

**Opening Speech By
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bin Tun Datuk Abang Haji Openg
The Rt. Hon. Chief Minister of Sarawak**

**2nd International Conference on
Language Studies (ICLS) 2017
*Sustaining Languages and Cultures: Borneo and Beyond***

**Wednesday | 9 August 2017 | 10.00 am
Riverside Majestic Hotel, Kuching, Sarawak**

1. Let me begin by extending a warm welcome to all the conference delegates especially to those from outside Malaysia to this International Conference on Language Studies or ICLS 2017.
2. I am glad that the Faculty of Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) has decided to organise this conference once again, as it will be most interesting and exciting to see more than 200 participants from all over the world converging here to present and discuss their latest research findings and innovations in related fields of studies.
3. I believe that this conference under the theme “Sustaining Languages and Cultures: Borneo and Beyond” will provide a platform for local and international practitioners and researchers to discuss various issues related to the research and preservation of languages and cultures in Borneo and neighbouring regions. Some of these issues will cover areas such as ‘Language Documentation and Conservation’, ‘Local Knowledge, Literature, and Culture’, and ‘Language policy and Practice’, and many others.
4. I think this conference is also timely in various respects. Firstly, it takes place at a time and in a world that is undergoing rapid globalization and digitalisation – *politically, economically, culturally, and socially*. Advances in technology have fueled this process and the impact is felt in every aspect of life, including the languages that we speak and the cultures that we uphold for many generations.
5. Secondly, in the face of the rapidly changing world that threatens the very existence of societies, the time has never been more right for us to discuss openly and seriously issues that affect our people, their languages and cultures. Sarawak is a land rich in historical and cultural heritage; and home to more than 40 ethnic and sub-ethnic groups living in peace and harmony, speaking in diverse ethnic languages and practicing unique cultures and ways of life. In view of this great diversity in Sarawak, I cannot over-emphasised the importance of this conference to us to preserve and conserve our cultures, languages and tradition.

6. Various works have been undertaken by the state government and a number of agencies to preserve and conserve the people's languages and cultures, but the question remains:

Will these initiatives be sufficient when some of these languages and cultures are potentially or critically facing extinction?

For example, as I understand, Tatau, Lugat, Narum, Sihan, Lahanan, Baketan, and Seru that have been categorised as endangered languages and are facing extinction if no measures and concerted efforts are taken to preserve them.

7. Indigenous languages are not only slowly dying out due to the influence of dominant culture and languages such as Bahasa Malaysia and English, but also due to the rise of other languages and cultures such as **The Korean Wave**, that is the export of Korean popular culture through the creative industry, which has impacted upon people of all ages in many parts of the world.

8. Therefore, it is time that community of researchers and practitioners, as well as members and leaders of indigenous communities to collaborate with local and foreign institutions of higher learning, as well as stakeholders in preserving, conserving, and revitalizing indigenous languages and cultural heritage for our future generation.

9. I personally believe that UNIMAS and the newly established Faculty of Language and Communication can take the lead in this critical initiative. I understand that there will be a signing ceremony of MOU between UNIMAS and Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka right after this.

10. I also understand that there are delegates of institutions of higher learning from USA, South Africa, Australia, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Brunei, not to mention teachers, students and community leaders and members amongst us. This is indeed a great start for UNIMAS to build capacity and strengthen partnership in creating a vibrant and sustainable future of languages and cultures in the state and beyond.

11. I hope that, by virtue of the event being held in Sarawak, it will also mean a greater focus on issues and concerns not only specific to the people Sarawak, but also those living in Borneo and beyond who are culturally and linguistically diverse. It is indeed an honour for Sarawak to play host to this conference which seeks to examine impact of globalization on indigenous languages and cultures and empower the community of researchers and practitioners to work together towards a common goal of sustaining languages and cultures in the region.

12. I have this experience of engaging with this one local Taiwan indigenous group when I was the Minister of Industrial Development. And we have a very good discourse while trying to promote industrialization in Sarawak we also talked about cultural engagement in this particular region. As you might be aware thousands of years ago, there was this big land mass before it was submerged under water. Taiwan, China, Indo-China and Borneo was one land mass. There was this migration

of people within this region and language seems to be common to all areas in this particular region.

13. With such great hopes, I very much look forward to the results of your deliberations in the next two days of ICLS 2017. I also hope you will provide advice for Sarawak to help us in not just preserving but also enhancing the richness of our unique cultures and languages. Finally, I wish all of you fruitful deliberations and I sincerely hope the conference will succeed in achieving its aims.

14. Finally, thank you to the organising committee, all the speakers and participants for all your great effort. To all those who come from afar, I wish you a pleasant stay in Sarawak and enjoy Sarawak hospitality in Kuching.

Thank you.