



2nd ASIA-PACIFIC RAINFOREST SUMMIT 2016

WELCOME REMARKS AND KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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Distinguished Guests, My fellow Government Leaders, Delegates, Colleagues, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalamualaikum Warramattullahi Wabarakatuh, and a very good morning to all of you.

On behalf of the Government of His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam, it is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the 2016 Asia-Pacific Rainforest Summit here in Brunei Darussalam. I am pleased to witness your commitments in coming all the way here to participate and share your expertise in promoting the development and conservation of the rainforests of the Asia-Pacific region.

I would like to acknowledge with thanks, the invaluable support provided by the Australian Government in co-organizing this year's Asia-Pacific Rainforest Summit. I admire the demonstration of your commitments in attaining the common objectives of this Partnership since its inaugural Summit in 2014 in Sydney, Australia. We wish to return the same commitments, or even more, in this Asia Pacific Partnership towards the development and conservation of our rainforest resources.

I also would like to extend my warmest appreciation to the energetic and creative staff from the Departments under the Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism, Australian High Commission, the Centre of International Forestry Research, and Department of Environment and Energy. Your professionalism and hard work are considered a major

contribution in making this summit a success. To our sponsors, a very big thanks for your generosity. I am happy to witness your kindness in supporting the required resources of this Summit. I share the output of this Summit to all of you as well.

I would also like to thank my colleagues from the Government sector across the region for being here with us in this Summit. Your continuous support and contributions will fuel this initiative and strengthen our position in addressing the challenges brought about by climate change and deforestation.

For our private sector counterparts, businesses, civil society groups, academia, international and regional partners, and non-government organizations, I am very happy to see you all here. You have been an inspiration in the delivery of our concrete actions on the grounds. You are all very helpful in reaching out and in binding us to achieve the sustainable management of our rainforest ecosystem.

This Asia-Pacific Rainforest Summit has the following objectives:

- i. Building political momentum for better forest and landscape management;
- ii. Exploring opportunities for environmentally sensitive economic diversification;
- iii. Connecting policy-makers, academics, civil society and private sectors in a regional networks of leaders sharing knowledge, research and best practices; and

- iv. Increasing public awareness within the region on the values of forests.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The rainforest ecosystem has served as the building blocks of the Asia Pacific region. History can tell that forestry has been the earliest industry that supported the development of nations through the utilization of timber products for infrastructures and related industries. And until now, our rainforests provides the unparalleled support in mitigating climate change, food security, and other economic potentials.

I am glad to mention that at some point, our initiatives in restoring our rainforests have started. The 2015 Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) reported that the forests of the Asia Pacific region have increased by 5 million hectares since 2010 and 20 million hectares since 2000. With a total forest area of 723 million hectares, the Asia-Pacific forests represent 18 percent of the global forests. According to FRA report, these positive developments can be attributed to the increase in protected areas, forest plantations, and improving quality of forest management in the region.

However despite the increase in the region's forest, FRA2015 still noted that deforestation and forest degradation remain an important challenge in many countries. Identified drivers of deforestation and forest degradation include agricultural expansion, infrastructure development, forest product extraction, and forest fires.

Ladies and Gentlemen

This Summit aims to identify practical actions to reduce forest loss while at the same time, balancing the development aspirations of the Asia-Pacific nations. There is a need for us to refocus our economic activities that would complement our initiatives in rainforest conservation. As such, new opportunities shall be identified for private and public sector investments and partnerships.

We are in the 21st century, where technological developments are on our finger tips. We should promote efficient utilization of forest resources through appropriate technologies and at the same time encourage the production of forest value-added products. Our rainforests are rich, and have the capabilities to provide a wide array of forest goods and services that would cater economic diversification. With the right partnership, technology, and renewable forest resources, we can never go wrong.

During our inaugural summit in Sydney, we discussed on the practical and technical aspects of monitoring forests, combating illegal logging, protecting biodiversity, promoting community and indigenous people participation in forest management, and eliminating deforestation from the global supply chain. In this summit, we will be stepping ahead and will focus our discussions on sustainable financing, opportunities and partnerships, sustainable landscape management, policy frameworks, and green economies.

I personally find our themes interesting and very timely, for it is aligned with the current thrusts of His Majesty's Government for the Brunei forestry sector. At the national level, we are continuously optimizing the benefits of our rainforests which occupies more than half of the country's land area. Our economic diversification initiatives include the forestry sector with focus on forest industry, non-timber forest products, biological prospecting, carbon trading, and efficiency in forest product processing and utilization. At present, we are reviewing our national forestry strategies to promote our forest-based downstream industries. We intend to improve the forestry industry environment to encourage further private investments on technologies and new machineries to increase our efficiency and manufacture of value-added forest products.

Aside from environmental attributes, we believe that our forests have great economic potentials. The high biodiversity index of Brunei forests is an indication of the variety of non-timber forest products that are yet to be discovered. The exploration and research for these new and indigenous forest products are jointly conducted by the Government and the academic sectors. Forests are renewable resources and with the proper conservative technologies, it can provide endless goods and services to our society.

Our forestry economic diversification initiative is also in line with the strategies provided for by Wawasan 2035, stating our Long-term National Development Plan. Specifically, the plan highlighted the continuing efforts to conserve our remarkable biodiversity, rainforests, and natural habitats as part of our environmental strategy. It also stresses the development of

forest resources, conservation and protection, and ecotourism as the main focus of the forestry sector.

Almost half of our total land area is part of the National Forest Estate, and as part of our commitment to further the integrity of our environment, we intend to increase our forest estate to 55% of Brunei's land area. With this reality and assumed responsibilities, our forestry sector will be welcoming partners from the government and private sectors in the sustainable management of our forest and forest resources.

As such, we will need the entrepreneurial and creative minds of the private sectors in developing our forest-based industry. We will be pleased to cooperate in the conduct of researches and expeditions to understand further our diverse forest and learn new products that are significant to our modern societies. We also believe in the capabilities of our rainforests to sequester carbon as we open our windows to further study our forests in reducing greenhouse gases.

With all these development strategies in the forestry sector, our Government remains vigilant against the identified drivers of deforestations. As such, we have controlled agricultural expansion and regulated forest conversion for agricultural purposes. The cutting of forests for agriculture development was stopped. Instead, we are focusing our agricultural initiatives on efficiency of production, thereby increasing the projected yield per hectare. We encourage investments on agricultural technology development and high technology farm practices including vertical farming.

Likewise, our existing regulations on forest product extraction must observe sustainability and promotes natural regeneration of forest resources. We have strengthened our forest law enforcement activities through the establishment of multi-agency participation from the police force, military, district authorities and the Forestry Department.

On a sub-regional context, the Heart of Borneo initiative plays an important role in transboundary forest management in minimizing deforestation and the associated loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Brunei's partnership with the HOB initiative has connected the country's rainforests into the network of protected areas of the Island of Borneo. The partnership boosted our capabilities in promoting sustainable management of forests and other sustainable land uses.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are honored to host this Summit for us to learn more and improve our rainforest management strategies. We are happy to meet our government counterparts and friends from the private sectors and share the lessons learned from their home country. We are very glad to become your partners in promoting our common objectives for the benefits of the Asia-Pacific communities.

In conclusion, I would like to wish everybody a fruitful discussion. During our dialogue, let us uphold our commitments made under the Paris Agreement. For Brunei, we are committed to reduce energy consumption, carbon dioxide emissions, and increase the area of our forest reserves.

Likewise, I would like to reiterate the fulfillment of our 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Let us end poverty, protect our planet, and ensure prosperity for all as part of our new sustainable development goals.

Before I end my remarks, I would like to take the opportunity to announce the launching of a booklet entitled “Bird Watching in Brunei Darussalam 2016: a guide to the birds of Brunei Darussalam”. The book aims to enhance the country’s pristine nature tourism products focusing on bird watching, which has seen a gradual progression during the last 3 years. The booklet is intended, not only to serve as a general guide for birders on bird species endemic to Brunei, but also as a reference for academics and the public while creating awareness on the importance of wildlife conservation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Brunei is small, but we have a lot to offer. I am inviting you to enjoy our environment, our food, our culture, and our rainforests during your stay here in our country. As the host country, we will be pleased to assist you to have a comfortable stay. Please feel free to move around and bring some sweet memories back home.

and

With the kalimah 'Bismillahir Rahman Rahim' and peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad Sallallahualaihi Wassalam, peace be upon him, I am pleased **to officially open the 2016 Asia-Pacific Rainforest Summit.**

Wabillahit Taufiq Walhidayah, Wassalamualaikum Warahmatulahi Wabarakatuh