

RSOG SEMINAR

Leadership and Orang Asli

with

Achom Luji

- When** : 10 December 2015
- Where** : Razak School of Government
- Speakers** : Achom Luji

About the Seminar

One of the contentious debate in Leadership is on whether the leaders are made or born. Whilst one can argue on this, evidently, situation and context influence leadership considerably. In that light, this seminar intends to look at leadership and *Orang Asli*, the minority indigenous people of Peninsular Malaysia. They are estimated around 120,000 in number; distributed unevenly among 19 different linguistic groups. Apart from the well-known *Batin and Penghulu* (chieftain), leadership roles are also observed in the form of *Lembaga Adat* (council) and *Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung* (village committee). What is Leadership to *Orang Asli*? Or is such a concept non-existent in the first place? If it does exist, what can one learn from the *Orang Asli* and are there any that can be applied into the public or private sector context? To the *Orang Asli* themselves, how best can the public and private sector help them to enhance their Leadership.

Summary

In Devotions upon Emergent Occasion, John Donne's oft-quoted line – “No Man Is an Island” is read in entirety as “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, part of the main.” The very essence of the phrase can be inferred that one can be in the most remote places on earth but they remain as part of a tribe, a nation, or part of the world's population. The same should be said of one of the oldest lineages of Malaysia, the *Orang Asli* of Peninsular Malaysia, as their existence predates the periods of colonisation, surge of independence, and current state of modernity. The indigenous people of Peninsular Malaysia - the *Orang Asli*, comprise of three main tribes namely the Senoi, the Proto-Malays, and the Negritos. They make up approximately 0.6% of the total population in Malaysia. Whilst small in number, there remain numerous challenges facing the existence of this population especially in this digital age.

In his talk entitled Leadership and *Orang Asli*, Mr. Achon Luji enlightened the audience with the cultural identity of the *Orang Asli*, specifically as part of the Semai tribe (a subset of Senoi), and his thoughts and opinions on the issues surrounding *Orang Asli* as Malaysia stretches to become a developed nation. It was highly emphasised that the *Orang Asli* is a unique society with their own cultural values that is highly regarded and observed within its community. This community reveres to their leaders such as their chieftain, often one who is knowledgeable of the local customs and folkways. In addition to the chieftain, there will also be *Tok Halak* – faith healer, who is often tasked to cure or provide remedy for the ill, and *Tok Tandir* who is responsible and advice sought for any interpersonal relationship unions or separations. In ceremonies such as harvest season, rainy season, and burial, it will be officiated or led by a respected individual of the society. Thus, it can be said that the concept of leaders are ingrained in the society and they are not at loss with leadership during any rites of passages in their lives.

According to the speaker, at the onset the lives of *Orang Asli* is focused to address their basic needs - identifying suitable lands for daily activities such as farming and hunting for families. He is of the view that the *Orang Asli* community experienced change from 1948 with the establishment of *Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli*. The existence of this governmental body introduced the community to education and other human development activities that are being delivered to the general public from late 1960s. This also allowed some of the members of community to work away from their community, which could be inferred as an inclusive means of providing the voice of the community to the ‘more mainstream’ society. These educational efforts have led to some of the community members to participate in the professional world, which includes as lawyers, lecturers and doctors. Nevertheless, there remain those who prefer to stay in the community as they are. He is in the opinion that the community ought to be kept abreast with the changes in the world.

In the consideration that *Orang Asli* are laid back, he is in the opinion that the community are likely to be more receptive to accept things as they are or as how they are given and are more than willing to be a follower in most instances. This tendency to follow and mimic is also likely to cause some segments of the community to become more extreme based on the type of

influence that they are exposed to. The influence, whether positive or negative, often come from three main segments of society – those in the political domain, those with capitalist interests, and the religious groups. Nevertheless, there remain the potential to enrich them with positive support. This, he believes, is necessary as means to cope with social ills that are currently plaguing the *Orang Asli* community. Thus, he added that the future of *Orang Asli* requires a leader that espouses moderation.

Issues raised

1. The values of *Orang Asli* need to be cherished and preserved for posterity. It can be developed in forms of creative products or through various medias in ensuring its cultural sustainability, and at the same time allow for some economic gains.
2. In managing and assisting the *Orang Asli* community, meaningful engagement between the community itself with government, non-governmental organisations, and private sector is seen as the way forward to ensure significant participation and impact by all parties involved in addressing any given issue.
3. In times of disasters and crisis, the basic needs of survival – clean water, food, and shelter, remains a paramount form of assistance provided for *Orang Asli*.

About the Speaker

Encik Achon Luji served the government for 36 years, with his first posting at the *Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli* as office assistant in 1969 and was then promoted to head the information unit. He then served the Radio Television Malaysia (RTM), heading *Unit Siaran Orang Asli (Asyik FM)* until his retirement in 2005. His involvement in community activity includes establishing the *Persatuan Orang Asli Semenanjung Malaysia (POASM)* and *Koperasi Orang Asli*, Chairman of JKKK Kampung Kuala Koyan, and is continuously invited as a motivational speaker on *Orang Asli* related matters. He has also been invited to present working papers on *Orang Asli* arts and culture in local universities and the National Museum, including appointment as a panel for many seminars.

Contact

To get more information on this event, you can contact us via email at programmes@rsog.com.my