

## Statement for the International Day for Biological Diversity, 22 May 2013

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The 10 Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), through the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, join the world in celebrating the International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB) on May 22<sup>nd</sup>.

This year, the theme of IDB is *Water and Biodiversity*, in recognition of the United Nations' designation of 2013 as the International Year of Water Cooperation. The theme underscores the crucial role of biodiversity and ecosystems in providing for water security, and therefore for sustainable development. It is also a special occasion to reflect on the role of water and biodiversity in our lives.

While water covers most of the Earth, only a meager 0.03 percent is available as liquid freshwater at or near the land surface. This minuscule amount supports all terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity, as well as the well-being of humans and the other species that depend on this source of life.

In Southeast Asia, nearly 700 million people depend on water for sustenance, sanitation, and many forms of economic activities. Similar with the rest of the world, however, we are faced with a worsening international water crisis owing to wanton mismanagement, rapid population growth, and the impacts of climate change. We must therefore work together to address water insecurity.

One potent weapon against water insecurity is biodiversity conservation. We must remember that ecosystems regulate the availability of water, and its quality. Ecosystem degradation increases water insecurity. Ecosystem conservation and restoration therefore help achieve water security.

Let us ensure the wise use of wetlands! There is a critical link between wetlands and water. Without wetlands there will be no water; and without water there will be no wetlands. Without adequate management of wetlands from the mountains to the sea, there is no water of the right quality and quantity where and when it is needed.

Let us protect our forests! They have a close relationship with our water resources. Forests are akin to giant sponges. They soak up rainfall during wet seasons and slowly release in times of drought. Forests have natural filtration and storage systems that supply more than 70 percent of usable water all over the world. Thus, sustainable forest management is needed to ensure a steady stream of good-quality fresh water.

Biodiversity conservation is a sustainable solution to the water crisis. Governments are beginning to realize the importance of using ecosystems to manage water.

The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity fully supports the celebration of the International Day for Biological Diversity. We encourage all sectors to participate in this global celebration. Now is the time to call public attention to the root causes of biodiversity loss and act decisively to halt the decline of our natural wealth. Let us recognize that biodiversity conservation holds the key to achieving a more water-secure world.

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