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Academic says demeaning for Dayak women to be paraded in public for Kumang pageants, wants NGOs to reevaluate Gawai event

BY CHURCHILL EDWARD ON MAY 9, 2024, THURSDAY AT 12:57 PM

SARAWAK

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Prof Datuk Dr Jayum Jawan

KUCHING (May 9): An academic has labelled Kumang beauty pageants held annually as part of Gawai celebrations as “demeaning” for Dayak women.

According to Prof Datuk Dr Jayum Jawan, Kumang Gawai was never originally part of the harvest festival.

He called on Dayak-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to reevaluate holding the contest.

The professor, who is Universiti Putra Malaysia Tan Sri Empiang Jabu Research Chair in Dayak Women’s Studies professor and Academy of Sciences Malaysia fellow, called on Dayak NGOs – especially women’s movement Sarakup Indu Dayak Sarawak (SIDS) – to take the lead in shaping and redefining Dayak culture.

“I am surprised that Dayak and Iban women do not have anything to say on activities such as beauty contests for Kumang especially. I would have thought that this event degrades and demeans Dayak and Iban women, who are paraded in public,” he said in a letter to The Borneo Post.

“Furthermore, I could not really remember that this is part of the original Dayak or Iban culture of Gawai. All I can remember is that this was heavily used by politicians in the 1960s, when they held feasts on their campaign trails.”

He said it is time SIDS and other Dayak NGOs reevaluate this beauty contest to restore dignity and respect to Dayak women.

The Kumang/Dayung Sangon/Keligit Gawai has been held at district, divisional, and state levels for decades, with the male version of the contest being known as Keling Gawai.

[demeaning](#)[jayum jawan](#)[Kumang Gawai](#)[SIDS](#)