

Political Transformation Conference: Sabah Security & ESSZONE Report Chief Minister of Sabah, YAB Datuk Seri Panglima Musa bin Aman officiated the opening of the Political Transformation Conference: Sabah Security & ESSZONE on 3rd April 2013 at the Magellan Sutera Harbour Resort, Kota Kinabalu. The Conference were attended by more than 650 participants including the cabinet ministers from Sabah, members of the Sabah State Assembly, the law fraternity, specifically those from the Sabah Law Association and the Bar Council Malaysia, civil servants (including teachers and academicians), members of statutory bodies, law enforcement bodies, members of the civil society organisations (such as PACOS – Partners of Community Organisations in Sabah and Migration Working Group), and the wider public. The Political Transformation Conference: Sabah Security & ESSZONE, organised jointly by Razak School of Government (RSOG), the Chief Minister of Sabah Office, Attorney General's Chambers (AGC) and Institut Terjemahan Buku Malaysia (ITBM) provides relevant stakeholders and interested public with an avenue to discuss the legal, social and other aspects pertaining to security in Sabah. Of late, Malaysia is being challenged and needing to relook its way of tackling security and safety. Occurring in time when the nation is undergoing transformation in the political and legal, this space of engagement between the executive, the government and the general public can ultimately lead to greater understanding of roles and fostering relationships in times where security and safety is an ever pressing issue. The state of Sabah is the first state to host the Political Transformation Conference, subsequent to the Persidangan Transformasi Perundangan held in early January 2013 in Kuala Lumpur. This one day conference also saw the launch of YBhg. Tan Sri Abd Gani Patail's book entitled, "Putting to Rest the Claims To Sabah by the Self-Proclaimed Sultanate of Sulu" by the Chief Minister of Sabah. The Deputy Inspector General of Police, YBhg. Tan Sri Dato' Sri Khalid bin Abd Bakar shared with the public a presentation on 'Issues of National Security and Combating Terrorism: The Case of Lahad Datu', providing a chronological outlook on the situation and measures undertaken to curb terrorism and increase safety measures. YBhg Tan Sri Abd Gani Patail then shared his views on 'The ESSCOM Factor: Moving Sabah Security into the Next Level'. An open forum ensued where concerns, comments and recommendations were made in relation to the presentations by the speakers. A total of 20 questions were raised during the question and answer session. Some of the key issues raised are as follows: Border Security and Internal Safety The initiation of ESSZONE is not new as in the past; there have been similar initiatives such as RASCOM (Rajang Area Security Command) where its inception was to flush out communist terrorist in Sarawak during the 1970s. The difference is that it now provides the holistic view of citizen's livelihood and economic consideration through resettlements and yet still ensures that the internal safety and security is protected. However, border security effectiveness is raised as it has been an issue that links to high prevalence of undocumented migrants. Citizenship and Undocumented Migrants It was inevitable that the issue of citizenship and undocumented migrants were raised in a platform such as this, especially when issues of security is being discussed. The sentiment is mostly on how it has been an ever present and complicated issue and is yet to be addressed comprehensively by the government. The lack of monitoring and enforcement has further caused difficulty in ensuring that this issue is adequately managed. This concern was raised by both legislators and members of the public, using personal narratives anecdotes to concretise the depth of the issue. Accountability and Integrity Issues of accountability and integrity were raised, especially in relation to enforcement of certain laws (example used was the illegal possession of fire arms). The lack of stringent monitoring and enforcement of authority and to a certain extent, the acceptance of graft-related practices, were highlighted. The laissez-faire attitude towards these practices would breed further corrupt practices and would be against the ethos of accountability and integrity and as thus, would be detrimental to the success of ESSZONE. The members of conference were in the opinion that all parties should

shoulder the responsibility and highlight these unscrupulous practices to relevant bodies for investigation and subsequent prosecution. Civic Participation and Engagement Civil society has been making vital contributions to the socio-political situation in Malaysia over the years, and to a certain extent, assisted in service delivery in Sabah. To enhance this collaborative participation, the support of policy-makers is crucial and thus it is imperative that civil society engage with the civil service and elected representatives who remain the primary channel for policy formulation, implementation and the enactment of laws. Participation of civil society in consultation, implementation and monitoring with the relevant bodies is also crucial, to ensure that the objectives are met. Conclusion The ESSZONE is seen as a necessary initiative in response to recent security issues in Sabah. It is also seen as an attempt to contextualise the issues occurring in the region that is not solely constraint to security, but also to ensure livelihoods of citizens are being protected. The effort is also to identify workable solution on an intricate matter with a myriad of issues. However, concerns still remain on its implementation and monitoring and it was highly suggested that a more collaborative approach, one that extends beyond government machinery and encompasses community leaders and civil society is needed.