



United Nations Development Programme

Communications Office

# PRESS RELEASE

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## **Economist Jeffrey Sachs Leads Dialogue on Tackling Poverty in Sabah**

**Kota Kinabalu, January 4** – Renowned economist and Special Advisor to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Professor Jeffrey Sachs, will lead a special roundtable dialogue under the banner of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) next week, which will spotlight the issue of poverty and inequality in the state of Sabah.

The event, organized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Centre for Poverty and Development Studies at the University of Malaya will bring together major actors including the government, opposition parties, NGOs, academia and the media to review existing policies and discuss the way forward for Sabah in its fight against poverty.

Sachs currently serves as the Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University and the Royal Professor Ungku Aziz Chair in Poverty Studies at University of Malaya. Author of numerous publications, including, "The End of Poverty," he is leading a delegation on a five-day mission to Sabah which will include visits to some of the poorest areas such as Pulau Banggi and Kudat.

Despite relatively robust economic growth rates in the last decade, particularly from the flourishing tourism sector, Sabah still lags markedly behind the rest of the other states in the country in development outcomes, according to UNDP statistics.

About 23% of households in the state are still living below the national poverty line income, while child poverty rates stand at 42%. More than one fifth of the population aged six and over has never been to school.

"Poverty in Sabah is compounded by high inequality and high population growth. The benefits of growth appears to have been disproportionately distributed to the richer population, while high population growth has diluted its impact on per capita income," said Dr. Richard Leete, UNDP Resident Representative for Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei.

"There is a need for us to step-up pro-poor investments, and to improve data collection so as to understand who the poor are, why they remain in poverty, and how we can address the problem.

Local communities should be involved in the design and the implementation of policies and programmes aimed at affecting their well-being."

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Under the 9<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan, the federal government has allocated 20 billion to spur development in Sabah, while the state government has committed RM 5.15 billion, through projects such the Sabah Agro-Industrial Precinct and the agropolitan project in Pulau Banggi.

“Greater spending on poverty reduction programmes is indeed important for improving social outcomes, but equally so is spending well. Ensuring that scarce resources are utilized where most needed, hinges on improved governance and accountability.”

UNDP is currently working hand-in-hand with governments and other development actors globally to implement the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of eight key development objectives to combat poverty in all its forms by 2015.

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**ABOUT UNDP:** *UNDP is the UN's global network to help people meet their development needs and build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working as a trusted partner with governments, civil society and the private sector to help them build their own solutions to global and national development challenges. Further information can be found at [www.undp.org.my](http://www.undp.org.my)*

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