

**Sustainable Living in Malaysia:  
Living Well Within the Ecological Limits of Our Planet**

Friday, 15 & Saturday, 16 June 2007, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur

Opening Speech by Y.B. Dato' S. Sothinathan, Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and  
Environment

Good morning,

Mr. Manogaran Maniam  
President Environment Protection Society Malaysia

Professor William Rees  
University of British Columbia, Vancouver

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very glad to be here today at this important conference and I would like to start by extending the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Malaysia's apology for not being able to officiate this event as he is currently heading the Malaysian delegation at the CITES conference in the Hague, Netherlands. I will therefore deliver his opening speech.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

SLiM or the short form for Sustainable Living in Malaysia, is a very timely subject to embark upon as Malaysia marches on to achieve developed country status by 2020. Sustainable living as many of us are aware is a key component in this regard. I congratulate EPSM for organising this event which I was made to understand started on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June with a two day workshop followed by a two day conference beginning today. I like to also commend EPSM for taking the lead to organise this function in cooperation with University of Malaya, Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya and MENGO to celebrate the World Environment Day which falls on 5 June every year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I first saw the words SLiM on the brochures, I really felt it was very catchy and in terms of sustainable development, I think basically that's what we are talking about, to slim down our usage on resources while optimising productivity. How do we reduce our demand on the limited resources we have? What's our current usage of these resources? To give an indication to these questions, we are glad to have with us Professor Rees, who first coined the term ecological footprint. Ecological Footprint is a resource management tool that measures how much land and water area a human population requires to produce the resources it consumes and to absorb its wastes under prevailing technology. I understand the ecological footprint for a person in developing countries is around 1

hectare as oppose to 9.6 hectares in the United States, which means that for every person in the world to reach present U.S. levels of consumption from existing technology would require four more planet Earths.

The five billion people of the developing countries or 80% of the world total may never wish or be able to reach that astonishing level of ecological footprint of the United States. However in trying to achieve at least a decent standard of living, these people, two billion of whom make three US dollars a day or less, one billion of whom are classified by the United Nations as living in absolute poverty have joined the industrialized countries in converting the last of the natural environment and pushing to extinction a large part of the planet's biodiversity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Hence this tool is very important for us to calculate our Ecological Footprint and which will enable us to have an idea on our consumption pattern and also our performance in the pursuit of sustainable development and take necessary actions to ensure our ecological footprint is not too large as we may be biting into the resources of our future generation. By measuring our Ecological Footprint we can assess our overshoot, which helps us manage our ecological assets more carefully. Ecological Footprint enables people to take personal and governments to foster collective actions in support of a world where humanity lives within the means of one planet.

Realising the importance of natural resources management, the Government of Malaysia in 2004 created a dedicated ministry to shoulder this responsibility i.e. the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. Malaysia, being a fairly young nation from being traditionally a agriculture based economy has diversified into industrialisation and is now also venturing into the potentials of information technology and biotechnology for new wealth creation to ensure a healthy growth of the economy.

We too acknowledge the fact that the global wealth, if judged solely by economic indicators such as domestic gross product is rising, but if judged by the condition of the biosphere, upon which these conventional economic measures ultimately depend, it's falling at an alarming rate. The challenge for Malaysia as being a mega biodiversity hotspot is to ensure that the socio-economic well being of the nation is improved with minimal or mitigated impact on the environment, while rising the quality of life of people. These long term plans should recognise that sustainable development would require a coherent systematic integration of development initiatives, resulting in a structural, functional and cultural consolidation of a new way of doing things so as to achieve a longer term durability of a higher standard of life.

To ensure this development is done in a sustainable manner, the government has put in place many policies, laws and guidelines in place such as the Local Agenda 21, National Physical Plan, National Policy on Biological Diversity, National Environment Policy, the Environment Quality Act and the list goes on. In fact in all our recent Malaysia Plans, sustainable development has been the crux in paving the growth of the nation.

Nevertheless, we do admit that translating these policies and guidelines into concrete actions is a challenging task and so goes with the enforcement of laws. We need the cooperation of every citizen, NGO, industry, private and government agency. Awareness

on the importance of the environment and using natural resources wisely is paramount in the pursuit of sustainable development. Hence my Ministry has embarked on a nation wide project to increase awareness on the environment as we feel environment is the joint responsibility of all of us. We too have made allocations to all Members of Parliament to carry out activities within their constituency on increasing the awareness on environment. We want the MPs to get involved in environment matters, because at the end of the day as I said it is what that happens at the ground that counts. I have instructed our state departments to work closely with the MPs and MPs can contact these departments for assistances and if there is a problem or complaint on environmental matters the relevant department must act immediately, I too am accessible at any time.

I would like to acknowledge the work done by the NGOs in Malaysia to promote awareness and also educate the public on sustainable development. This event for example is an evidence of the good work NGOs such as EPSM is carrying out to complement the government's efforts in sustainable development. I know that even the private sector is gradually getting involved into this mainstream. At this juncture, I would like to also urge more of our friends from the corporate sector to increase their involvement in sustainable development as at the end of the day our own sustainability will depend on how wise we use and manage our resources.

Starting of with the Brundtland report on "Our Common Future" which brought the term sustainable development to the for front to the Rio Earth Summit and with the Millennium Development Goals and coupled with the 2010 Biodiversity targets, Malaysia has subscribed to all this and is committed to implement them as we believe we've entered the Century of the Environment, in which the future of this planet lies in our hand and environment is taking centre stage as an integral component of our daily life . Malaysia made a commitment to maintain at least 50% of its forest cover and trees in perpetuity at the Rio Summit in 1992. Today forest cover in Malaysia is estimated to be 19.52 million hectares or 59.5% of the total land area.

Hence, I would like to reiterate that this SLiM programme is timely and I hope more workshops and community participation will be carried out to educate our public on the understanding, implications and their participation in improving the standard of SLiM in Malaysia and with these words I officially declare the Conference on Sustainable Living in Malaysia open.

Thank you.