Scholarship leads to friendships

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IT’S BEEN 35 years since the first two Malaysians stepped foot on British soil as part of the Chevening Scholarships programme.

Today, there are now more than 1,600 Malaysian Chevening alumni who have benefited from the programme.

Although they gained heaps of knowledge throughout their time in the UK, some say it is the friendships formed that has been the most valuable asset.

Chevening scholar Akil Yunus says: “I feel this was a real eye-opening experience and I got to mix around with many people.”

He adds that he became close friends with people from Cape Verde, Africa, and India.

“I went to the University of Birmingham and it was a very diverse set of students that I got to meet and interact with,” he says.

“Just being part of the Chevening and Chevening network itself has opened a lot of doors and opportunities to visit places that I would not have otherwise,” says the postgraduate student.

One of the most memorable moments for Amnesty International Malaysia executive director Shamini Darshni Kaliemuthu was when she visited Auschwitz, Poland, together with her fellow Chevening scholar, Firdaus Husni.

Now a good friend, the both of them from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, made the trip east from the UK to visit the concentration camps operated by Nazi Germany during World War II.

Kaliemuthu who took a sabbatical to spend a year studying International Politics under the scholarship, is very passionate about human rights.

She says that it was “amazing” to visit Auschwitz, which was not only the site of atrocious acts against humanity but also where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was developed.

She adds that she took part in the programme as she wanted to understand the cause of some of the human rights issues Malaysia is facing today.

“I wanted to have a political understanding of colonisation, post-colonialism and how Malaysian politics evolved post-colonisation,” she explains.

Kaliemuthu says that after coming back, she is able to use the knowledge gained there in her job today and continue to advocate for human rights.

During the reception to welcome back the 2017/18 scholars, the new British High Commissioner to Malaysia Charles Hay says: “If it weren't for our partners, we wouldn't have this number of opportunities for the scholars to study in the UK.”

Among the Malaysian partners are The Prudence Foundation, Yayasan Khazanah and CIMB.

The reception also saw the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Jeffrey Cheah Foundation with the British High Commission.

The Chevening-Jeffrey Cheah Foundation scholar from Malaysia will be part of the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years to pursue a medical, physical or life sciences related Masters Course at either the University of Cambridge, the University of Oxford or Lancaster University.

Hay (centre, yellow tie) with the scholars posing for a photograph during the reception to welcome them back from the 2017/2018 academic year.