

**OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF FOREST WATCH PROJECT AND
PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN ON FOREST CONSERVATION IN MALAYSIA**

SPEECH BY Datuk Paul, President, Transparency International - Malaysia

- *YB Dato' Sri Douglas Uggah Embas, Minister of Natural Resources & Environment, Malaysia*
- *Excellencies Ambassadors, High Commissioners, Members of Diplomatic Corp,*
- *YBhg. Dato' Dr.Hj Abd. Rahman Bin Hj.Abd.Rahim, Director General of Forestry, Peninsular Malaysia*
- *YBhg Datuk Hj Mustafar b. Hj Ali, Director of Investigations, Malaysian Anti Corruption Commission*
- *Distinguished Guests*
- *Members of the Media and*
- *Ladies and Gentlemen*

It is a distinct honour and great pleasure for me to be here this morning to welcome and say 'thank you' to all distinguished guests and participants, for the official launching of this ForestWatch Project for Forest Conservation. ForestWatch is an important component of Transparency International Malaysia's Forest Governance and Integrity (or FGI) Programme.

Special thanks to Yang Berhormat Dato Seri, for the special honour you accord us this morning, despite your enormously busy schedule. We are truly grateful to you Sir, for this honour. We are truly grateful to the Ministry for its consistent support to our programme.

We know that it is a great concern to the Ministry as it is to us that good governance in forestry must prevail, for good governance holds the key to sustainable management of our forest resources. This ForestWatch Project is designed to pull in people to give their support to excellent governance and towards the good work of conserving the forest.

Looking at forestry from a broader perspective, there is growing anxiety and much talk over the impact that the world's receding forest cover will have upon us and all future generations. Loss of biological wealth, ecological degradation and global warming are but a few of the possible outcomes. The consequences may all together, leave the earth barren and exposed, making it vulnerable to major environmental catastrophes. Close to us today is the concern over the gradual diminution of our own tropical rainforests.

Fortunately for us we still have considerable areas of land under forest. History tells us that land development, with sustained socio-political equilibrium has been the key to the nation's speedy growth. But today, Malaysia's remarkable economic progress had also been the bugbear for forestry. The achievements had cost the country most of its fascinating lowland rainforests. Socio-political equilibrium is not balanced by environmental security. There will be no balanced development, in other words, no sustainability in national development if government development policies ignore the importance of forests, such as:

(a) the decline in forest cover as it occurs today is allowed to continue at the cost of environmental security

(b) Protection functions of the forests give way to pressures for logging, or worse, protection forests are cleared for housing development

(c) The remaining state land forests that support the country's claim of having more than half of its land area under forest cover, will continue to be opened for agriculture. This will leave the country with 48% of its land, under forest cover. This will be below the 50% level that Malaysia had previously committed to the World Commission on Development and Development for sustainable development and climate change mitigation.

Clearly state governments will need to be persuaded against allowing this trend to continue. For Malaysia to be able to manage its forest resources sustainably, the country must obviously have an adequate forest base, that is, having sufficient area of land under permanent forest.

Very importantly, the government must have a conservation element in the nation's programme of sustainable development. In this context the importance of forestry providing that conservation element must be recognised. The forests as a renewable natural resource with a massive wealth of biodiversity, with their economic as well as the critical environmental protection attributes, are just simply essential.

But Transparency International Malaysia or TI-M is only a single NGO and it cannot pretend that it can win the minds of the state governments with its advocacy work in this respect. TI-M is happy that with the collaboration of IRIM (the Institute of Foresters, or Institut Rimbawan Malaysia) and the kind support and cooperation of the Director General of Forestry Peninsular Malaysia and his team at the Forestry Department Headquarters, TI-M can proceed with this ForestWatch initiative. MACC (Malaysian Anti Corruption Commission) has always been a constant supporter in this Project and the FGI Programme.

Through Forest Watch, we shall draw the attention of the public and other NGOs. Jointly, we shall gather momentum and move along the proper process of alerting state governments through their forestry authorities, of developments observed by the public that the public may perceive a threat to the safety of the forests. Most of this monitoring

will be done through trained observations, using Google Earth imagery. This would be the first step in the long term advocacy for state governments' consideration for policy reviews - so that the nation will have sufficient forests that are well managed, for posterity.

With this, I would like to thank all those involved in sponsoring and supporting today's event; NESTLE (Malaysia) Berhad and the National Art Gallery for sponsoring and supporting the children's activity; and Citrine One, our media coordinator who is assisting us to get ForestWatch message across the nation.

Thank you.

(Usual acknowledgements to TI-M staff and other parties involved in making this event possible, and wishing for its success).