

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF
TROPICAL FORESTS**

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“Setting the Scene on Collective Actions for Sustainable Forests”

**Speech by YBhg. Datu Hamden bin Haji Mohammad
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Introduction:

I am honored to stand before you today to address a matter of paramount significance—the imperative need for the conservation and sustainable management of our forests. To begin, I offer my heartfelt greetings to all present, acknowledging our shared dedication to nurturing a balanced coexistence between humanity and nature.

(Slide 1: The State of Sarawak's Forests)

Ladies and gentlemen,

Covering an expansive 12.4 million hectares, Sarawak stands as the largest region in Malaysia. Approximately 62% of its landmass is covered by forests, which serve as a valuable repository of biodiversity, economic resources, and

cultural heritage for 27 primary ethnic communities in the region. When Sarawak joined Malaysia in 1963, the forests remain as the authority of the Sarawak Government in accordance with Article 74(2) of the Federal Constitution.

The land use policy in Sarawak is very clear. The Sarawak Government has implemented a comprehensive approach, allocated specific areas for various purposes to ensure sustainable development and environmental conservation. This allocation includes 1 million hectares for conservation (TPAs), 6 million hectares of Permanent Forest Estates for sustainable forest management, and others for plantation, settlement, and miscellaneous development.

(Slide 2: Government Policies and Legislation in Sarawak)

Systematic management of Sarawak's forests began in 1919 with the formation of the Forest Department Sarawak. Sarawak has been advocating for sustainable forest management since the formulation of the Statement of Forest Policy 1954.

In 2019, the policy underwent revision to align with current development and adherence to best practices in forest management.

Over the years, we have witnessed a significant evolutionary transformation in the forestry landscape of Sarawak, encompassing not only on-the-ground operations but also administrative aspects. The restructuring of the Forest Department Sarawak and Sarawak Forestry Corporation has resulted in a more organized and targeted approach of governance, jurisdiction, and management of forests.

Numerous efforts also have been implemented to improve and refine the implementation of Sustainable Forest Management in Sarawak. The Sarawak government strongly believes that the “Economically viable, Environmentally sound and Socially Acceptable” and advocating responsible forestry practices is extremely important to show government’s commitment to maintain and enhance the best management practices.

Sarawak's forest policy has undergone substantial reform, placing increased importance on environmental protection and the sustainable management of forest resources. In 2022, we amended the Forest Ordinance 2015 to incorporate provisions related to amenity forests and to regulate the implementation of forest carbon activities, including its trading.

(Slide 3: Strengthening Sustainable Forest Management)

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is important to underscore that Sarawak is a developing nation, where forest resources play a pivotal role in our economic development. To balance the need for environmental conservation and economic needs, we have reduced our harvesting operation to approximately 2 million cubic metres per year, with strict requirements on forest management certification for both natural and planted

forests. We currently have 25 certified natural forests covering over 2.2 million hectares, as well as 7 certified forest plantations covering approximately 97,000 hectares. With this, I extend my congratulations to all stakeholders who have played a role, directly or indirectly in this journey, paving the way for a more environmentally sustainable future.

As we will witness later today, through our partnership with STA, we have developed a handbook on Reduced Impact Logging (RIL) aimed at aiding on-ground personnel in effectively implementing RIL practices. This handbook is an adaptation of the harmonized RIL Guideline for ground-based timber harvesting in Sarawak, which was jointly developed with the FAO. The guideline marks a significant stride towards standardizing timber harvesting practices and enhancing regulation within Sarawak's timber industry. The FAO has affirmed that the guideline adheres to international best practices, not only in its content but also in terms of stakeholder engagement and participation in its refinement.

(Slide 4: Forest Restoration)

In a concerted effort to pursue FLR, Sarawak has set a goal to plant 35 million trees across the state within 5 years, starting from 2021 until 2025, focusing on logging areas, forest reserves, protected areas, Native Customary Rights (NCR) land, and private owned lands. As of now, Sarawak has recorded the largest number of tree plantings among Malaysian states, exceeding 32 million trees. It is also mandatory for forest timber licenses to commence FLR activities which includes tree planting of indigenous species, silviculture management and agroforestry.

(Slide 5: Technology for Forest Conservation and Management)

Ladies and gentlemen

Sarawak has incorporated remote sensing and ICT into the Continuous Monitoring and Surveillance (COMOS) initiative, with the goal of enhancing the efficiency of enforcement operations. This integration also facilitates decision making process for actions carried out by FDS and other enforcement agencies in cases related to illegal logging activities, enabling a comprehensive understanding of patterns and impacts. By doing so, the initiative ensures that subsequent measures are implemented, and enforcement activities are conducted with increased effectiveness and transparency. The use of the DA42-MPP aircraft, equipped with hyperspectral sensors and air monitoring sensors, further strengthens this initiative.

Additionally, we have developed the Sarawak Logs Tracking & Forest Revenue System (REVLOG) and EFIMS (Enterprise Forest Information Management System (EFIMS), an online application system designed to oversee forests, monitor logging activities, and track the movement of logs throughout the supply chain. These initiatives are part of our effort to ensure all operations are conducted transparently, efficiently, and effectively.

(Slide 6: Forest Conservation through International & National Collaborations)

Sarawak's partnership with both national and international agencies dates back over 50 years, commencing initially with the FAO's involvement in forest inventory. Subsequently, a multitude of collaborations has been initiated to strengthen forest management, conservation, and enhance the capabilities of our forest officers.

The ITTO has been a longstanding partner in Sarawak's efforts for forest conservation, providing support for 22 projects and pre-projects since 1992. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to ITTO for their unwavering support of Sarawak's initiatives in biodiversity conservation and community development.

Other significant partners are WWF-Malaysia, UNDP/GEF, HOB initiatives who has contributed to forest conservation, FRIM for Forest Resource Assessments, GTZ Germany on forest management, and a multitude of national and international organizations and institutions.

(Slide 7: Exploring new source of income- Forest Carbon)

Sarawak is a pioneer of all states in Malaysia in terms of its forest carbon trading policies and regulations following the amendment of the Forest Ordinance 2015 and the approval of the Forests (Forest Carbon Activity) Rules in 2022.

Our region possesses the capacity to establish carbon sinks within its permanent forests and tree planting initiatives to earn carbon credits. This initiative not only opens up new income streams derived from forest resources but also aligns with global efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change and global warming while also supporting sustainable development goals.

(Slide 8: Community Development Initiatives)

Community engagement and development are integral components of sustainable forest management (SFM), ensuring that local communities play an active role in conserving and utilizing forest resources responsibly. The Forest Department has been actively facilitating community engagements with Forest Timber Licence holders and other relevant stakeholders through the Forest Management Certification initiative.

Over the years, the Forest Department has implemented numerous community development initiatives throughout Sarawak such upgrading of basic facilities, the provision of opportunities for local entrepreneurs (NTFP carnival) and the facilitation of handicraft training.

(Slide 9: Key Threats to Forest Sustainability in Sarawak)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The forests face numerous threats, both natural and anthropogenic, that jeopardize their long-term viability.

In 2020, the population in Sarawak has recorded a growth rate of 1.4% reaching a total of 2,5 million people. The increasing competition for land and forest

resources poses a significant threat to forest sustainability, as various stakeholders compete for access to these valuable natural assets.

Additionally conflicting interests over forests arises when different stakeholders, such as indigenous communities, conservationists, and industries, have different interests in the same forested areas.

Addressing these threats requires concerted efforts among governments, communities, NGOs, and other stakeholders at local, national, and international levels, including the implementation of sustainable forest management practices, strengthening law enforcement and governance, promoting conservation initiatives, and mitigating climate change impacts.

(Slide 10: Recognition of Forest Department Sarawak in Ensuring Forest Sustainability)

The Forest Department plays a critical role in ensuring Sustainable Forest Management. Just recently, the Department received recognition through both the Sarawak Public Service Quality Award (AKPANS) and the Integrity, Governance, and Anti-Corruption Awards (AIGA), achieving Gold for its exceptional contributions to effective governance, operations, and services.

It gives us great pleasure to announce that the Department has been recognized internationally for its work through the latest Public Service Innovation Asia awards. The Seedball Blaster project received a Silver Award, and the EFIMS and REVLOG systems received two Gold Awards. Additionally, the Chinese Innovation and Invention Society (Taiwan) presented EFIMS with a special award.

It is also crucial that I mention that the Department's corruption index has changed from high to low, according to an assessment conducted in 2023 by the Malaysia Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC).

(Slide 11: Way Forward)

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our goal is clear—to strike a balance between human development and the preservation of our forests. It is not a question of choosing one over the other but finding a harmonious coexistence. Sustainable forest management is not merely an environmental agenda; it is an economic imperative, a social responsibility, and a commitment to the well-being of our planet.

The Forest Department Sarawak will continue to

- Engage with relevant stakeholders towards achieving SFM goals.
- Enhance and provide support in capacity building.
- Leveraging on up-to-date technology applications in forest management.
- Intensify research and development (R&D) to support decision making.
- Facilitate and support timber industry in Sarawak in SFM

Nevertheless, our collective actions must extend beyond borders. Forests are interconnected ecosystems that transcend political boundaries. Collaboration at the regional, national, and international levels is essential to address transboundary and global issues.

In the spirit of collaboration, let us share knowledge, pool resources, and foster innovation. Let us learn from successful initiatives, and together, create a roadmap for sustainable development for a better future.

For those visiting Sarawak for the first time, please enjoy our hospitality and take the opportunity to explore the natural beauty and rich cultural heritage of Sarawak.

Thank you.