

## Biography and Involvement of Sir Malcolm Macdonald (1901-1981) in The Formation of Malaysia 1963

Zurita Mohd Yusoff<sup>1</sup>, Aminuddin Mustafa<sup>2</sup>, Najihah Abd Wahid<sup>1</sup>,  
Tengku Fatimah Muliana Tengku Muda<sup>1</sup>, Fatma Susilawati  
Mohamad<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Institute for Islamic Products and Malay Civilization, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Terengganu, Malaysia, <sup>2</sup>Faculty of Law and International Relations, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Terengganu, Malaysia.  
Email: zurita@uniswa.edu.my

### Abstract

Malaysia was officially formed in 1963 with the union of Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak. One of the earliest British figures to put forward the idea of the formation of Malaysia was Sir Malcolm MacDonald, the British High Commissioner in Southeast Asia and had a collection of historical documents related to events that took place in Malaysia after independence. However, his life background and his involvement in the formation of Malaysia are unknown to many. Thus, this article aims to explain the background of Sir Malcolm MacDonald's life, his involvement in the formation of Malaysia, and also his contribution. This writing uses document analysis methods to obtain data related to his background and role throughout his tenure as British High Commissioner in Southeast Asia. The data collection method used in this writing is document analysis. The results of this writing found that Sir Malcolm MacDonald was a figure who grew up in a family involved in politics and community activities. This situation has influenced him to also get involved in political activities and contribute to the world community. His collection documents are now housed in the Durham University Library, United Kingdom in original and digital form. Some of the documents, especially related to the history of Malaysia, have been digitized by researchers from Sultan Zainal Abidin University (UniSZA), Terengganu. It is anticipated that the digitization of this document will make it easier for researchers and the public to make references from authoritative sources.

**Keywords:** Biography, Malcolm MacDonald, Formation, Malaysia, 1963

### Introduction

Malaysia or formerly known as Malaya had several times been colonized before independence in 1957. A number of external forces, which were Portuguese, Dutch, Japanese, and English have colonized Malaya between 1511 until 1957 (Abdullah & Ibrahim, 2013; Teh et al., 2019). In 1963, Malaysia was formed with the union of Malaya, Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak. The idea of the formation of Malaysia or Gagasan Malaysia has been put forward by

several parties including Sir Malcolm MacDonald. He was the British High Commissioner in Southeast Asia at the time and had a collection of historical documents on events that took place in Malaysia after independence. This document is now stored in the library of the University of Durham, United Kingdom in both original and digital form. This article is written based on a study that uses a qualitative approach and applies a historical study design. Data in this writing were collected using the document analysis method. The data were analyzed using content analysis methods.

### **Birth and Education of MJM**

Malcolm John MacDonald was born on 17 August 1901 in Lossiemouth. He was the second child of six siblings to James Ramsay and Margaret MacDonald. His sister, Alister was born in 1899, and his three younger brothers, Ishbel was born in 1903, Davis in 1904, and Sheila in 1910 (Sanger, 1995). He studied at Bedales and also at Queen's College, Oxford. He was also an active student in the debate at university that has himself selected to participate in debate competitions in America and the Pacific. Malcolm MacDonald was a member of the British delegation at two conferences organized by the Institute of Pacific Relations in Honolulu in 1927 and Kyoto in 1929 (Durham University Library Archives & Special Collections Catalogue, 2021). Malcolm MacDonald and his family live a happy life in Lossiemouth with peaceful nature. The birds flying around Lossiemouth make their lives better. This is evidenced in the writing of his first book entitled Birdwatching in Lossiemouth. He recounted having seen as many as 252 species of birds in the waters of the Moray Firth, along flowing rivers and several places around Lossiemouth. Malcolm was also raised as a child by a pair of parents who were active in a variety of community activities. Her mother, Margaret, was a member of the Women's Industrial Council and also the National Union of Women Workers (Sanger, 1995). At the age of 10 in 1911, Malcolm MacDonald had lost his mother, Margaret MacDonald. Margaret and Ramsay have set an example for their children to treat the community they meet without discrimination and to forge friendships with a sincere heart (Sanger, 1995). Malcolm MacDonald was educated at Bedales School and Queen's College, Oxford. In December 1946, he married Andrey Marjorie Rowley and had a daughter named Fiona. Malcolm MacDonald has two adopted children from his marriage with his first wife which are Bill and Jane Rowley (Durham University Library Archives & Special Collections Catalogue, 2021).

Sir Malcolm MacDonald is recorded to have died on 11 January 1981 at the age of 80. Important documents on the history of the countries he visited including Malaysia are kept as his personal collection and are now in the custody of the Durham University Library, Asian Art Museum, the University of Malaya, and the National Museum of Singapore, Singapore (Durham University Library Archives & Special Collections Catalogue, 2021).

### **The Career of Malcolm MacDonald**

Malcolm MacDonald held positions in the Labor Party until 1931 and in National Labor in 1931-1935. He was subsequently appointed National Labor MP for Ross Cromarty in 1936-1945. He previously held ministerial posts in the Dominions & Colonial Office from 1931-1940 and was involved in controversies about the future of Eire and Palestine as well as the promotion of colonial development policies. In 1940, he was appointed Minister of Health, and then he moved to Canada as British High Commissioner starting from 1941 until 1946. After the war, he was offered the post of Governor-General of Malaya, Singapore, and British Borneo. As Governor-General of Malaya, he was responsible for managing the whole of Asia.

In 1955, he became High Commissioner for the UK in India, and in 1960 he was appointed chairman of an international conference in Laos. The latter part of his administrative and diplomatic career was spent in Africa as Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Kenya. Sir Malcolm was appointed British High Commissioner to Kenya in 1964-1965 (List of High Commissioners of the United Kingdoms to Kenya). He was later involved in various diplomatic missions to other parts of Africa especially Nigeria and Rhodesia. After retiring, he assumed the position of Chancellor of Durham University and President of Overseas Voluntary Service. (MacDonald, 1984).

### **Appointment as Chancellor of the University of Malaya**

In 1949, the Federal Legislative Council, the Federation of Malaya approved the Bill Establishment of the University of Malaya. The establishment of the University of Malaya is in line with the requirements contained in the Carr-Saunders Commission Report. The Bill was later signed by the British High Commissioner to Southeast Asia, Mr. Malcom MacDonald as its first Chancellor. He was the Chancellor of the University of Malaya in Singapore from 1949 to 1961. Dato Onn bin Jaafar, the chief minister of Johor at that time was appointed as one of his Pro-Chancellors. Its first Vice-Chancellor was Dr. G. V. Allen. (University of Malaya, 2021).

### **Malcolm MacDonald's Involvement in the Formation of Malaysia**

As early as 1894, a director of the British North Borneo Chartered Company (BNBCC), Lord Brassey submitted a proposed merger with the Borneo territories of the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States. However, the suggestion by Lord Brassey at the time went unnoticed. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, political leaders in Singapore also discussed a combination of the regions and states. Later, after the Japanese occupation in 1946, the British High Commissioner in Asia when it was the Governor-General Malcolm MacDonald had mooted the idea of the possibility of five areas of Sabah, Sarawak, Singapore, Brunei, and Malaya collectively united as the "Malaya Raya" (SarawakVoice, 2021). The proposal put forward by Sir Malcolm MacDonald also did not receive attention because the three provinces in Borneo at that time were not interested in supporting the proposal.

Malcolm MacDonald is a strong leader fighting for the idea of Malaysia since 1951. He has held several discussions with the leaders of Malaya such as Dato Onn Jaafar and some leaders of Singapore and North Borneo states about the possibility of creating a greater combination that covers all the country. Efforts to realize this idea were later made by several other officials after Sir Malcolm MacDonald was transferred to India in 1955 as British High Commissioner.

Several writings also found that the Colonial Office had held several discussions on the idea of Malaysia before Tunku made a visit to London to attend the Commonwealth Conference in June 1960. In the conference, he raised the issue of coalition with the Borneo states to Lord Perth. Basically, the administrator of the Colonial Office in London and the British administration in Southeast Asia believe that the combination of economics and politics between the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, and the Borneo states would bring a lot of benefits and would strengthen the position of small states so that they can compete with the state-larger neighbours.

Historical records state the idea of combining the states of Malaya, Singapore, and Borneo has been suggested before the Board of North Borneo Chartered Company, Lord Brassy in 1887, but has gone unnoticed. After the end of World War II, this proposal was put forward again by the British High Commissioner to Southeast Asia, Malcolm MacDonald, yet it again

did not materialize as all three provinces in Borneo were not interested in supporting the aspiration (Bharian, 2021).

On 27 May 1961, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj, the then Prime Minister of the Federation of Malaysia announced the idea of Malaysia (Gagasan Malaysia). Before the announcement, he and several other leaders refused the Malaya and Singapore merger of several factors. The main factor is that the majority of Singaporeans are of Chinese descent and are considered to still have high loyalty to Mainland China. In addition, Singaporean politics is also considered left-leaning or leaning towards communist domination. Tunku and also the leaders of the then Malaya was concerned that the Chinese domination will endanger the safety of Malaya (Rodzi, 2003).

The announcement made by Tunku Abdul Rahman was opposed by the opposition from the Islamic Party of Malaya (PAS), which was led by Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy as he considered these ideas are things that deviate from the basic and Malay political structure that the party stood for. Dr. Burhanuddin's view of the amalgamation of a state should cover a larger area by combining Malaya with Indonesia, the Philippines, and the other Malay Archipelago, but rejected a merger with Singapore. Economic factors and education of Chinese people is stronger than the Malays were also feared would threaten the position of the Malays (Rodzi, 2003).

Besides PAS, Gagasan Malaysia also faced opposition from the Labor Party and People's Party of Malaya, Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), United National Kadazan Organization (UNKO), and Pasok Momogun in Sabah Malaysia was also opposed to the idea. Despite the variety of opposition, the establishment of Malaysia through the amalgamation of Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei finally was completed on 16 September 1963 (Rodzi, 2003). However, on 9 August 1965, Singapore seceded from Malaysia after many ideological differences as well as several racial riots.

### **Malcolm MacDonald Documents Collection Related to Malaya**

Sir Malcolm MacDonald was a man who loved to collect and keep documents related to his career and life in every place he ever visited. Upon his death, his family had agreed to place his documents collection in the Royal Commonwealth Society. Later, Mrs. Audrey MacDonald expressed the view that the collected documents be transferred to the University of Durham so that they can be used to be tended for and preserved, and cultivated as teaching and research materials. Cataloging work was completed at the Royal Commonwealth Society before being transferred to the University of Durham. The collection was donated by three Trustees, Mrs. Sheila Lochhead, sister of Malcolm MacDonald, Miss A.M. McAulay, Durham University Librarian, and D.H. Simpson, Librarian Royal Commonwealth Society. A collection of photographs related to Malcolm MacDonald is kept in the Royal Commonwealth Society. Sir Malcolm MacDonald's documents collection is arranged in the chronology of the phases of his life, career and it ended with his retirement. The compilation of the document is divided into several categories, namely documents on official duties, telegrams, and correspondence. The section entitled Personal Papers includes correspondence with family and personal friends (Durham University Library Archives & Special Collections Catalogue, 2021).

### **Malcolm MacDonald's Documents Collection Digitization Project by Sultan Zainal Abidin University (UniSZA), Terengganu, Malaysia**

In 2019, the Ministry of Education has given the trust and responsibility to UniSZA to implement Islamic and the Malay World Manuscripts Digitization Projects. The call was

welcomed by the UniSZA in the initiative to digitize Islamic and the Malay World manuscripts including Sir Malcolm MacDonald Collection of documents stored at the University of Durham, United Kingdom (BeritaHarian, 2019). This initiative is in line with the current development of the digital era (Abdullahi, 2018). A total of 30,000 sheets of the document have been purchased by UniSZA in digital form and have been uploaded into the UniSZA e-Manuscript System for the purpose of preservation and research for the benefit of current and future generations. Research Institute for Products and Islamic Civilization (INSPIRE) has been entrusted to lead UniSZA Manuscripts Digitization Project which contains eight sub-projects. Documents obtained by UniSZA from Durham University is a document related to important events that occurred in Malaya before and after independence. Documents were in the form of correspondence, photographs, official documents, and also personal notes.

### **Conclusion**

Malcolm MacDonald is a respected British leader in Malaya. During his tenure as British High Commissioner to Southeast Asia, he proposed the idea of Malaysia. He also served as Chancellor of the University of Malaya in Singapore from 1949 to 1961. During his tenure as British Commissioner in several countries, he has kept many documents related to his official duties and historical events that occurred in his experience. In some of the documents that are in the collection of Malcolm MacDonald are related to the history of Malaya before and after independence. The efforts made by UniSZA to digitize the document is expected to highlight this historic document to the general public and local researchers as well as international researchers.

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### **Corresponding Author**

Zurita Mohd Yusoff

Research Institute for Islamic Products and Malay Civilization (INSPIRE) Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Gong Badak Campus, 21300 Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia.

Email: zurita@unisza.edu.my

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