KUALA LUMPUR: Suhakam should apply to speak on behalf of indigenous peoples in their suits against government agencies or developers for alleged encroachment.
The Bar Council's Committee on Orang Asli Rights (Coar) said it would welcome Suhakam holding a watching brief in its orang asli cases.

Its co-chair Steven Thiru said Suhakam would appreciate the challenges the orang asli and their lawyers faced, which ranged from disdain to ignorance of orang asli rights.

Thiru was responding to Suhakam chairman Tan Sri Hasmy Agam's statement in Sunday Star that they might consider applying for watching brief status.

Coar is handling between 10 and 15 cases currently, such as the Ladang Rakyat cases in Kelantan.

On the first National Inquiry (NI) into the Land Rights of Indigenous Peoples that kicks off today in Sabah, Thiru said it was long overdue.

"We are hoping the message of the NI will be that the very existence of the indigenous peoples, and not just their way of life and lands, is in peril."