

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
OF
PEHIN ORANG KAYA SERI UTAMA
DATO SERI SETIA AWANG HAJI YAHYA
BIN BEGAWAN MUDIM DATO PADUKA HJ BAKAR,
THE MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND PRIMARY RESOURCES
OF BRUNEI DARUSSALAM
AT
**Roundtable on Protecting Nature in the Heart of Borneo (HoB):
Stock Take, Present Challenges, Future Directions**
On
Wednesday, 5 September 2012
At
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore

THE HEART OF BORNEO
THREE COUNTRIES ONE CONSERVATION VISION
STAY FOCUS, COMMIT MORE RESOURCES, EDUCATE, EDUCATE AND
EDUCATE

Ambassador Tan Chin Tiong,
Ambassador-at-Large and Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies;
Mr. Tan Keng Jin, Head of the Public Affairs Division of ISEAS;
invited speakers, distinguished guests, friends, ladies and gentlemen.

To our Muslim listener, Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and Selamat Hari Raya Aidil Fitri and a very good morning to all of you.

AN UPDATE

1. It is indeed an honour for me to join you all this morning in this Roundtable entitled **Protecting Nature in the Heart of Borneo: Stock take, Present Challenges and Future Directions**. As I said I want to begin my speech by stating the central theme which is also the conclusion part of my speech which is **WE NEED TO: STAY FOCUS; COMMIT MORE RESOURCES IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THE LAST REMAINING TROPICAL RAINFOREST, SPECIFICALLY THE HEART OF BORNEO; AND EDUCATE, EDUCATE, and EDUCATE the public at large.**
2. Before that, why Brunei Darussalam is such a strong advocate on the Heart of Borneo Initiative, knowing very well that in terms of per capita carbon dioxide (CO₂) emission, as last monitored by the World Bank in 2008, Brunei Darussalam rank among the top emitters at 27.5 metric tons per head of her population compare to, say, for example Singapore which is only about 6.7 metric tons. The reason for this high per capita CO₂ emission is not because of any direct industrial activity that emits CO₂, but rather because of her dominant oil and gas industries, which again are not entirely for domestic consumption but for exports.

3. The dominant oil and gas industries have in fact provided Brunei Darussalam with an avenue to grow and sustain her development without sacrificing much of her pristine and virgin forest. With intact forest cover, Brunei Darussalam remains one of the top 10 forested countries in the World. Nonetheless, the development of her oil and gas industries were never out of line with her national economic and social development because the country undertakes some measure of prudent conservation policy of her oil and gas reserves.
4. Secondly and more importantly, being small, Brunei Darussalam has its equal share of problems and challenges. Any environmental degradation or ecological changes for a small country like Brunei Darussalam would have a magnified and profound impact on the country.
5. Therefore for Brunei Darussalam, the Heart of Borneo meant a lot than just a commitment to preserve the last remaining rainforest. His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam foresaw that the Heart of Borneo Initiative would provide the additional and necessary force to conserve further the country's pristine ecosystems and at the same time, would promote a more balanced national economic development. More than that, we echo **FRITZ SCHUMACHER**, in his seminal thesis in 1973 entitled **SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL** in which he was referring to living nature as a whole but talked about fossil fuel. He said **"IF WE SQUANDER OUR FOSSIL FUELS, WE THREATEN CIVILIZATION; BUT IF WE SQUANDER THE CAPITAL REPRESENTED BY LIVING NATURE AROUND US, WE THREATEN LIFE ITSELF"**. In our own words **IF WE SQUANDER THE BORNEON RAINFOREST, WE THREATEN LIFE ITSELF.**
6. Whilst on this thesis **SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL**, Schumacher quite rightly treated living nature as **MANKIND'S NATURAL CAPITAL** and not as income to be expended or spend. In other words if we treat living nature as our natural capital, that is irreplaceable asset, we should start doing like we do for physical capital or assets such as: **CONSERVE; MINIMIZE WEAR AND TEAR; SET UP A SPECIAL FUND IN ORDER TO CONTINUE ITS USAGE; AND NEVER, NEVER, NEVER LIQUIDATE THEM.**

7. To start with, the implementation of Heart of Borneo Initiative in Brunei Darussalam involves the commitment of many stakeholders, both Government and Non-Government Organizations. It is institutionalized within the Government machinery through the creation of a National Council. Recently, His Royal Highness, Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah, the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam and Senior Minister in the Prime Minister's Office was appointed as the Royal Patron of the Brunei Heart of Borneo Council, which further enhances the stature, momentum and impact of the HoB implementation within the Country. It also provided a strong message on the commitment of Brunei Darussalam in conserving the Borneoan forests and environmental sustainability. A Central Secretariat was also established with the task to execute the mandate of the Brunei HoB Council as well as to implement and monitor projects as provided for by the Project Implementation Framework (PIF).

8. That is where Brunei Darussalam stands now as far as the implementation of the Heart of Borneo Initiative is concerned: strongly advocating, internally and externally, for the establishment of the Heart of Borneo; committing more than 58 percent of her land area into the Initiative – not big in terms of absolute area and in comparison with her neighbours but a significant portion given that there are competing needs for the same area of limited land; and lately we infuse new blood into the Initiative by obtaining a further commitment from the countries of Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia along with the Philippines in the BRUNEI-INDONESIA-MALAYSIA-PHILIPPINES EAST ASEAN GROWTH AREA (BIMP-EAGA) to make the BIMP-EAGA as **the most mega diverse sub region in the world** covering not just the terrestrial habitat but also the marine habitat as contained in the Joint Ministerial Statement of the BIMP-EAGA Ministerial Conference on the Heart of Borneo and Coral Reefs held in Bandar Seri Begawan on 9 March 2011. In our approach to this terrestrial to marine habitat conservation (**FOREST TO REEF – F2R**), one cannot just have a terrestrial mega diverse area without also the need to have a marine mega diverse area. They co-exist and more importantly they are interdependent, complementing each other and creating synergy that would contribute to the rich biodiversity of the area.

PRESENT CHALLENGES

9. The challenges are many, coming from many directions and some are more pressing than others. However, I will only talk about important ones. The first one that comes on my list is: how does one commoditize, let alone, monetize nature and the benefit it will bring. This comes on top of my list because it creates a kind of a vicious downward circle: no monetize benefit means there will not be potential donors or investors; and without investors or donors will perpetuate the destruction of nature. Surprisingly when world experts calculated the value of nature's ecosystem services, they found it was worth at least US\$36 trillion annually. That figure is close to the annual gross world product of approximately US\$39 trillion (page 24 of K C Grove & M H Smith – The Natural Advantage of Nations). That probably is a rough valuation based on indirect contribution of nature to the economy. In reality, economists have struggled to commoditize and monetize those benefits. For subjective benefit are of any use in an exchange or a trade, it must in the first instance be fulfilling the functions of money such as a good store of value, transferrable and preferable transportable. All these are against nature and the living thing. Without any way to commoditize and monetize those benefits, it is very difficult to induce investors and donors with part with their money.
10. Secondly, how to maintain and sustain public's interest and momentum, given that there exists doubter and naysayers and vested parties who could afford to spend money to turn black and white into gray shades;
11. Thirdly, time is one of our greatest challengers but all are not lost. In an extensive study using the lessons of geography and history, **Professor Laurence Smith**, Professor of Earth and Space Sciences at UCLA, in his book **THE WORLD IN 2050 FOUR FORCES SHAPING CIVILIZATION'S NORTHERN FUTURE** enumerates global forces that will shape our world up to 2050. These are:

demographics, resource demand, globalization and climate change. In all these forces the nations around the Arctic Rim (including the US) will become increasingly powerful while nations around the Equator struggle for survival. The World by 2050 will be a globally integrated world with over 9 billion people, with mounting megatrends of water stress, heat waves, and coastal flooding. Can we not reverse this shift? I hope we can because 2050 is just around the corner.

12. Fourthly, the involvement of the young generation who are known to be averse to nature and outdoor activities. Again with the apparent difficulty of quantifying or monetizing the potential benefit to be derived from nature and outdoor activities and thus appreciate nature will be a hard sell for any community to persuade its young generation to take that giant step. In the words of **the late Senator Gaylord Nelson, the founder of Earth Day: "The ultimate test of man's conscience may be his willingness to sacrifice something today for future generations whose words of thanks will not be heard."**

13. Finally, how do we ensure the benefits of the Heart of Borneo Initiatives trickle down to the local and indigenous population?

FUTURE DIRECTION

14. **There is a need to Stay Focus.** The commitment of the partner countries signatories to the 2007 Bali Declaration on the Heart of Borneo Initiative would need to be FOCUSED AND DEEPEN by infusing a new breath and blood into this voluntary trans-boundary co-operation. **Will there any need for a reconvening of the Ministerial Meeting of the Ministers Responsible for Forestry from Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia and Malaysia to stock take the achievement and to refresh the mandate after a lapse of 5 years? My answer is a resounding YES.**

15. **There is also a need to Commit More Resources.** Not just by the affected countries but also by international communities; not just present generation but also future generations; and not just financial but also human resources.

Financial resources are required to build and expand the capacity of the local and indigenous population. Financial resources are required to do research and development and more importantly to help minimize the destruction of the rainforest and to maximize the benefits derived from it. Currently, only about 5 % of the forest micro-organism have been explored and exploited.

16. And finally, without sounding too simplistic. **We need to continue to EDUCATE, EDUCATE, and EDUCATE the public at large.** It is recognized that of all sectors of society, our education sector has the greatest opportunity to truly empower us and our future generations to make a difference (Hargrove and Smith). Coincidentally, the United Nations has declared 2005-2015 as the Decade of Education in Sustainable Development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I shall end this address by congratulating the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies for successful organizing this roundtable and to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation for giving us this platform as well as your support and warm hospitality to our delegations.

Thank you for your attention.

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