

## Land ownership should not be a barrier to children's education, says Sabah leader

KOTA KINABALU: Improving education in Sabah should not hinge upon matters like land ownership, says former senator Datuk Donald Peter Mojuntin (pic) in response to a statement by Education Minister Datuk Dr Mohd Radzi Jidin.

During a recent visit to Beluran district on the east coast, Mohd Radzi had said problems with land ownership were delaying efforts to improve or repair schools in certain states, including Sabah and Sarawak.

He added that schools in Felda settlements were among those involved.

Mojuntin, who is Opposition party Upko deputy president, said the minister's statement had put the Federal Government's commitment to education in states like Sabah and Sarawak in question.

"As a Sabahan, I cannot help but feel outraged by the statement which is basically saying that the Federal Government will not help unless and until (the) relevant lands are transferred to it.

"This is tantamount to holding Sabah to ransom.

"Where is the priority – land ownership or education for our children?" he said in a statement on Tuesday (July 19).

On Sunday (July 17), Mohd Radzi said the ministry was serious in implementing the legalisation or ownership transfer of school land from state governments to the Lands and Mines Director-General Department to ease future planning of school infrastructure.

He said the main factors that hindered efforts to upgrade schools, especially those with dilapidated buildings, were related to the status of the school land.

"There are instances where the school site is still not owned by the department. So new construction efforts to replace the dilapidated buildings cannot be implemented.

"We are doing it seriously, discussing with the state governments so that the legalisation can be done quickly," he said after attending the Beluran district-level Teachers' Day celebrations.

Mojuntin said Sabah has the most people affected by poverty in the country.

Citing **Statistics Department** findings, he said that in 2020, the percentage of people living in extreme poverty in Sabah was 25.3% compared to 8.4% at the national level.

He added that of the 10 poorest districts in Malaysia identified under the 12th Malaysia Plan, eight were in Sabah, namely Kudat, Pitas, Kota Marudu, Beluran, Tongod, Telupid, Nabawan and Kota Belud.

"It is a fact the world over that education is the main answer to eradicating poverty.

“How can proper and sufficient education be (provided) if Sabah has the biggest number of dilapidated schools? According to a statement by the Deputy Education Minister II earlier this year, Sabah has 270 such schools but only 31 were approved for upgrading for the period 2016 to 2020,” he said.

Mojuntin urged Putrajaya to provide the funds and give Sabah the autonomy to oversee education matters in the state.

“Enough with lip service and delaying tactics in developing Sabah. Why is the minister being so legalistic?

“If he wants to be legalistic then why is the federal government ignoring its constitutional obligation under Article 112C and 112D and the 10th schedule of the Malaysian Constitution to pay back to Sabah 40% of all yearly revenues collected from the state?” he asked.

According to Mojuntin, Sabah would have enough funds to improve and upgrade its schools had the Federal administration paid what was owed to the state since the late 1970s.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2022/07/19/land-ownership-should-not-be-a-barrier-to-children039s-education-says-sabah-leader>