

ITTO/IUCN International Workshop on Increasing the Effectiveness of Transboundary Conservation Areas in Tropical Forests

17-21 February 2003, Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand

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Your Excellencies, Honourable ITTO and IUCN Representatives, Distinguished Guests, Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen;

I, on behalf of His Excellency Prapat Panyachatraksa, the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment feel it is great pleasure and honour to be invited to chair the opening ceremony of the International Workshop on Transboundary Conservation Areas held jointly by the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), and the National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department of Thailand - the out-growth of the Royal Forest Department. First of all, on behalf of the people and the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand, I would like to extend our warmest welcome to all of you to Thailand. Especially those from overseas, who are here to share your experiences in transboundary conservation area management with participants from other countries, as well as to experience the way of life, environment, and socioeconomic conditions of the people of north-eastern Thailand.

Forest provides huge benefits. Besides supplying wood and other forest products, it stores vast amount of information on genetic resources, regulates the climate and the flow of rivers, protects and enriches forest soils, controls pests and diseases, regenerates useful plants and disperses seeds, safeguards water quality, offers beautiful landscapes, and enriches us spiritually. Of course, conservation areas is, as one of the vital factors of life on earth, both fauna and flora, protecting biological and cultural diversity, helping to improve the livelihoods of local communities, providing home for many indigenous people and bringing countless benefits to society in general. As pressures on natural resources increase due to the expansion of communities and the population explosion, the conservation of such resources for the furtherance of mankind is recognized globally. Cooperation in conservation of border areas of one or more countries or even crossing the borders deems necessary.

Conservation planning cannot just be site-specific anymore, but has to be on a broader scale, both at national and international levels. Plants and animals do not recognize national boundaries. They move from country to country without any bother to apply for passports or visa, nor do they fear the danger awaiting them across the border. Clearly, strategies for conservation of biodiversity in the twenty-first century must recognize transboundary cooperation as one prime factor.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

In Thailand, forest complexes have been identified so that ecosystem management can be applied for biodiversity conservation. Presently, there are 19 forest complexes throughout the Kingdom. For example, the Western Forest Complex adjacent to Myanmar has already been planned and managed jointly with DANIDA. The Phatam Forest Complex in the northeast, straddling the borders of Cambodia and Lap PDR, has been established as transboundary, biodiversity conservation management area supported by ITTO. This success is, of course, due to strong political will of the three countries to conserve and sustain biodiversity,

Apart from the mutual benefits from biodiversity conservation, transboundary conservation areas can also play an important role in fostering better cooperation and understanding between countries. They may help bring about peaceful solution to minor disputes. In many cases, they bring neighbouring countries to work together for mutual objectives and benefits, and strengthening friendly relationship as a result. Thailand, too, would like to develop our forest complexes adjacent to our neighbours as transboundary conservation areas for mutual benefits in biodiversity conservation as well as to strengthen relationships conservation-wise with our neighbours in the South and the West. As mentioned earlier, our first dream came to reality two years ago when ITTO rendered the support to Thailand to initiate the project entitled "Management of the Phatam Protected Forest Complex to Promote Cooperation for Transboundary Biodiversity Conservation between Thailand, Cambodia and Laos (Phase 1)". The Project will last until September 2003, and we expect the Project to be extended to the implementation stage of its management as planned during Phase I. That means Thailand will work together with Cambodia and Laos to achieve biodiversity conservation within the adjoining protected areas straddling the borders of the three countries. Poaching, illegal felling and trading of illegal forest products along the borders will be minimized if not completely checked. Local communities will be trained to utilize natural resources wisely. Certain species of both plant and animals may be utilized for commercial or domestic consumption through training by outreach and/or extension programmes provided they are in compliance with laws and regulation. Ecotourism, including cultural and agro-tourism, may be developed and promoted so the local communities can earn their living through these activities. This project may be only a pilot transboundary conservation area on this subcontinent. Yet, it may already be a showcase for other countries to learn from this lesson and duplicate the same,

The Project areas were once covered with dense and fertile forests and were habitats of fauna and flora. Among those, one is the endangered Kouprey, the unique wild ox of the region. Kouprey was last seen 10 years ago and none has been seen since. It may be because of poaching. Forested areas have been gradually decreasing as a result of forest encroachment for shifting cultivation, or other activities that destroyed wildlife habitats to the level that it no longer can sustain the existence of certain species. Wildlife may migrate from area to area or even from one country to other without any restriction if habitats connect. Human activities destroying habitats result in tremendous losses of biodiversity, such as wildlife, plants, insects, and even micro-organisms. Protection of conservation areas in individual country has been realized through the establishment of the national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and the equivalent reserves. However, forest complex next to neighbouring countries may create problem such as preventing officials to supervise and control over poaching and/or encroachment due not only to remoteness and rough terrains, but also international protocol. We, therefore, need mutual agreement and cooperation from neighbouring countries to conserve and manage the adjoining areas using the share information and methodologies. Thailand is willing to cooperate fully with our neighbours to the west and the south, similar to what we have done in the northeast, to establish similar transboundary conservation areas. We hope that ITTO, IUCN and other donor countries will provide necessary funding to this unprecedented effort.

I would also like to take this opportunity to raise some issues to your attention. Ladies and Gentlemen, many tropical countries are poor or at best trying to escape from being poor and are seeking assistance from the rich or developed countries. Tropical countries may possess abundant resources, especially in diversifying species and competent enough human resources to manage them. But without seed money to initiate the programme, it is unlikely or next to impossible to start the activities in the planned magnitude. To comply with the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) agreements, rich and/or developed countries are requested to provide necessary assistance to the poor and developing countries to enable them to utilize their natural resources wisely. Of course, monitoring is necessary to ensure proper and

appropriate use of fund. I, therefore, wish you all to heed their requests and proceed to support the third world countries to enable them to globally conserve and manage their resources according to criteria and indicators established by various agencies.

The Royal Thai Government is expressing her appreciation to ITTO and IUCN in selected Ubon Ratchathani as the venue for this workshop and choosing the Phatam Forest Complex to be a case study, so that your experience can be discussed and compiled for implementation to fit the local situations more effectively. I am pleased to learn from the organizing committee that great support from local agencies has been obtained to make the workshop possible. Worth mentioning among them are the Local Administration Organization of Ubon Ratchathani, the Regional and Provincial Forest Offices, the involving national parks and wildlife sanctuaries; and, of course, the organizing committee from the National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department who provided local transport for all participants, facilitated in accommodation reservations and arrangement, secretariat staff and so on. I, therefore, wish to take this opportunity to extend my personal gratitude to these agencies for assistance given to the joint Organizing Committee and made the Workshop possible.

Last but not least is also the inspiration of ITTO and IUCN in deciding to conduct this Workshop in Thailand. Thank you, again, for all that have been given to us and to the people of Thailand.

I do not want to prolong my statement as I've learned that there are many issues awaiting your discussion and deliberation. I wish you all a pleasant stay in Ubon Ratchathani and a success at your meeting.

May I now declare the workshop open

Thank you.