



**Australian High Commission**  
**Malaysia**

**MEDIA RELEASE**


**AUSTRALIA COMMEMORATES 80<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF  
SANDAKAN DAY**

**Sandakan, 15 August 2025** – The Australian High Commission in Malaysia today joined the community of Sandakan in commemorating the 80th anniversary of Sandakan Day, honouring the courage, sacrifice, suffering, loss, and enduring spirit of the 2,434 prisoners of war who perished in the Sandakan death marches during World War II.

The solemn ceremony, held at the Sandakan Memorial Park, brought together veterans' families and representatives, community leaders, and dignitaries from Australia, Malaysia, United Kingdom and New Zealand. Present at the ceremony this year were **Australian High Commissioner to Malaysia, Her Excellency Ms Danielle Heinecke**; **Member of Parliament for Sandakan, Yang Berhormat Madam Vivian Wong Sher Yee**; **British High Commissioner to Malaysia, His Excellency Mr Ajay Sharma CMG**; **New Zealand High Commissioner to Malaysia, His Excellency Mr Michael Wehi Mailetonga Walsh**, along with many other government officials and military officers.

This year's commemoration also coincides with the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Australia's diplomatic presence in Malaysia – a milestone that reflects the breadth and depth of the friendship between the two nations. From strong defence and security cooperation to people-to-people links in education, trade, tourism, and cultural exchange, Australia and Malaysia continue to build on a foundation of deep history of partnership, trust, respect, and shared values.

**Ms Heinecke, Australian High Commissioner** said, "Sandakan and its surrounds are home to the single greatest atrocity committed against Australians in war. For this reason, Sandakan holds a special place in our hearts. On this day, as we reflect on the past and honour the fallen – it is a reminder of the of the terrible impact of war, and impress upon us the need to preserve peace. 80 years on, these stories remind us why Australia and Malaysia have stood side by side



for generations, and how our shared history will continue to strengthen our share future as close partners.”

**Ms Karen Cowie, family representative of Australian veterans** shared, “I am honoured to be here in Sandakan today, to observe this significant day that has impacted many Australian veteran families. Standing here where our loved ones suffered and sacrificed reminds us of their bravery and resilience. It is meaningful to know that Australians, Malaysians and Allied forces continue to honour their memory together, ensuring that their stories live on for generations to come. Lest we forget.”

Australia and Malaysia share longstanding historical defence links. Beginning in World War II, through the Malayan Emergency and Konfrontasi, the unique defence partnership continued to mature under the auspices of the Five Power Defence Arrangements and the Malaysia-Australia Joint Defence Program. In addition to numerous reciprocal secondments, courses and annual exercises, Malaysia hosts an ongoing Australian Defence Force presence at Royal Malaysian Air Force Base Butterworth.

The Australian High Commission in Malaysia remains committed to supporting Malaysia and other partners to preserve the memory of Sandakan, ensuring the memorial park in Sabah continues to be a beautiful and respectful place of commemoration for generations to come, and for future generations to understand the lessons of history and the value of peace.

The High Commission also extends its gratitude to the Sandakan Municipal Council for organising the memorial service, and to all friends and community for their continued support.

Ends.

Media note: Imagery will be available via this [link](#)