

Journalist wins Suhakam award

The Star's Stephen Then receives accolade for Print Media Award

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KUALA LUMPUR: When he started off as a rookie journalist at the age of 21 in 1991, Stephen Then could not grasp the immense meaning of the words of his editor in *The Star*.

"He told me that journalism simply means caring for the society that we live in without fear or favour," said Then.

More than two decades later and after pursuing countless stories highlighting the human rights of the Sarawak people, he came to understand those words.

"I realised the power of the pen, that the humble newspaper can make a positive difference in highlighting and fighting for justice and humane treatment for those who are voiceless," said the 47-year-old.

He was awarded the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam)'s Print Media Award at the Human Rights Award 2016 held at the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR) here yesterday.

"Journalism opened my eyes to the plight of the rural people, the poor, those living in the forests affected by logging and those in the squatter colonies in urban areas," he said.

He has written extensively about vulnerable groups in the country, especially the marginalised, with the intent to promote equality for all.

Then has brought to light, among



Proud moment: Razali (centre) presenting the award to Then at the Human Rights Award 2016 ceremony.

others, the plight of those affected by native land disputes, money politics, corruption, rights of persons with disabilities, freedom of religion and workers' rights which provoked responses and remedial reactions from those in power.

"In Miri, I have gotten the MP to help the blind and handicapped with land resettlement and build low-cost houses for them after they read about them.

"I feel very honoured and humbled. I receive this award on behalf of all other journalists, as there are many of them who have done well

in the advancement of social justice.

"As journalists, we always have to do our best on the ground and write according to our conscience. Even though it is difficult, we must highlight the truth.

"Also, my editors have been supportive and allowed these articles to appear in print and on video," said Then.

Suhakam chairman Tan Sri Razali Ismail handed out the awards at the ceremony.

Other award winners were Dr Madhusudhan Shammugam (Individual Award), Malaysia Handicraft

Development Corporation (Government Agency Award), Boo Su-Lyn (Media Award), Mydin Mohamed Holdings Berhad (Business Entity Award), The Centre for Environment, Technology and Development Malaysia (Civil Society Organisation Award) and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Senator Datuk Paul Low (Special Human Rights Recognition).

The winners were awarded in recognition of their extraordinary contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights in the country.