

Headline	Sarawak can be top furniture exporter		
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Sarawak can be top furniture exporter

By **Jonathan Chia**

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KUCHING: Sarawak has the potential to be the country's top contributor of furniture for export because it is a major producer of tropical timber and timber products.

Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Dato Sri Douglas Uggah Embas said his ministry would help the state achieve this status by 2020.

Uggah stressed that this vision could be achieved if furniture manufacturers produce value-added products with local traditional ethnic identity for an international niche market.

He urged furniture manufacturers and related industry players in the state to fully embrace change and explore the various available technologies, expertise, incentives and new materials to enhance design and quality for export.

"Furniture and wood-based industry players must take a serious view of the trade barriers and requirements for green products resulting from concerns over environmental issues, especially the conservation and sustainability of biodiversity and forest resources.

"In this area, the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) has the expertise, experience and facilities for the research and development and commercialisation of furniture and other forestry products to offer assistance to the industry players," Uggah said during the official opening of the Sarawak Furniture Industry Development Seminar 2012 yesterday.

Although there is a good future for the furniture market due to increasing international demand, he said, the country's furniture industry faced challenges such as competition from countries like China, Indonesia and Vietnam.

To overcome such challenges, he said the National Timber

Industry Policy (Natip) underlined various strategies for the transformation of the wood-based industry, including the furniture industry.

"The target for this policy is to reduce the export of premier wood products such as timber, sawn timber and plywood to 40 per cent and at the same time to increase the value-added downstream products such as furniture and building components to 60 per cent by the year 2020," he said.

Under Natip, FRIM has been entrusted with the responsibility to lead a committee which would focus on innovation and technology.

Uggah pointed out that FRIM's internationally recognised accreditation labs would help locally made products to be accepted in the global market.

The seminar was organised by FRIM, Sarawak Timber Industry Development Corporation (STIDC) and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas).

During the function, Uggah also witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the three parties for collaboration in areas of furniture design and development, training, technical services and the setting up of a furniture testing laboratory in the state.

The signatories were FRIM director-general Datuk Dr Abd Latif Mohmod — on behalf of Malaysia Forestry Research and Development Board (MFRDB), STIDC general manager Datu Sarudu Hoklai, and Unimas deputy vice-chancellor Prof Dr Peter Songan.

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Dato Sri Douglas Uggah Embas, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment

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LATEST DESIGN: Uggah (third left) takes a closer look at furniture displayed during the seminar. Also seen from left are Unimas Institute of Design and Innovation director Assoc Prof Dr Khairul Adlin Abd Rahman, Songan, Batang Sadong Member of Parliament and MFRDB chairperson Nancy Shukri, Abd Latif and Sarudu.