

SPEECH BY

**THE HONORABLE DATO SRI DOUGLAS UGGAH EMBAS
MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT MALAYSIA**

**AT THE
OFFICIAL LAUNCHING CEREMONY OF THE CONFERENCE ON 'PUBLIC
AWARENESS CAMPAIGN ON FOREST CONSERVATION IN MALAYSIA'**

**Read by YANG BERBAHAGIA DATO' DR. HJ. ABD RAHMAN
BIN HJ. ABD RAHIM
DIRECTOR GENERAL, FORESTRY DEPARTMENT PENINSULAR MALAYSIA**

**1st February 2012, 1000 hrs
Orange Concourse, Sunway Pyramid Shopping Centre
Kuala Lumpur**

A very Good Morning, Selamat Sejahtera and Salam 1Malaysia

Yang Berbahagia Dato' Paul Low Seng Kuan
President of Transparency International-Malaysia

Yang Berbahagia Dato' Sri Hj. Abd Kassim bin Mohamed
Chief Commissioner of Malaysia Anti Corruption Commission

Distinguished Guests and Conference Participants
Members of the media
Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all I would like to convey my Minister's sincere apology for not being able to officiate the opening of this Conference this morning. The Honourable Minister extends his warmest greetings to you and wish the Conference the very best of success. It is my pleasure now to read the speech on behalf of the Honourable Minister.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. First and foremost, I would like to thank the organisers for inviting me to officiate the opening of the Conference on 'Public Awareness Campaign on Forest Conservation in Malaysia' and to launch the new Transparency International - Malaysia's Forest Watch Project Website. I must congratulate Transparency International for their initiative and efforts in bringing together government officials, environmental NGOs and the media to this important event that aims at enhancing awareness on forest conservation in Malaysia.

3. It has been the aspiration of the Malaysian Government to ensure that at least 50 percent of the country's land area is under green cover. This is in accordance with our commitment made at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. As of date we stand true to our commitment, with 56.4% of our land area covered by forests. This success is attributed to our continuous implementation of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) to ensure effective utilization, conservation and protection of our invaluable forest resources.

4. The objectives of SFM are many fold:

One: to ensure forests play an important role in the provision of ecosystem services especially in watershed protection as well as in the conservation of soil and water resources;

Two: to support climate change mitigation efforts since forests serve as important carbon sinks by absorbing and storing atmospheric carbon dioxide;

Three: to continuously provide timber to meet growing domestic needs as well as to generate revenue through export of timber and wood-based products; and

Four: to support our biodiversity and wildlife conservation programmes including the National Tiger Conservation Action Plan.

5. We have in place a comprehensive legal framework to support our policy objectives to conserve and protect our forests. However, the biggest challenge that we face is in ensuring that our forests are systematically managed so that we are able to continuously maintain at least 50% of our land area under forest and tree cover.

6. Nevertheless, one of the biggest threats to attaining the above goal is illegal logging. The main reason for illegal logging despite stringent enforcement is the high demand for timber and shortage in the supply of logs from Permanent Reserved Forest and State Land as well as the existence of illegal wood-based mills still in operation. This is further exacerbated by illegal logging committed by well-organized and planned syndicates using advanced communication tools and “tonto”.

Ladies and gentlemen,

7. I wish to reiterate that we do not condone illegal logging. We have laws and regulations to govern timber production and harvesting which are strictly enforced to curb forest encroachment and illegal felling. In fact, following the amendments to the National Forestry Act, 1984 [Act 313] in 1993, the number of illegal logging cases in Peninsular Malaysia have dropped from 419 cases in 1993 to 24 cases in 2011. Our enforcement officers and the Forestry Department Peninsular Malaysia should be credited for this remarkable achievement.

8. Although we have been so far successful in reducing illegal logging, we will not rest on our laurel. We will continue our efforts despite the fact that stemming out illegal logging is an arduous task and requires substantial financial and human resources. The occurrences of pockets of illegal logging are not an indication that

our enforcement is lagging. Due to the porous border and the nature of our forests, patrolling the forests against illegal logging remains a big challenge.

9. New measures have been taken to reduce or even eliminate the occurrence of illegal logging. The Ministry is in the final stage of revising the National Forestry Act to incorporate new provisions for higher penalties and imprisonment and strict liability (burden of proof). The Ministry has also established the 1NRE Enforcement Team comprising of various enforcement departments within NRE to conduct integrated enforcement operations. The main focus of this new approach is to identify *hotspot* areas throughout Peninsular Malaysia that have the potential for incidences of illegal logging activities. Apart from this, I am pleased to inform that my Ministry has also undertaken new administrative measures such as job rotation for identified sensitive position.

10. As proven in the past, our success in combating illegal logging is very much attributed to the strong cooperation and support from the relevant stakeholders and the state governments. The public including the NGOs have been the good “eyes and ears” in our effort to combat this crime. We hope this cooperation will continue and in this regard we welcome this timely Conference and ‘The Forest Watch Project’.

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. I was informed by the organizer that ‘The Forest Watch Project’ is developed to involve the public to become THE eyes and ears of the forest. This project involves using the Google Earth Geospatial Technology (satellite imagery, aerial photography and GIS 3D globe) to monitor and assess forest cover as well as report irregularities through the newly developed website. I believe the launching of the website and the public awareness campaign will open doors for the general public to be directly involved in forest governance in Malaysia. This one-of-a-kind project is

envisaged to assist the Government of Malaysia in enhancing forest governance for sustainable management of forest.

12. The Ministry appreciates the initiative and effort undertaken by Transparency International - Malaysia to organise this Conference which is among the major activities under TI's important Forest Governance and Integrity (FGI) Programme. I have full confidence that today's conference, through the gathering of brilliant minds and experts, environmental NGOs and the media, will provide opportunities as well as serve as a platform to share forestry issues. I truly hope you will have very constructive deliberation.

13. On that note, it is with great pleasure that I now declare the Conference on Public Awareness Campaign on Forest Conservation in Malaysia and the Transparency International - Malaysia's Forest Watch Project Website officially open.

Thank you.

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
Malaysia

1 February 2012