

 PETALNG JAYA: The country's first national inquiry into land rights of indigenous communities will commence next month. Headed by the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam), the inquiry will involve consultations and public hearings with the communities and stakeholders in more than 15 districts nationwide. The inquiry will start in June and last till early next year. A report on the findings and recommendations will be forwarded to Parliament, the Government and stakeholders by the middle of next year, Suhakam chairman Tan Sri Hasmy Agam told a press conference here yesterday. The inquiry, he said, would not be a fault-finding mission but to find feasible ways to resolve land rights issues. We are not here to resolve all the problems as we are not a court of law. We will only be able to highlight the problems and come out with recommendations, he said. More than 1,000 complaints of alleged infringement of rights of native land have been recorded by Suhakam over the last decade. Sabah had the highest number of complaints at 834 between 2002 and the first quarter of this year followed by 229 in Sarawak and 45 from the peninsula. Suhakam commissioner Jannie Lasimbang said the number of complaints represented the tip of the iceberg as many went unreported due to the communities' isolation and lack of awareness. However, she said she was confident the inquiry would be able to address the main issues such as slow issuance of land grants by the relevant authorities and the encroachment into native land. She also said the federal and state governments had responded well to the setting up of the inquiry. They responded positively and saw the need for such an inquiry to settle the issues once and for all, she added. She noted that native land rights had become a pressing issue that needed to be addressed as seen in the recent Sarawak state election