects on display

Both NGOs commend the relevant Ministries in their first steps to set up a Heritage Council to oversee such matters and hope that this will

soon result in a heritage unit staffed with knowledgeable personnel who can develop a conservation management plan for effective implementation of the Chief Minister's directive.

Pic 4 - The photo of a lifetime – CM stresses the importance of the community engagement programme in a project of this nature

Mike Boon went on to say: "*The schoolchildren of Sri Aman who were involved in the community engagement program alongside the project have had the greatest possible finale to this 18-month series of events. The Chief Minister and his wife, along with his Senior Ministers all took time to acknowledge their efforts in learning about the Fort's conservation and even took a group photograph! This will stay with them for the rest of their lives and cement a love of their heritage for future generations.*"

The community engagement programme, part of the Reminiscing Forgotten Treasures series started in Siniawan by PAMSC, SHS and other NGOs, has been a very successful model of how to energise the community behind heritage sites, enhancing their significance as examples of living heritage. The model has demonstrated what can be achieved by links between NGOs and corporate sponsors, such as NS Bluescope Lysaght (Sarawak) Sdn Bhd. It was introduced to Simanggang and will soon be reintroduced to Kuching. Karen Shepherd added: "*We would like to propose that our NGOs embark on a new project in Kuching to physically conserve a heritage building and, at the same time, run a third installment in this successful community engagement series for our state's capital. We will consult with the Museum to identify an appropriate site for physical conservation and call for more like-minded NGOs and corporations to step forward to support our next undertaking.*"