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EC-UNDP Small Grants Programme for Operations to Promote Tropical Forests

Regional Synthesis Conference Opening Remarks

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YBhg Prof Dato' Dr Hood Salleh, Chairman of the National Steering Committee for SGP-PTF

Mr. Eduardo Queblatin, Regional Coordinator of the Small Grants Programme for Operations to Promote Tropical Forests – I recognize his predecessor, Mr. Mark Sandiford is also here with us today

Dr. Delfin Ganapin, Global Manager of the GEF Small Grants Programme

Distinguished Guests from the ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN Social Forestry Network, the Ministry of Forestry of Indonesia

Colleagues and Partners from EC and UNDP in Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Pakistan

Distinguished Guests, Members of the Media

Selamat pagi dan selamat sejahtera kepada semua para hadirin.

On behalf of UNDP Malaysia, I would like to warmly welcome you all to today's conference, especially those of you from overseas and who are visiting Kuala Lumpur for the first time. I hope that despite your heavy conference schedule you will have an opportunity to explore this wonderful city and meet its warm and friendly people.

It is a pleasure for us to host this regional conference and my thanks to Eduardo for choosing Malaysia as the venue.

I would like at the outset to recognize Mr. Thierry Rommel, EU Ambassador, who unfortunately can not be with us today as he is overseas. This is the first of numerous SGP-PTF events that Ambassador Thierry has had to decline. From its launch almost 4 years ago, Thierry has shown total support and enthusiasm for this programme. The Ambassador and I have had the pleasure of traveling together to several project sites. We have witnessed first hand the need for the small grants, as well as the changes that they can bring.

I would also like to recognize the positive and supportive role of Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the Economic Planning Unit, as well as other government agencies that have worked closely with the SGP-PTF programme.

Distinguished participants

I would like to say a few words about SGP-PTF in Malaysia.

In the four years that the SGP-PTF has been implemented in Malaysia, its staff have worked tirelessly at the grassroots level to accomplish the programme's objectives, consistent with the national vision of sustainable human development and sustainable forest management. The National Steering Committee, well led by Professor Dato' Hood, has met regularly to create a programme that demonstrates commitment to sustainable forest management, and that recognizes the vital role that indigenous peoples' play in achieving it.

The SGP-PTF programme nicely complements UNDP's upstream policy work, with downstream activities that provide us with the necessary evidence and lessons to advocate for improved policy measures to address the needs of the country's poorest communities in a context of sustainable forest management.

UNDP is proud of the successes achieved through the activities of this programme. Malaysia's SGP-PTF has attracted royal attention and distinguished celebrity partners who are totally committed to its objectives. They, like us, have been able to experience first-hand the chronic deprivations of some of the country's indigenous communities, especially the women and children among them.

The programme has enabled UNDP to build new alliances with civil society organizations, academia, local governments, and most importantly local communities. Through some 20 projects, SGP-PTF has given NGOs and community-based organizations the opportunity to implement innovative initiatives tailored specifically for indigenous communities. We have been able to help improve the lives and livelihoods of Malaysia's most disadvantaged, especially the poorest women.

On the ground, the programme has *inter alia* developed ecotourism sites in four states in Malaysia. It has helped conserve the world's largest flower in Ulu Geroh in Perak. It has provided livelihood opportunities for Rungus women in small villages throughout Sabah. And it has helped create food security for the Penan of Sarawak.

Distinguished participants

Malaysia's development has followed the East Asia model. Its openness to international trade has led to almost four decades of rapid economic growth. An open trade policy, coupled with pro-poor growth and affirmative actions, have been the key factors that have contributed towards rapid poverty reduction and high human development.

Yet today, there are still more than 1 million people, the bulk of whom are children, living in households below the national poverty line. Poverty rates are highest in the rural areas of Sabah and Sarawak. The bulk of the poor in these two states are indigenous communities

who live on the margins of forests. They have little or no access to electricity, piped water, safe sanitation or all-weather roads. They lack access to basic social services. They are rightly the new focus of pro-poor policies aiming to ensure the right to development for all. The SGP-PTF programme has helped to draw attention to their plight.

In closing, UNDP would like to thank all partners for helping to make the SGP-PTF programme so outstandingly successful. I would like to acknowledge and thank Ms. Jennifer Rubis for building on and consolidating the excellent work of Ms. Azrina Abdullah, as well as my colleague Ms. Ginny Ng for her oversight. I sincerely hope that the SEARCO Regional Office will have success in securing funds for a new phase of the programme. UNDP Malaysia will continue do all it can to assist your good efforts.

Thank you.