



NEVER TOO OLD: The Head of State presenting the scroll to Menua.

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First Iban PhD recipient from Unimas

KOTA SAMARAHAN: Dr Robert Menua Saleh created history for Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) when he received his scroll at the university's 12th convocation ceremony here yesterday.

At 54 years old, not only was he the oldest graduate, but Menua, who is the Tun Jugah Foundation's Oral History Department research director, is also the first Iban to obtain a PhD from the university.

Menua, who graduated from the Faculty of Social Sciences, told The Borneo Post he decided to study again because he believed that it was important for him to aim for the highest possible academic qualification.

"My motto is when there is a will there is a way," said the father of two, adding that he became a full-time student in 2003.

He also said as a director of research in Tun Jugah Foundation who had to deal a lot with foreign thinkers, he decided that it was important that for his image

as well as that of the Foundation he had to get a PhD.

Menua earned the degree with a thesis on the 'Communication roles of Iban community structures' in selected development projects in Kanowit district with emphasis on the role of 'Randau'.

'Randau,' he explained, was a genuine form of participatory communication among Iban longhouse communities and it was still widely recognised by the Iban people as an effective mode or channel of communication.

Menua described his journey in Unimas as the most challenging endeavour he had undergone in life. Ultimately, he hoped that his success would encourage more Ibans to obtain PhDs.

"I really want to see more people from the Iban community graduating with PhDs. There are still not many Iban PhD holders compared to the other communities," said Menua, who hails from Sungai Ngemah in Kanowit.

Asked what his advice is for others his age who might be considering studying again, he replied: "I really want to encourage those who have the willingness to study to do so.

"Do not be discouraged by difficulties or constraints. The most important thing in life is always be motivated to do something better."

He thanked the Tun Jugah foundation for sponsoring his studies and all the Iban communities and government officers in Kanowit for their cooperation when he carried out his field work in Kanowit from 2003 to 2004.

Menua received his PhD from the Yang di-Pertua Negeri Sarawak Tun Datuk Patinggi Abang Muhammad Salahuddin. He was among Unimas' first three Bumiputera PhD graduates. The other two are Polity Abdullah (Resource Science at Technology Faculty) and Dr Onni Suhaiza Selaman (Engineering Faculty).

A total of 1,470 graduates received their scrolls yesterday.