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DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO MALAYSIA

Opening remarks

By

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At the occasion of the

***EC UNDP Small Grant Programme for Operations to
Promote Tropical Forests
Creating a Sustainable Future for Rural-based Indigenous
Communities in Malaysia***

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Dr. Leete, UNDP Resident Coordinator,
Prof. Dato' Hood Salleh, SGP PTF National Steering Committee Chairman,
Excellencies,
Celebrity partners,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome you today to this event which is indeed a very important moment in the implementation of the EC-UNDP Small Grants Programme for Operations to Promote Tropical Forests (the EC UNDP SGP PTF). The title we have chosen, 'Creating a Sustainable Future for Rural-based Indigenous Communities in Malaysia', reflects our two objectives for this gathering today: 1. the presentation and dissemination to you of the results and successes of this programme and 2. the identification of ways to move forward, building on the solid and innovative basis established through the SGP PTF to ensure its sustainability.

The EC-UNDP SGP PTF

The EC UNDP SGP PTF is a 5-years and 15 million euro regional collaboration between the European Union and UNDP. The programme has allowed some of the region's forest dependent communities' direct access to European Union funds. The Malaysian component of the SGP PTF will receive at the end of its implementation (June 2007) a total amount of over 900.000 EUR support, for small-grants, community-led activities and other support actions. The programme comprises regionally around 130 ongoing projects in eight target countries in Asia, 20 of them in Malaysia, all carried out by local communities living in and from the forest.

The programme for Malaysia puts indigenous communities at the core of forest management and focuses on two main achievements:

- Firstly, poverty alleviation, through the promotion of entrepreneurial skills, tenure security, partnerships towards value-added processing and marketing;
- Secondly, promoting policy as well as legal and administrative guidelines that reinforce an approach to forestry that is supportive of community livelihood and empowerment. Local communities are no obstacle to growth, rather they can help ensure growth is sustainable.

If the focus in the past has been on sustainable 'forest production', the social and environmental values of the forest have nonetheless been recognized more and more as critical elements of Malaysia's definition of sustainable forestry and biodiversity management. In the same way, the living conditions of the indigenous people need improvement with full respect to their cultural habits and traditions.

The first lesson we learnt through this programme is therefore that acting to alleviate poverty among forest dependent communities, particularly the indigenous people, is a need.

Results of the SGP PTF Malaysia

I can confidently and proudly say that the SGP PTF Malaysia is a successful programme:

- there are 20 ongoing small grant projects, implemented by indigenous communities from all over Malaysia: Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak, and we could respond with the funds available only to a part of the numerous proposals received through our calls for proposals,

- the communities have received support, and capacity building trainings, they are now managing their own activities and have prepared for the second phases of their projects,
- a network between them communities has been created.

And this takes me to another very important result of the programme: the SGP PTF has promoted the use of innovative approaches:

- it has adopted a bottom-up approach as the communities have been given the opportunity to contribute to the formulation of the specific activities. It has not been easy for them. They are the ones that know best which are the needs and specific issues to tackle in order to ensure improved living conditions in the respect of the forest. However, they need help and support in preparing their actions and at a later stage in implementing them.
- The requested support has been offered through the programme. The SGP PTF had a specific component for capacity building, to help the communities to improve their proposals and their management of the projects.
- The programme has promoted exchanges between the communities (not only in Malaysia but at regional level) and their networking.

The second lesson learnt has therefore been for both us and the communities that it is necessary to empower the communities to allow them to take the initiative and work for their own improvement and the protection of the forest.

The SGP PTF is innovative also because it applies a participatory approach.

And here is the third lesson. No initiative will be successful without the participation, support and involvement of different parties who work together

for the success and sustainability of each project and more generally of the programme.

The dialogue among the different stakeholders is the aspect which can ensure a successful implementation of their activities and their sustainability. The involvement both at project and programme level of the relevant authorities, but also of other relevant stakeholders: NGOs and other civil society representatives, the private sector and the research community, just to mention the main ones, is paramount.

The project National Steering Committee is an example of the successful implementation of this approach. For two and half, almost three, years, it was chaired by Prof. Hood Salleh, the NSC met regularly involving representatives from EPU, the private sector, NGOs and indigenous communities from Peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak, the academic sector. The forestry departments of Peninsula Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak have given their contribution to projects evaluation and supported their implementation. All were complaining about the amount of additional work that the evaluation of the over 80 proposals presented to the two call implied (40 only from Sarawak), but all were there for long hours of work, discussion and dialogue.

Sustainability of the SGP PTF Malaysia

I hope I did not scare you with the description of the amount of work necessary for the implementation of the programme as in fact the second aim of our event today is exactly to try to involve you in the future of the SGP PTF and the individual projects, to create a sustainable future for the communities which have worked with dedication and commitment.

The project's activities and their results belong in the first place to the communities. Commitment and communities involvement is the starting point and the basis of a successful exit strategy. But despite the good intentions and the efforts the communities can put, this is not sufficient precisely because these communities are not economically strong. Sustainability will be linked to the future support the communities will receive.

Where can the support come from?

The European Commission hopes that the support can come in the first place from the Malaysian society: the authorities but also the private sector. Several examples of cooperation and support have already taken place during the programme implementation.

A very important support has also come from individual persons. Just to mention 2 but outstanding examples: His Royal Highness Raja Nazrin Shah, Raja Muda of Perak, and the celebrity partners, actress Ms Joanna Bessey, actor Mr Zahim Albakri, singer Reshmonu and a well known script writer and director Mr. Na'a Murad. Thirdly, the support can be sought from other donors, from third countries working and cooperating with Malaysia.

How will these efforts be combined to support the continuation of the projects started through the SGP PTF?

This question will definitely keep UNDP, the EC and the communities busy in the months to come (the projects will end in June 2007) but once more dialogue and cooperation will help us to find the appropriate answer.

I will now to leave the floor to the colleagues from UNDP and to Prof. Hood Salleh to go into more detail on the description of the programme, the results achieved and some concrete proposals for future sustainability and support.

I would like to conclude thanking on behalf of the European Commission once more those who are working hard for the SGP PTF programme in Malaysia. A particular thank to Dr. Richard Leete, the staff of UNDP for their dedication, the Project National Steering Committee, the local communities and the indigenous people.

Last but not least, I want to thank you all for being here with us today to take your time to come and learn about this initiative and to give us your input and hopefully support to create a sustainable future for rural-based indigenous communities in Malaysia.

Thank you.