

**Association For Tropical Biology
And Conservation (ATBC) Conference 2018
Pullman Hotel, Kuching Sarawak
1 July 2018**

**Opening Speech by The Right Honourable
Datuk Patinggi (Dr) Abang Haji Abdul Rahman Zohari
bin Tun Datuk Abang Haji Openg
Chief Minister of Sarawak**

Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. First and foremost, I would like to extend our warm Sarawak welcome to all participants, from near and far, of the 55th annual meeting of the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC) and conference in Kuching. Many of you have travelled thousands of miles to be here, and I want to thank everyone, for your dedication and commitment to our common cause. We are honoured by your presence in this meeting and conference.
2. It is inspiring to see more than 850 people from over 60 countries converging in Kuching with a common objective of discussing on what's new and how best to conserve the natural ecosystem and biodiversity that is so important to the health of our planet.
3. Sarawak has a special link with the history of tropical biology as a scientific discipline. In 1854 British naturalist Alfred Russell Wallace visited Kuching and spent two years studying evolution by natural selection and the geographical distribution of organisms that led to him being considered as the co-discoverer of natural selection together with Charles Darwin.
4. I am given to understand that ATBC is the largest professional association of people studying and conserving tropical ecosystem and that this is the first time in its 55 years of history that the global ATBC meeting happens in Malaysia. I am happy and felt honoured that Kuching has been picked as the venue of your meeting and conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. Sarawak is a land with a diverse ethnic composition but we have always strived to ensure that our differences do not stand in the way of our social and political stability. We have taken steps in earnest to develop our economy which used to be heavily agriculture and commodity-based. We know the danger of being too dependent on the exports of raw materials and therefore, we are trying hard to diversify our economy and expand our economic base to include manufacturing in order to add value to our raw materials. We know industrial manufacturing required huge amount of power and we tried to harness our renewable and clean energy potentials to power our industrialisation programme and depend less on fossil fuels.
6. While trying to industrialise the economy we recognise the importance of protecting, preserving and conserving the environment. Our state government has formulated various policies and legislations to sustainably manage and conserve our forests and wildlife to ensure that our economic developments are in conformity with the globally accepted principle of sustainable development.
7. Sustainable development is a delicate balance between the need for economic growth, social progress, political stability and preservation of the environment. For this reason, the Sarawak Government has formulated the Land Use Policy to manage our land use in order to achieve development that is sustainable.
8. Sarawak has a land mass of 12.4 million hectares, and 64% is still under forest cover. Sarawak has a very clear land use policy which takes into consideration all aspects of economic development, social well being and environmental balance and integrity. This policy includes three (3) main sectors i.e. forestry, agriculture and other land uses. For forestry, the government has targeted 6 million hectares of land as the permanent forest estates and 1 million hectares as totally protected areas.
9. I would like to assure all of you that the Sarawak government manages its forest based on the principles of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM). We invited the FAO in 1968 and the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) in 1989 to undertake a study of sustainable forest management in Sarawak and recommend to us how to manage our forest effectively. The findings covered a wide spectrum of subjects on sustainable timber yield, sustainable catchment management, biological diversity and economic sustainability. All of these recommendations have been complied with and implemented by the relevant state agencies and industries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. We have always welcomed international collaboration to carry out research and

conservation works in our forest. We have strategic conservation partnership with various countries such as Japan, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, USA, Australia, New Zealand, India, china, ASEAN, the Middle East and others.

11. We also have scientific collaborations with international bodies such as the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), FAO, UNDP, GEF, JICA, FOMISS, ALTERA, APFNet, DANCED/DANIDA, GTZ, etc. to promote greater cooperation and sharing of scientific information.
12. Of notable mention is that Sarawak is currently developing a spectral mixed dipterocarp forest database for Sarawak with various universities such as Salford University, Lincoln University and our local universities.
13. In addition, just a few days ago Sarawak Forest Department signed a MOU with Copenhagen Zoo, Denmark for collaboration in the conservation and management of wildlife and protected areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. While you are here in Sarawak, I sincerely hope that you would have the opportunity to explore and see for yourself some of the stunning protected natural treasures of Sarawak in our national parks such as Gunung Mulu National Park, Niah Cave National Park, Lambir National Park, to name a few.
15. For those of you who cannot afford to venture to other districts outside Kuching because of time constraints we do have interesting places within the vicinity of the city such as Bako National Park, Kubah or Matang National Park; Semengoh Nature Reserve to explore.
16. It is also my sincere hope that your presence in Kuching as a large group of eminent people in tropical biology and conservation will leave a lasting impression on and inspire our local academics and scientists to upgrade the status of conservation works in Sarawak.
17. With that note, it gives me great pleasure to **officially declare** open this ATBC International conference 2018, Kuching Sarawak.

Wishing you all the best. Thank you