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SABAH'S RICH BIODIVERSITY MUST BE MANAGED IN A SUSTAINABLE MANNER: DATUK SAPAWI

KOTA KINABALU, Tuesday: The rich biodiversity that Sabah has to offer is among our greatest assets and heritage that we should continue to protect, conserve and manage in a sustainable manner, said the Director of Yayasan Sabah, Datuk Sapawi Bin Haji Ahmad.

According to him, one fifth of Borneon diversity is located in Sabah and it is this exceptional richness of biodiversity that resulted in Malaysia being ranked as one of the 17 mega-diversity countries in the world.

He said this in his opening remarks during the official launching of the International Conference on Forest Ecology, Biodiversity and Conservation in Borneo held at Auditorium Tun Ahmad Raffae, Menara Tun Mustapha. His speech was delivered by the Corporate Secretary of Yayasan Sabah, Dr. Karim Samsuri. Also in attendance was the Head of Group, Health, Safety and Environment of PETRONAS, Dr. Bea Punnudurai.

Datuk Sapawi said, Yayasan Sabah Group recognises that wild fauna and flora are irreplaceable part of the natural systems of the earth which must be protected. Hence, according to him, Yayasan Sabah Group has voluntarily set aside large unique forest ecosystem which are under Class II Production Forest as conservation areas. These conservation areas have been gazetted as Class I (Protection) Forest Reserves, namely, the Danum Valley and Maliau Basin in 1995 and Imbak Canyon in 2009. These areas are an integral part of the Heart of Borneo (HoB) programme that will conserve one of Southeast Asia's largest and last tracts of pristine forests.

"By setting aside these areas, we are acknowledging a wider responsibility in the field of forest management. In view that managing the conservation areas require substantial resources, we are also

grateful to have the support and strong commitment of several local and international organisations namely, Sabah Forestry Department, Sabah Wildlife Department, Sabah Parks, WWF-Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Academy of Science Malaysia, PETRONAS, Shell Malaysia, Royal Society Southeast Asia Rainforest Research Programme (UK), DANCED/DANIDA (Denmark), IKEA (Sweden) and Face Foundation (Netherlands),” said Datuk Sapawi.

Apart from conservation, Yayasan Sabah Group also embarked on rehabilitation projects. The Innoprise-IKEA Forest Rehabilitation Project (INIKEA), a collaborative effort through Sow A Seed Foundation, has rehabilitated more than 12,400 hectares of forest in Tawau which were degraded by fire in the 1980s.

“Besides that, the INFAPRO project, a collaboration with Face Foundation (now Face-The-Future) of The Netherlands has successfully rehabilitated more than 12,000 hectares of the targeted 25,000 hectares of logged forest in Lahad Datu, since 1992,” he said.

He stressed conservation and forest rehabilitation efforts would not be complete without the commitment and support of the younger generations.

“Therefore, awareness of education about the natural environment has been an important component in our programmes. Through the Sabah Nature Club, many of Sabah’s school children have undergone awareness and environmental education activities. The Club has accumulative registered members of more than 40,000 to date,” he said.

According to him it is important that Yayasan Sabah Group join effort towards reaching a common goal by protecting the last remaining pristine forest left in the world and the wildlife that calls it home.”

“I truly believe that the conference will be the stepping stone in achieving the change that we want for our future generation to live in. Let us not forget that the biodiversity we have inherited today is the result of generations of evolution, shaped by nature’s gentle touch, which provides incredible ecosystem services that sustain our lives and the loss of biodiversity will threaten our very existence,” he said.

According to him the theme of the conference, the “Knowns and the Known Unknowns” is most appropriate in view that many species of flora and fauna may yet prove to have medicinal, agricultural or other value, which we are unaware of at present.

“Their continued existence constitutes a “gene pool” of unknown but potentially great value. I hope the Conference could deliberate on this and perhaps come up with a resolution,” he added.

Yayasan Sabah Group hosted a similar conference titled Forest Biology and Conservation in Borneo in 1990 which discussed aspects related to forestry and social sciences as these are interrelated, and cannot be separated. Some of the speakers for this Conference presented papers during the Conference back in 1990.

“Having lived and worked In Borneo for some time, I hope that the knowledge and experiences gained over the last 25 years would help resolved some of the perennial concerns still facing us today, such as environmental degradation, shrinking forests and loss of biodiversity,” he added.

The three-day international conference which is organised by Yayasan Sabah Group and funded by PETRONAS sees some 370 speakers and presenters from all over the world, as well as from Malaysia, coming together to share and exchange knowledge on Sabah’s exceptional biodiversity. It was launched by the Science Advisor to the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tan Sri Professor Dr. Zakri Abdul Hamid who also delivered the keynote address entitled “*The Politics of Biodiversity Loss.*”

- PIX 1** : Tan Sri Professor Dr. Zakri Abdul Hamid launching the conference alongside Dr. Karim Samsuri (left) and Dr. Bea Punnudurai.
- PIX 2 (a,b,c)** : A section of the participants.
- PIX 3** : Tan Sri Professor Dr. Zakri Abdul Hamid being briefed on Yayasan Sabah’s conservation efforts by the Manager, Maliau Basin Conservation Area, Encik Jadda Suhaimi.

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