

**OPENING ADDRESS AND OFFICIAL LAUNCHING OF  
THE 18TH MALAYSIAN FORESTRY CONFERENCE 2018  
“ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY AND  
DIGITIZATION”**

**BY**

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IMPERIAL HOTEL, KUCHING, SARAWAK**

**PREAMBLE**

1. It is a great pleasure for me to be here this morning, to officiate at the 18th Malaysian Forestry Conference 2018 with the theme “Advancing Sustainable Forestry through Digitization and Technology”.
2. Let me extend a warm Sarawak welcome to all of you especially those from Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah to the Land of Hornbills.
3. It is worthy of note that this conference is attended by officers, administrators and researchers from forestry agencies in Malaysia and other observers from institutions related to forestry, timber industries and NGOs. All of you have come to gather in Kuching with the common objectives of discussing and sharing on what’s new and how best to manage our nation’s forests resources sustainably.

**FOREST RESOURCES**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. Malaysia is blessed with the mega-rich biodiversity of its tropical rainforests. We always regard our forest resources as our treasure. As of 2016, forest constitutes about 55 % or 18,119,338 ha of Malaysia’s land mass. In Sarawak, forest cover is about 64% of its total land mass.
5. For the past 100 years, forestry has been the backbone of the state’s economy and has contributed significantly towards its socio-economic development as well as the well-being of its people. About 50% of Sarawak’s population are our rural people whom are mostly still dependent on the forest and forest resources for livelihood and employment. Forest industry development had provided access and communication to the rural communities especially those in the most interior part of Sarawak.
6. The state government is well aware of the fact that with any development there is always side effects. As such, we are always committed to strike a balance between the need for development and safeguarding our forest resources, environment and well-being of the people. We fully subscribed to the concept of sustainable development of the forest so that our forest will always be there to provide for us.

## SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

Ladies and Gentlemen,

7. The state government is committed in ensuring its forest and forest resources are managed in a sustainable manner. In fact, we have put in place a well-meaning forest policy statement as early as 1954 to ensure that our forest will not be destroyed in the face of development and modernisation.

8. However, with rapid socio-economic development which requires more areas for development and competition for land use as well as encroachment into our Permanent Forest Estate the management of our forests become more and more challenging.

9. Realizing this, our state government has to re-look at its policies and ordinances to strengthen our forest management and wood-based industries. Policy reform is needed to catch-up with current issues facing forestry either locally or globally. Among the policies that are being reviewed and newly introduced are:

- Sarawak Forest Policy
- Forest Management Certification
- Development of Planted or Industrial Forest
- Wood Industries Development Plan
- Raw Material for timber industries
- Forest Revenue especially cess from downstream products

These draft policies are in the final stage of deliberation before they are endorsed.

10. In line with our policy reform, the state government has made it mandatory for all long-term forest timber licences to obtain Forest Management Certification by 2022. In the past, FMC was merely on voluntary basis.

11. With growing local and global concern on environmental issues, forest management certification has become the main requirement for buyers to ensure that timber and timber products come from sustainably managed forests. It is also has become the key interest for environment and social based Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

12. We acknowledge that in the beginning of this journey, shortcomings and challenges are inevitable, especially on the capacity of both implementing agencies and timber industry. Nevertheless, we believe that with strong cooperation and collaboration from all relevant ministries and agencies, timber industries, NGOs and local communities a balance between environment, economy and socio-economic development can be achieved.

13. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate three of our Forest Management Units (FMU) namely Anap Muput FMU for being able to maintain its certification and Ravenscourt FMU and Kapit FMU for being certified recently. Not forgetting our Forest Plantation Management Unit namely Segan, Lana, Masama, Penyuan and Kejin Long Lama for being certified Forest Management (Plantation) Certification. I hope that other FMUs would follow suit very soon.

14. I am made to understand that Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah are well ahead of Sarawak in implementing the Forest Management Certification. This is perhaps the area

where collaboration among the forestry agencies in these three regions could be enhanced to further uplift Malaysia's image in forest management certification.

15. I would like the private sector to respond to the government's initiative to get all our people (licensee) in the forestry sector to have the certification. Once you got the recognition the market will respond to you. And this is very important to the private sector and therefore you must be committed to have the certification.

## **ADVANCEMENT OF TECHNOLOGIES**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

15. Today, with the advancement of technologies and digitalisation in many aspects of development, we can no longer be oblivious to the use of technologies and be isolated as our forests can be seen and remotely monitored from anywhere in the world. At the same time, the advancement of technologies can be used to our advantage as they can be used to manage our forests more efficiently.

16. In developed countries like Finland for example, forest owners can take care of their forest-related business from the comfort of their homes. They have the service portal that provides latest information of forest areas in terms of forest stands, stocking, soil types, etc. This service portal could also suggest possible logging method or other forest management activities for the area as well as providing related income and cost estimates.

17. As in other industries, Information system is one of the technologies that have a big impact in their operation; likewise it also applies in forest management. Sustainable forest management requires timely and accurate information, and with the advancement of technologies this information is readily and easily available with the snap of your finger. This would enable the decision maker to make an informed decision. Technologies also offer options for a more pragmatic approach in conservation of biodiversity e.g. wildlife tracking and monitoring. This is also in line with the state's aspiration to become a digital government.

18. For us in Sarawak, we strive to stay abreast with the latest technologies in the area of forest planning, monitoring and enforcement. Drone for example is widely use in monitoring and reconnaissance works especially in area where access is limited. Geospatial technology is capable of capturing, storing, analyzing and displaying geographically referenced information in real time. Since our country is a signatory to many international conventions and multi-lateral environmental agreements, data on forest and other land uses need to be reported periodically. All of these are made possible with the help of technology. At a larger scale, Sarawak has embarked on information sharing through "big data" to enable better coordination within state agencies.

19. I would like to add here that its the policy of the state government to digitalise all its services and to have what we called "big data" in our storage system. Once we have all the information system it can be retrieved and this information can be the basis for planning as well as to identify trend, particularly in the forest and timber industry.

20. I would like at this stage to say thank you to ITTO for having given us guidelines in forest management in Sarawak. I was the Minister of Industrial Development from 1988 to 2000 and we have been working very closely with ITTO, particularly Dato' Freezaila. And this is the sort of collaboration we are working on in order to be always informed of

the timber industry development worldwide. And we are fortunate that with the collaboration we have managed to develop a sustainable management system for our forest, and we are committed to continue with that.

21. Ladies and gentlemen, technology is important and in this instance, to provide an efficient monitoring system. The system will enable us to really record what is in store and at the same time to enhance what is really in store. It means that if you have a forest estate you know the volume of the timber stand and also the amount of timber stand that is depleted and the amount that have to be replanted. And this is the way how we manage our forest.

22. For that matter Sarawak is committed to enhance its digital infrastructure. Last year we have announced we are putting aside RM2 billion from our state fund to upgrade our digital infrastructure, including the speed, because if you have the devices but do not have the speed you cannot get information in real time. And therefore, it is the commitment of our state government to enhance its digital infrastructure in the rural areas where the forests are, and this will be done in order to make sure that our foresters can get and retrieve information in real time and therefore can be used for planning purposes.

## **FOREST BEYOND TIMBER**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

19. Beyond timber, others such as non-timber forest resources are very much underutilized. Non-timber forest resources play a key role in rural communities' livelihood and the local economy, though just as an informal sector of economy.

20. Non-timber forest resources such as eco-tourism, carbon credit and community-based forestry are some of the potentials that should be explored as alternative source of income for the community and the state as a whole.

## **WAY FORWARD**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

21. Having said that, and with all the advancement of technology that is being use now is secondary if the integrity and sanctity of our forests is not sufficiently guarded. Therefore this is where the focus and emphasis on Research and Development is vital. The existing platform such as the Heart of Borneo Initiative could also be used to enhance collaboration, networking and knowledge sharing. Our colleagues from Peninsular Malaysia could also share with us their experiences in implementing the Central Forest Spine Project.

22. Therefore, it is my fervent hope that the conference resolutions would capture various issues on research and development, technologies and develop ideas on how we move forward as one to address challenges in forest management at the national, regional and global levels as well as for future collaboration in forestry.

23. Last but not least, for all those who come from afar, I wish you a pleasant stay in Sarawak and enjoy what Kuching has to offer.

23. With that note, it gives me a great pleasure to officially declare open the 18th Malaysian Forestry Conference 2018, Kuching Sarawak.

Wishing you all the best. Thank you