

PAPERLESS IN THE RAINFOREST, MANGROVES AND MOUNTAINS

East Malaysian ethnic groups whose nationals are affected by statelessness, selection



Melanau: About 130,000 people scattered in river mouths in Sarawak, they live from fishing, rice cultivation and sago (made from the pith of the sago palm). Seventh-century Chinese sources mention this ethnic group.

Bidayuh: Collective term for about 200,000 members of several ethnic groups who live permanently in the rural area around Sarawak's capital, Kuching. Christianization in the nineteenth century largely destroyed their customs and traditions; many Bidayuh adopted English names.

Iban: Around 750,000 members, most of whom lived nomadically or settled in longhouses in Sarawak until the colonial period; known as pirates and headhunters. Their orally transmitted literature is considered to be more extensive than that of the classical Greeks.

Rungus: A subgroup of the Dusun in northern Sabah with very different language, customs and oral tradition. About 60,000 members. Their clothing embroidered with pearl-like beads is well known.

Dusun: Collective term for about 700,000 members of about 30 related ethnic groups living in the coastal and hilly areas of Sabah. According to genetic studies, they are more closely related to the ancient population of Taiwan and some groups in the Philippines than to other groups in Borneo.

Bajau: A sea nomadic people from the conflict-ridden Philippine Sulu archipelago who live on boats and in settlements built on piles. Related to the Sama people living along the coast; about 430,000 mostly stateless members. Children do not have the right to attend school.

Murut: Ethnic group on Borneo with 29 sub-groups and several languages; about 100,000 members in the interior of Sabah.

Penan: Originally a nomadic ethnic group of hunter-gatherers, 16,000 people in Sarawak, several hundred of whom are still non-settled. Bruno Manser, a Swiss environmental activist, lived with them in the 1990s and drew worldwide attention to the deforestation that was destroying their environment.

*Sulu Archipelago, Philippines

