



MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

OFFICIATING SPEECH

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SECRETARY GENERAL
MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY (NRES)**

**FOR
THE 2026 BIODIVERSITY SCIENCE FORUM**

**30 SEPTEMBER 2026 / WEDNESDAY
9:30 AM**

ALOFT HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR

SALUTATION

1. His Excellency San Lwin, (TBC)

Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC),

2. His Excellency Ajay Sharma CMG, (TBC)

the British High Commissioner to Malaysia,

3. YBhg. Dato' Dr. Ismail Haji Parlan,

Director General of the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM),

4. ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB),

5. Distinguished representatives of ASEAN Member States,

6. Esteemed scientists, researchers, policymakers, practitioners, representatives of civil society, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities,

7. Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning and Selamat Datang to Malaysia.

1. On behalf of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability, or NRES, it gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to Kuala Lumpur for the 2026 Biodiversity Science Forum.
2. Malaysia is honoured to co-organise this important regional Forum together with the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity and the Forest Research Institute Malaysia, with the support of the ASEAN-UK Green Transition Fund through the EnCORE Wetlands Project.
3. To our colleagues who have travelled from across ASEAN and beyond, I hope that your time here will not only be productive but will also strengthen the friendships and professional networks that are so important to our regional cooperation.

I. SCENE SETTING — A REGION RICH IN NATURE, BUT UNDER GROWING PRESSURE

Ladies and gentlemen,

4. There could hardly be a more important time for us to have this conversation. ASEAN is blessed with extraordinary biological richness. Across our region, tropical forests, wetlands, peatlands, mangroves, coral reefs and other ecosystems sustain an immense diversity of life. But biodiversity is not something that exists separately from us. It is the foundation upon which our societies and economies depend.
5. It supports our food and water security. It contributes to livelihoods. It regulates our climate. It reduces disaster risks. It provides genetic resources and supports human health and well-being.

6. ASEAN's biodiversity supports the well-being of more than 660 million people. Yet, this natural wealth continues to face mounting pressures from habitat loss, climate change, invasive species, illegal wildlife trade and other human activities.
7. This brings us to an important question:

How do we ensure that the science and knowledge we already possess can translate into better decisions, and ultimately, better outcomes for nature and people?

That question lies at the heart of this year's Biodiversity Science Forum.

II. INSPIRING INPUT — FROM KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION

Ladies and gentlemen,

8. Science has transformed the way we understand nature. Today, we can detect species from traces of environmental DNA. We can listen to entire ecosystems through bioacoustics.
9. We can use satellite imagery and artificial intelligence (AI) to monitor changes across landscapes at a scale that would have been unimaginable only a generation ago.
10. We can measure carbon stored in our forests, wetlands, peatlands and coastal ecosystems with increasing precision.
11. These emerging approaches are reflected in the programme before us from **eDNA, bioacoustics and AI-assisted monitoring**, to carbon sequestration, blue and green carbon, ecological corridors and adaptive restoration. But technology alone will not conserve biodiversity.

Data alone will not restore an ecosystem.

12. And a scientific paper, however excellent, will have limited impact if its findings never reach those making decisions on the ground.
13. This is why I believe the real strength of the Biodiversity Science Forum lies not simply in presenting good science. Its value lies in **connecting science with action**.
14. It brings researchers into conversation with policymakers. It connects emerging technologies with practical conservation needs.
15. And importantly, it recognises that scientific knowledge should also **engage with the knowledge and lived experience of Indigenous Peoples and local communities**. I believe that is an important ambition.
16. Because some of our most difficult environmental challenges will not be solved by a single discipline, institution or country. They require different forms of knowledge to come together.

III. BIG PICTURE — INTEGRATED BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE AGENDA

Ladies and gentlemen,

17. This brings me to the bigger picture. For many years, biodiversity conservation, climate change and development **were often discussed through separate policy tracks**.
18. But nature does not operate according to our institutional boundaries. **Climate change affects biodiversity, while biodiversity loss weakens climate resilience. And both ultimately affect people.**

19. A degraded forest is not only a biodiversity issue. It can become a carbon issue, a water-security issue, a disaster-risk issue and a livelihood issue. Similarly, restoring a mangrove is not simply about planting trees. A healthy mangrove can provide habitat, store carbon, reduce coastal vulnerability and support local livelihoods.
20. Restoring peatlands can conserve biodiversity while retaining carbon, improving hydrological functions and strengthening landscape resilience.
21. This interconnectedness is why the theme of this year's Forum is so timely: **“Advancing Biodiversity Enhancement in ASEAN: Science-Based Pathways for Climate Mitigation and Ecosystem Restoration.”**
22. The important word here, to me, is **“enhancement.”** Our ambition cannot simply be to slow down biodiversity loss. Increasingly, we must ask: **How can we leave ecosystems in a better condition than we found them?**
23. How can our policies not merely minimise damage, but actively contribute towards recovery and resilience? And how can science help us determine whether our interventions are genuinely producing measurable biodiversity gains?
24. These questions are particularly relevant as ASEAN Member States work towards implementing the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**. But ASEAN cooperation gives us something more. Our ecosystems do not stop at national borders.
25. Wildlife corridors cross boundaries. River basins connect communities. Migratory species move across countries. Marine ecosystems connect our coastlines. Therefore, while implementation may occur nationally and locally, many of our solutions must also be **regional and collaborative**.

26. And this is precisely where ASEAN can add value. We can share science. We can share technologies. We can share lessons from what has worked, and equally importantly, what has not.
27. **Together we can build a stronger regional evidence base for decisions affecting our shared natural heritage.**

IV. WAY FORWARD — MAKING SCIENCE MATTER

Ladies and gentlemen,

28. So, what should we hope to achieve from these two days?

The programme provides us with four important areas panel discussions:

- i. **biodiversity assessment and emerging science;**
- ii. **biodiversity enhancement and ecosystem resilience;**
- iii. **climate mitigation and nature-based solutions;**
- iv. **restoration science and practice.**

29. The Forum will then move from discussion to real-world application through a field visit to FRIM. But I hope our ambition goes beyond completing the programme. I would encourage everyone participating in this Forum to keep **three questions** in mind.
30. **First: What does the science tell us?** Let us ensure that our policies and interventions are supported by credible evidence and effective monitoring.
31. **Second: How can we translate that science into action?** A finding becomes valuable when it can inform a policy, improve management, guide restoration, empower a community or change an investment decision.

32. And **third: How can we scale what works?** ASEAN is enormously diverse. A solution developed in one ecosystem or one country cannot always be transferred directly to another.
33. But principles, methodologies, technologies and lessons can be shared and adapted. This Forum therefore provides an opportunity not merely to exchange research findings, but to identify **scalable solutions, innovative technologies and community-led approaches that are appropriate for Southeast Asia region.**
34. By the end of this Forum, we should aim to move from **knowledge to recommendations; from recommendations to implementation; and ultimately, from implementation to measurable outcomes for biodiversity.** That is how science can make a difference.

Ladies and gentlemen,

35. Before I conclude, allow me to express the sincere appreciation of the Government of Malaysia to the **ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB)**, the **Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM)**, the **ASEAN-UK Green Transition Fund**, and all partners involved in making this Forum a reality.
36. I also wish to thank our scientists, researchers, policymakers, practitioners, civil society organisations, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities represented here today.
37. Your presence reflects something very important: **The future of biodiversity cannot be shaped by governments alone. It cannot be shaped by scientists alone. It must be shaped together.**

Once again, **Selamat Datang to Malaysia.**

38. I wish everyone a productive and inspiring Forum, and I look forward to the ideas, partnerships and recommendations that will emerge from our discussions.

Thank you.