

# Govts' support crucial for Heart of Borneo

CONSERVATION and sustainable development are two sides of the same coin and neither happens in isolation, Datuk Dr Mikaaail Kavanagh, told 250 participants of an international conference in Kota Kinabalu on Tuesday.

He added that this is as true for Borneo as it is anywhere else in the world.

The day-long conference, with the theme, "Discover Borneo", was organized by Yayasan Sabah in conjunction with the official launching of the k@Borneo portal by Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman, with the view to highlight the importance of information to promote Borneo.

Dr Mikaaail set the tone for the conference by saying in his keynote address that information, integration and participation are "critical components" for the Heart of Borneo (HoB), just as they are in any other conservation initiative.

The keynote address speaker, who settled in Malaysia in 1978 and embarked on a 25-year career with WWF-Malaysia, now serves as Special Advisor to the WWF International's support for HoB initiative.

**Biggest on the planet**  
Dr Mikaaail noted that the HoB is one of the biggest conservation programmes on the planet, and that it illustrates the growth over a decade of an audacious, almost outrageous, conservation idea.

With the HoB covering a total area of over 200,000 sq km, he said its size is about 90% of United Kingdom, 65% of the whole Malaysian Federation, and 300 times the size of Singapore.

He said that on the one hand, the world's tropical forests are generally acknowledged to be global treasure houses of biodiversity on the other hand, human pressures are threatening their very survival by clearing and over harvesting them.

"Plus, there is fragmenting of what is left into non-viable patchworks of small areas that rapidly decline in species composition and ecological functioning."

For conservation to succeed, Dr. Mikaaail stressed, very large blocks (of forests) need to be protected.

He said this was the initial and simple idea that gave birth to the Heart of Borneo conservation programme.

"But the reality is that the forests have always provided many goods and services for the local communities who have at the same time adapted to modern economic development with all its costs and benefits."

He invited conference participants to take note that HoB is not a proposal for a lock away of the whole area under total protection as a giant park.

"Rather, it is a proposal for a core of total protection, set in a connecting buffer zone of sustainable human use."

**Very different conditions**  
Dr Mikaaail pointed out that HoB involves three different countries of Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia and Malaysia and that very different conditions apply in different parts of a landscape.

"This requires great national commitment, including finding efficient ways of coordinating the intergovernmental, trilateral



Forests Canopy: balancing between conservation and sustainable development of Borneo Island.

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Dr Junaidi Payne



Dr Mikaaail

effort." In his opinion, the interest, encouragement and support that HoB has received from the governments of the three Bornean countries "is key to generating widespread support that put HoB past the tipping point".

He gave a brief account of major actions jointly taken by the three governments since the declaration of the HoB initiative was officially endorsed in Bali, on Feb. 12, 2007.

Tan Sri Datu Khalil Datu Hj Jamalul, the Director of Yayasan Sabah, was on hand to welcome the panel of seven speakers and participants at the opening session.

Chairman of the conference, held at the mini theatre of Menara Tun Mustapha, at Likas, was Datuk Dr Abdul Latiff Mohamad, the Emeritus Professor of the Faculty of Science and Technology, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

After the opening session, all participants were invited to attend the opening ceremony of k@borneo portal at the main auditorium by the chief minister, before returning in the afternoon for the presentation of papers.

Dr Junaidi Payne, a conservation specialist who is attached to WWF-Malaysia as senior technical advisor for its Borneo programme, spoke on the "Trends in Generating Conservation Information in Sabah".

He found that the availability of good spatial information, "a big weakness" and that there are no clear trends for generating conservation information in Sabah.

However, Payne, who has been living in Sabah since 1979, noted that the availability of printed materials "is significant" in the state and gave examples of

some of the "excellent compilations" of publications.

#### Outstanding work

He made special mention of the annual reports of the Sabah Forestry Department, saying that they were outstanding, on time, and comprehensive in contents.

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Among the outstanding publications he highlighted are: Tree Flora of Sabah and Sarawak; Kinabalu - Summit of Borneo; Maliau Basin - Sabah's Lost World; the 2008 annual report of Sabah Forestry Department; and A Field Guide to the Frogs of Borneo.

Payne, a biologist and an author of many books related to conservation including one on the Orang Utans, spoke of his experience in finding reliable information.

Among the major sources of information he listed are: world wide webs (www), through the Internet; public libraries; universities; government departments and agencies; bookshops and networking colleagues.

Giving each of these categories a rating from one to 10, he placed the www at the top with a score of 10, bookshops and networking colleagues at 5, government agencies at only 2; whilst public libraries and universities are at the bottom rank of 1.

#### Some weaknesses

Payne discussed the implications of these weaknesses in generating reliable and up-to-date information on Borneo.

He advocates the wider use of the www through Internet, stressed the need to encourage and facilitate individual researchers, and warned that

gaps might appear when key institutions and individuals become inactive.

He concluded that "something very major needs to happen" in order to fulfill the unfulfilled promise of digital mapping in Borneo.

Dr Glen Reynolds, Director of the South-east Asia Rainforest Research Programme (SEARRP) of the Royal Society, presented a paper on "Current Efforts in Centralizing Information in Various Parts of Borneo".

He said the Royal Society, through the SEARR programme, has put in place a series of strategic research projects that would address the major issues facing tropical forests in the context of change in climate and land use.

This, he said, is done in collaboration with Royal Society's key partners in Sabah, particularly Yayasan Sabah, the Sabah Forestry Department, the management committees of the Danum Valley and Maliau Basin.

#### A regional hub

"It is our hope that these projects will collectively form a regional hub for ecosystem research and provide opportunities to rationalize data collection and information sharing not just on Borneo, but across the tropics."

Dr. Glen noted that the work of the Society has been built upon its 25-year history of research at Danum Valley. He now serves as a senior scientist at the field centre there, having started work on the SEARR programme since 2000.

Dr Jacqueline Pugh-Kitingan, an ethnomusicologist holding the Kadazandusun Chair at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), made a presentation on the "Importance of collating of Traditional Knowledge in Sustainable Transforming Rural Indigenous People of Borneo".

She holds the view that Borneo societies are rich in traditional knowledge.

"Although undergoing culture change and social transformation, people should be able to access their traditional land and environment as well as their history, intangible cultural heritage and other traditional system of knowledge."

#### For future generations

Dr. Jacqueline, who is an associate professor in UMS's School of Social Science, told conference participants that the systematic collation, documentation and preservation of data are essential for access by future generations.

She also stressed the importance of indigenous languages and the need for digitalization of recorded data, for genetic banks, and that copyright and intellectual property rights must be maintained.

Touching on challenges, she said the destruction of the environment leads to the disruption of traditional socio-economic systems, the loss of indigenous pharmacopoeia, and the loss of resources for material culture.

In cases related to the destruction of historical sites and monuments, she gave the example of the Liwagu dam, and the proposed Buayan dam.

As for challenges within the communities, Dr Jacqueline, who is also an Adjunct Research Fellow in Anthropology in the School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University, Australia, said these include the demise of traditional experts. Other such challenges are, entrance of new media and ignorance of the younger generations, she added.

Prior to joining Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Dr Jacqueline worked for many years as music director cum cultural research officer in Sabah's Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, and was a research affiliate of the Sabah Museum.



Prof Emeritus Abdul Latiff Mohamad (far right), Conference chairman, with the panel of seven speakers on his left at the Borneo International Conference on 'Discover Borneo' in Kota Kinabalu last Tuesday.