



MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES,
ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

KEYNOTE SPEECH

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**PROTECTING OUR NATURE AND BIODIVERSITY TREASURES:
MALAYSIA'S ROLE AS A SUPERPOWER IN BIODIVERSITY**

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MALAYSIA PAVILION - BLUE ZONE | 10:00 AM

This narrative emphasises Malaysia's unique position as a megadiverse country and its commitment to emerging as a leader in biodiversity conservation on the global stage.

[SALUTATIONS]

1. I want to begin by thanking everyone for attending our session today. There's always so much to do and see at the COPs and so we are grateful for the time you have chosen to spend with us.
2. I must also thank the participants and the organisers for helping make today's event a success. Thank you all for your care, concern and passion for nature and biodiversity, whether in Malaysia or around the world.
3. What I want to do today is to just share some broad thoughts of mine on why biodiversity matters and what Malaysia is doing to protect the parts of it that have been entrusted to us.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

SETTING THE STATE

4. As we have seen, nature and biodiversity has rightfully emerged as a central focus for the COP28. And as you have probably heard, the Presidency has announced that COP28 will focus on four paradigm shifts, including putting nature, people, lives, and livelihoods at the heart of climate action.
5. This strategic approach is very exciting for us. It aligns with Malaysia's recent efforts, given our country's renewed commitment and focus on the importance of nature and biodiversity.
6. As you all probably know, Malaysia is one of the world's 17 megadiverse countries. Rich land, freshwater, and ocean ecosystems

exist side-by-side in our country. Some have even described Malaysia as a “biodiversity superpower.”

7. We are home to an estimated 15,000 species of vascular plants, 306 species of mammals and 742 species of birds. Malaysia also hosts 654 species of amphibians, 506 species of reptiles, as well as 2,068 species of freshwater and marine fish.
8. Pristine forests of all kinds occur across Malaysia; with complex structures from mangroves to montane forests. Believe it or not, even small areas of Malaysia’s forests are richer in tree and wildlife species than most similar-sized areas in tropical Africa or America.
9. Malaysia's coasts and seas are likewise endowed with a wealth of marine biodiversity, ecosystems, habitats and other natural resources. Our Economic Exclusive Zone overlaps with the Coral Triangle area, which is thought to have the greatest diversity of marine life in the world within its coral seas, mangrove forests, mud flats, seagrass areas and sandy beaches.
10. These are truly national treasures of ours, just as precious and requiring careful management as any fossil or mineral wealth. But why?

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BIODIVERSITY

11. The fact is that biodiversity is the lifeblood of the planet. It has a crucial role in maintaining the ecological balance, climate regulation, and economic well-being.
12. Biodiversity provides the economic and social needs of the population and important ecological services. This includes the protection of water quality, regulation of the hydrological cycle, soil

generation, watershed protection, recycling of nutrients, carbon sequestration and oxygen release.

13. The variety of biological organisms in ecosystems helps to stabilise the environment, providing human societies with a wide range of essential and basic amenities. This includes habitable environments, building materials, water supply, flood mitigation, coastal protection systems, productive soils, generating revenue through tourism as well as recreational opportunities.
14. Lately, there has been much talk about “**nature-based solutions**” or NBS. These are inextricably linked to biodiversity. For example, coastal peat swamps, mangroves, seagrass beds and coral reefs all have their parts to play as nurseries for fishery resources as well as in preventing coastal erosion. Forests act as water catchments and increase the water retention capacity of the soil so that water is released slowly into the streams and waterways during the dry season, thus ensuring water supply throughout the year.
15. Biodiversity also arguably has an economic function. Through innovative means like eco-tourism, it can be leveraged as natural capital to benefit the livelihoods of the people, including and especially indigenous or rural communities.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

LOSING BIODIVERSITY=LOSING THE NATION

16. And yet, today, we find countries across the world facing loss of biodiversity, often due to human ignorance or greed. An average of around 25 percent of species in assessed animal and plant groups are threatened, suggesting that around 1 million species already face

extinction, many within decades, unless action is taken to reduce the intensity of drivers of biodiversity loss. Without such action, there will be a further acceleration in the global rate of species extinction, which is already at least tens to hundreds of times higher than it has averaged over the past 10 million years.

17. The loss and degradation of ecosystems also impairs the goods and services that they provide to human populations. When such ecosystem services are affected, we become much more vulnerable to catastrophic events such as flooding, storm surge, landslides, water supply disruption, and zoonotic diseases; all of which will be exacerbated by climate change.

18. Indeed, the **World Economic Forum (WEF)** argued in 2020 that USD44 trillion of economic value generation – or over half the world’s total GDP – is moderately or highly dependent on nature and its services. Construction (USD4 trillion), agriculture (USD2.5 trillion) and food and beverages (USD1.4 trillion) were described as the three largest industries that depend most on nature.

19. It’s no stretch to say therefore that losing our biodiversity is the same as losing our nation.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests,

BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE MUST BE MAINSTREAMED

20. Biodiversity loss and climate change are interlinked crises. Climate change is a growing global threat not only to biodiversity and ecosystems but ultimately to all of society in every region of the world. These threats pose severe impacts to livelihoods through increasing natural disasters, drought, increasing temperatures, increasing sea level rise, erosion of shorelines, reduced crop yields, coral reef

bleaching, decreased water availability, increasing incidences of diseases, and many more.

21. Addressing biodiversity loss and climate change require both to be mainstreamed across all sectors, while mitigation and adaptation measures need to be seriously considered and implemented to alleviate the disastrous impacts. It has to be on everyone's minds and lips. These are things we cannot afford to be blasé about or turn off from.

WHAT MALAYSIA IS DOING

22. The government of Malaysia has not been idle in the face of these challenges. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, we have to take a more proactive role in order to meet our goal to emerge as a biodiversity superpower among nations with such rich ecosystems.

23. In response to the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF)**, Malaysia has recently launched the **National Policy on Biological Diversity 2022-2030 (NPBD)** to provide direction and a framework for biodiversity management in the country taking into account our national circumstances, priorities, and capabilities. This document details five (5) goals, 17 targets, and 61 actions and indicators that Malaysia will undertake to manage its biodiversity in a sustainable manner.

24. Malaysia's commitment to the KMGBF should go beyond support and extend to leadership. This entails not only meeting targets but also setting an example for other nations to follow.

25. Substantial national resources have been allocated to enhance a wide range of actions to address biodiversity loss and climate change.

Among the actions we have undertaken is to further enhance our conservation and restoration efforts, as forests can in fact be used to reduce and stabilise the impacts of climate change.

26. The financial aspect of biodiversity conservation must also be addressed. The KMGBF calls for at least USD200 billion per year, with a significant portion coming from wealthy to low-income countries. Malaysia intends to advocate for equitable contributions, recognizing the shared responsibility of nations in conserving biodiversity.

27. Despite Malaysia's efforts, we cannot do this alone. To enable greater implementation of biodiversity conservation as well as overcoming the gaps and constraints faced, adequate and substantial technical and financial resources are needed for its success. In this regard, Malaysia calls for greater support from the developed parties and partners, especially through technical assistance and adequate financial resources to provide the much-needed funding for biodiversity conservation.

WHAT MALAYSIA HAS ACHIEVED

28. Of course, money seems to always be the hardest word. But let us highlight what a developing country like Malaysia has achieved if only to demonstrate that money given in this direction will be well-spent.

29. In 1992, during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, our country pledged to maintain at least 50% of the country's land area under forest and tree cover, a promise we have kept with 54.6% currently or 18.05 million hectares of its land that is still covered by forests.

- 30.** The recent report by the World Resources Institute's Global Forest Watch and the University of Maryland on global deforestation reported that Malaysia has managed to keep rates of primary forest loss to near record-low levels. Overall, Malaysia reduced its primary forest loss by 57% as of 2022, placing us fourth among the top 10 countries for reduction in primary forest loss as of 2022.
- 31.** Malaysia has also proactively aligned itself with the KMGBF's principles. This includes the protection and restoration of at least 20% of the world's lands and 10% of marine areas by 2030. The revision of Malaysia's National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) to align with the KMGBF is also a significant step forward.
- 32.** To conserve forest and marine life, we have also increased the allocation for the Ecological Fiscal Transfer for Biodiversity Conservation (EFT) from RM70 million in 2022 to RM150 million in 2023 and RM200 million in 2024 to incentivize States in Malaysia to protect and increase coverage of protected areas.
- 33.** We also recognise the important roles of indigenous and local communities as custodians of biodiversity. The annual allocation for 2024 has been increased to employ 2,000 community rangers, including veterans from the Malaysian Armed Forces (ATM), Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM), Orang Asli, and local communities under the Biodiversity Protection and Patrolling Program (BP3). This effort aims to enhance enforcement in permanent reserve forests, protected areas, and combat intrusion, logging, poaching, and illegal mining.

THE ROAD AHEAD

- 34.** As I hope to have demonstrated, Malaysia has done a lot and is willing to be more ambitious when it comes to protecting our

biodiversity—hopefully with international support. But we are also cognisant that our efforts will come to naught without the consistent enforcement of strong conservation laws.

35. Moving forward, we will seek to implement the 61 actions outlined in the National Policy on biological diversity 2022-2030, which will enhance conservation, education, strengthened legal frameworks, research collaboration, and support for indigenous communities.

36. At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that there needs to be global collaboration, particularly with neighbouring countries and international organisations. Biodiversity has both thrived but also suffered without regard to political boundaries and so, we need to work together to protect it better, even if it means getting out of our geopolitical comfort zones. We must not forget that our continued survival on this planet is at stake.

37. And while there is rightfully extensive debate on the ethics behind technology in our world today, it arguably can play, if used wisely and inclusively, a key role in addressing the challenges before us. Certainly, recent trends and developments suggest that ICT, Big Data Analytics (BDA) and Internet of Things (IoT) can do much good in the fields of biodiversity and forest management.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests

CONCLUSION

38. Cynics may say that gatherings like this are merely preaching to the choir. Of course you all care about biodiversity. Shouldn't we be spending this time actually working to protect it?

39. I don't disagree that action is needed. But we shouldn't demean the power and impact of our presence. By just showing up, by being

here and standing up to be counted for biodiversity. In its own way, it all matters a great deal.

40. Certainly, we can only win this fight to save our planet if we are all in it together, whether it is individuals, communities and nations, especially in necessary but all-consuming sub-quests like preserving biodiversity. But we must know what we are fighting for and why and often we need refreshers or reminders. And so that is why gatherings like this matter a great deal.

41. Here in Dubai, thousands of miles away, I find myself, even in the excitement and intellectual stimulation of this international conference, thinking about home. My time at COP28 has reminded me of why Malaysia's unique and awe-inspiring environment is worth fighting for, to ensure that it is in a better state when we leave this earth to our children.

42. The road ahead will be long. It will often be tangled. But if we are united and have clarity of purpose, it will hopefully end in us being able to preserve the beauty and inspiration the earth gives us for future generations.

43. May COP28 lead us to a renewed commitment to biodiversity conservation. "Biodiversity is our life, heritage and our future". It is something worth fighting for and a fight we must win. Thank you.