Honored Guests from Malaysia at IU-Bloomington Commencement

Indiana University-Bloomington celebrated its 165th Commencement on May 7 with characteristic pageantry and excitement. The occasion was all the more memorable because of the prominent leaders on whom honorary degrees were conferred. Retiring Indiana University President Thomas Ehrlich and his wife Ellen Rome Ehrlich were both awarded Doctor of Humane Letters degrees. Among the other recipients of the honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree was Datin Seri Dr. Siti Hasmah Mohd. Ali, wife of the Prime Minister of Malaysia. Dr. Siti Hasmah is one of her nation’s leading women doctors, a pioneer in the fields of women’s health, family planning, drug abuse, and adult literacy. She is active internationally in promoting the cause of rural women, and has received honorary degrees from institutions in Malaysia and Ireland in recognition of her work.

Datin Seri Dr. Siti Hasmah arrived in Indianapolis Thursday evening, May 5, where she was greeted by an official delegation from the city and from Indiana University. On Friday, she visited Riley Children's Hospital, then attended a luncheon hosted by IUPUI Chancellor Gerald Bepko. In Bloomington, she was greeted by Patrick O'Meara, Dean of International Programs, who escorted her to the formal signing ceremony of the new IUPUI-Tenaga agreement (see story, page 1). In the evening, Dr. Siti Hasmah was guest at a reception and dinner hosted by President and Mrs. Ehrlich to welcome IU’s honorary degree recipients. She was accompanied by Datin Marie Jose Majid, wife of Malaysia’s ambassador to the U.S., Tan Sri Ani bin Arope, executive chairman of Tenaga Nasional, and his wife Puan Sri Sainah Ahmad. Later that evening, a formal reception was held to welcome the arrival in Bloomington of the Honorable Dato’ Seri Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia, and his staff, headed by H.E. Abdul Majid Mohamed, Malaysia’s ambassador to the U.S.

On Saturday, a formal luncheon was hosted by International Programs Dean Patrick O'Meara to honor the many distinguished guests from Malaysia. At the luncheon, also attended by President and Mrs. Ehrlich, the dean paid special tribute to Dr. Siti Hasmah, “whose life and career is a shining example of public service, and of dedication to social issues in the practice of medicine”. He highlighted the university’s special relationship to Malaysia through their joint educational programs. And he stressed IU’s deep commitment to international education, pointing out its “nurturing environment for countless international students and faculty...who have shared with us their ideas, their cultures and their intellects. Indiana University has indeed been fortunate!” Among the gifts presented to the guests was a hand-blown glass bowl engraved with the seals of the government of Malaysia and Indiana University.