

GAWAI ANTU
A DOCUMENTARY FILM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCT 19, 2025

“Gawai Antu” Documentary Returns to the Screen, Celebrating Sacred Iban Tradition and Cultural Legacy

Kuching, October 19, 2025 – The acclaimed documentary film ‘Gawai Antu’, which explores one of the most sacred and elaborate traditional ceremonies of the Iban people of Sarawak, is set for a renewed screening today, three years after its inaugural debut at the Borneo Cultures Museum.

Originally launched on September 20, 2022, the film was officiated by the Premier of Sarawak, YAB Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg, who also opened a dedicated exhibition showcasing curated artefacts essential to understanding the symbolic depth of the Gawai Antu festival.

GAWAI ANTU

A DOCUMENTARY FILM

Today, 'Gawai Antu' documentary film starts screening until the next six days, from October 19 until October 24, 2025, at 11am to 12 noon, and at 2pm to 3pm at the Borneo Cultures Museum Auditorium, Ground Floor. Throughout the six days of screening, our longhouse ladies from Rumah Gensurai, Layar, Betong will also be supporting the event as they will have their physical support and presence at the Borneo Cultures Museum, proudly representing their longhouse to relive the 'Gawai Antu' spirit and festival. This will in turn expose them to the visitors and guests who come to watch the film, a platform that empowers them to narrate and share their experiences.

After the screening today, there will be a sharing session over Press Conference by Barbara Dubah Jabu, the Executive Producer and Loo Shun Ming, the Producer and Director of 'Gawai Antu' who will provide insights and introduction on cultural resilience and significance of heritage preservation as documented through the film.

Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Alfred Jabu anak Numpang, Advisor to the "Gawai Antu" Festival as well as one of the very few knowledgeable elders in matters relating to adat, local customs and traditions, will also be joining the sharing session on cultural sustainability.

GAWAI ANTU

A DOCUMENTARY FILM

‘Gawai Antu’, also known as the ‘Festival of the Dead’, holds profound spiritual and communal significance among the Iban. It serves as a solemn yet celebratory tradition where the living honour and bid farewell to deceased family members, guiding their spirits to the afterlife. Through this festival, elders pass down values and rituals to younger generations, preserving intergenerational wisdom, identity, and respect for ancestors.

This unique celebration of the Iban community is an important linkage for Sarawak to the outside world, and for that matter, indigenous festivals of many ethnic groups from Sarawak, provide important avenues for cultural education for festival and history enthusiasts. Furthermore, the Iban, hold the unique ‘Gawai Antu’ to accord the highest form of respect, appreciation and honour by the living relatives for the good deeds, which their forefathers, relatives or ancestors had endeavoured hard during their time to ensure a good and decent life for those after them.

The preparations for such event as this is steep in rituals according to the Iban belief system, that may differ from place to place.

GAWAI ANTU

A DOCUMENTARY FILM

Prior to this, Premier Datuk Patinggi Abang Johari Tun Openg said, in preserving this unique cultural heritage, it is important that the Iban community document and digitise these traditions. He added, this documentary serves not only as a cultural archive for future generations but also as an educational tool to share Sarawak's rich socio-cultural heritage with the world.

The documentation of the Gawai Antu ceremony was held at Gensurai Layar longhouse in Betong Division, where Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Alfred Jabu, and his wife Tan Sri Empiang Jabu, attended in December 2018. In addition to that, the whole longhouse and the people of Gensurai Layar deserved congratulations for their role in preserving this tradition in high-quality digital format.

The documentary also bravely introduces the character of 'Indai Billai', the mythical 'Queen of Spirits', whose representation was traditionally considered taboo. The character of 'Indai Billai' allows younger generations to understand her significance and the deeper meaning behind 'Gawai Antu'.

"This celebration, as documented, goes beyond ritual. It provides a vibrant platform for intercultural interaction, bringing together Iban communities from across the

GAWAI ANTU

A DOCUMENTARY FILM

region and friends from other ethnic groups and countries,” said Barbara.

"It is very important to remember in a multiracial and multireligious society in Sarawak, and in Malaysia as a whole, we must encourage each single community to strive in promoting and preserving their culture and tradition which determine the survival of their cultural identity and racial integrity," said Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Alfred Jabu.

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