



PRESS RELEASE

Philippines President hosts South-East Asian launch of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity

Montreal 30 May 2011— The United Nations Decade on Biodiversity has been launched in South-East Asia by the President of the Philippines, Benigno S. Aquino III, who also issued a Presidential Proclamation declaring a National Decade. The event took place on 30 May 2011 at the Malacanang Palace with the participation of diplomats from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam; high-level government officials; and representatives of media, conservation organizations and the business community.

President Aquino's proclamation of 2011-2020 as the National Decade on Biodiversity in the Philippines recognized the United Nations Decade as an excellent opportunity to increase public awareness of the values of biodiversity and promote actions at the national, regional and local levels to conserve and sustainably manage the nation's rich natural heritage.

The Philippines Environment Secretary Ramon Paje handed over a copy of the Presidential Proclamation to Ahmed Djoghlaif, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, with President Aquino witnessing the presentation.

As a further demonstration of his country's commitment to the objectives of the Decade, the President declared: "The Strangler Fig Tree, known in the Philippines as *Balete*, located in front of this hallowed hall, as our Heritage Tree. This *Balete* tree, which is more than 100 years old, has been a mute witness to the unfolding of the Philippines' rich history."

He went on to say: "In declaring the *Balete* as a Heritage Tree, we will constantly be reminded of our obligations as citizens of this planet to protect, conserve and sustainably use our biodiversity resources."

Prior to the South-East Asia launch of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity, President Aquino launched a National Greening Programme, the aim of which is to plant 1.5 billion trees over more than 1 million hectares of land across the Philippines from 2011 to 2016. The programme was part of the Philippines launch of the 2011 International Year of Forests.

The ceremony followed the successful Asia and Pacific launch of the United Nations Decade in New Delhi on 23 May, as well as the national launch by the Republic of Korea, held in Sangjo on 20 May.

Recently, on the occasion of the International Day for Biological Diversity, the Philippines expanded the protection of 109 threatened species in about 400,000 hectares of conservation sites through the New Conservation Areas in the Philippines Project (NewCAPP). The project was made possible through the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme and the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

Following his meeting with the President, Mr Djoghlaif stated: "Responding to the biodiversity challenges calls for the full engagement of all stakeholders without exception. Last week in Seoul, I had the immense privilege of meeting H.E. Lee Myung-bak, the President of Korea. Today, I had the unique privilege of meeting the President of the Philippines, H.E. Benigno S Aquino III. My meetings with these two tremendous supporters of sustainable development demonstrated to me that leaders are taking up the challenge."

The South-East Asia launch of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity coincided with the week-long celebration in the Philippines of the International Day for Biological Diversity, on 22 May, and the awards ceremony for the ASEAN Champions of Biodiversity. The winners were HSBC in Brunei Darussalam (business), “Born to be Wild”, a Philippines television programme (media), and the Green Community of Indonesia (youth). The ASEAN Champions of Biodiversity recognized the outstanding biodiversity conservation and advocacy initiatives of business, media and youth organizations in Southeast Asia. The awards were organized by the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity and supported by the ASEAN Foundation, European Union, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Mr. Rodrigo Fuentes, Executive Director of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity said the Philippines launch of the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity and the awarding of ASEAN Champions of Biodiversity was very timely. He went on to say: “The Philippines is one of the world’s 17 megadiverse countries while South-East Asia, occupying only three per cent of the Earth’s surface, boasts of globally significant terrestrial and marine biodiversity that include an astonishing 18 per cent of all species assessed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It is but fitting that South-East Asia and the Philippines play a major role in global conservation efforts and celebrations.”

Regional launches for the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity are planned throughout the coming months. The Caribbean launch will take place in Havana on 4 July, to be followed on 22 July by the regional launch for Africa in Addis Ababa. Later this year, Costa Rica and Ecuador will host the regional launches for Central America and for Latin America, respectively. Japan, as the current President of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the country of origin of this initiative will host an international event to launch the Decade in December 2011.

Information on the Decade, including the logo, can be found on the official website of the United Nations Decade at: www.cbd.int/2011-2020.

Notes for Editors

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and entering into force in December 1993, the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources. With 193 Parties, the Convention has near universal participation among countries. The Convention seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats from climate change, through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of technologies and good practices and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety is a subsidiary agreement to the Convention. It seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology. To date, 159 countries plus the European Union have ratified the Cartagena Protocol. The Secretariat of the Convention and its Cartagena Protocol is located in Montreal. For more information visit: www.cbd.int.

The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity

The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity is an intergovernmental organization mandated to coordinate regional efforts of ASEAN Member States in conserving and sustainably managing biodiversity resources and ensuring access and benefit sharing of biodiversity resources in Southeast Asia. The Centre facilitates cooperation and coordination among the ASEAN Member States and with relevant national government, regional and international organizations, on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of such biodiversity in the ASEAN region. For more information visit: www.aseanbiodiversity.org

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