KOTA KINABALU: Two Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) academics on Wednesday, were honoured with the 10th Japanese International Cooperation Agency’s (Jica) President Commendation Award for their role in facilitating the peace process in the Southern Philippines.

Professor Dr Kamarulzaman Askandar, 46, and Dr Ayesah Uy Abubakar, 42, from the UMS Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Heritage, were accorded for their role in the Consolidation for Peace (Cog) meets that involved the Philippine Government, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), and civil societies.

The husband and wife team believed the recognition is a testimony of the importance of the role of academics in peace building efforts in the Southern Philippines.

COP is one of the many initiatives carried out to facilitate the peace process in the Southern Philippines, apart from the formal talks held in Kuala Lumpur up to the Malaysian-brokered peace deal signing in Manila in 2012.

It is a programme held in collaboration between Jica and the Research for Peace Unit of Universiti Sains Malaysia since 2006, where both recipients had once worked.

Dr Kamarulzaman said: “It is an honour for the university and for academics alike in the field of peace-building.

As we all know peace process is not an easy task and sometimes takes years, with chances of failure,” he said after receiving the award.

Referring to the peace process in the Southern Philippines, he said: “Many issues involved in arm conflict call for negotiations and dialogues, such as division of power, wealth ... which require much detailed elaboration.”

Meanwhile, Dr Ayesah, who is a Bangsamoro and also a Mindanao peace coordinator said, academics play a crucial role in providing an insiders’ view involving those in conflict and areas that involved civil societies in the Southern Philippines.

Throughout their work, she said building the trust of those involved is most important, adding that a key to resolving issues in the region is to try not to be biased on any of the conflicting parties.

“In this case we had to try to be as neutral as possible and as professional as possible in the way of doing things,” she said.

Both academics just completed COP’s sixth meeting in Hiroshima, Japan in June, as both of them are also involved in other peace efforts in Aceh in Indonesia, Timor Leste and Pattani in Thailand.

Dr Kamarulzaman and Dr Ayesah are two of 22 recipients for the 10th Jica President Commendation Award across the country this year, where the award was handed over by a Jica’s senior representative Kyoko Okubu and witnessed by UMS Vice Chancellor, Prof. Datuk Dr Mohd. Harun Abdullah, here.

EPF reminds members on fraudulent withdrawals

KUALA LUMPUR: The Employees Provident Fund (EPF) has reminded its members not to work with syndicates or agents who offer them assistance to withdraw their funds fraudulently.

Its Corporate Affairs Head, Nik Affendi Jaafar said the EPF views fraudulent withdrawals as a serious offence and would not hesitate to take stern action against members who were involved in it.

“Members who face financial problems are reminded to be careful with advertisements on various websites or agents who give out their business cards and pamphlets offering to help them withdraw their EPF money,” he said in a statement here Wednesday.

Nik Affendi said the EPF had never appointed or approved the services of a third party for withdrawal applications and members who want to make withdrawals can contact the EPF which offers free service.

He said the EPF had a comprehensive system to detect any fraud or attempt to forge a withdrawal even after the funds had been taken out.

He said fraudulent withdrawals including submitting false documents with the intention of getting approval faster was an offence under the EPF Act 1991 which carries a maximum sentence of three years jail or RM10,000 fine or both, if convicted.

He said from July until September this year, eight members had been charged in court while six summons were issued to members who cheated.

Meanwhile, members who encounter any attempts to cheat on EPF withdrawals have been urged to report this to the EPF Anti-Fraud hotline at telephone number 03-26162121 during office hours from Monday to Friday. – Bernama