

**NIK NAZMI NIK AHMAD**  
**MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES, ENVIRONMENT AND**  
**CLIMATE CHANGE MALAYSIA**  
**NATIONAL CLIMATE GOVERNANCE SUMMIT 2023**

**\*\*Climate Ambition in a Nation of Mega-Biodiversity Conversation\*\***

**5 SEPTEMBER 2023**

**Salutations**

Mengadap Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Pemangku Raja Pahang, Tengku Mahkota Tengku Hassanal Ibrahim Alam Shah Ibni Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al- Mustafa Billah Shah.

Ampun Tuanku Beribu-Ribu Ampun Sembah Patik Mohon Diampun,

**VIPs**

Chairperson of Climate Governance Malaysia Datin Seri Sunita Raiakumar.

CEO of the Companies Commission of Malaysia YBhg. Datuk Nor Azimah Abdul Aziz.

Assistant Governor of Bank Negara Malaysia Abdul Rahman Abu Bakar.

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

1. I want to thank the organisers for inviting me to speak at the **2023 National Climate Governance Summit**. It is a pleasure and honour for me to be here. Indeed, as Malaysia's climate change Minister, it is my duty to attend this important occasion.
2. Malaysia is recognised as **one of the world's 17 megadiverse countries** due to its extraordinarily rich and diverse ecosystems. Our country's biodiversity: its fauna, rainforests, oceans, rivers, lakes and mountains are national treasures that cannot be lost. Indeed, if we lose them, our entire nation will be lost.
3. Today, I hope to briefly examine the significance of biodiversity and the current challenges it faces and chart a path forward through informed policy recommendations.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

## **WHY BIODIVERSITY MATTERS**

4. Biodiversity, broadly, can be understood as encompassing a vast array of animals, plants, fungi, and microorganisms. In short, it is the lifeblood of our planet. Ecosystems, intricate networks where these organisms interact, are the foundation upon which life as we know it depends. Indeed, biodiversity plays a pivotal role in maintaining ecological balance, regulating temperatures, ensuring food security, and providing access to clean water.
5. It also has an underestimated importance to our economy. The idea that we have to choose between economic development and protecting our environment is a manifestly false one. The World Economic Forum (WEF) has highlighted that over half of the world's

economic output is dependent on nature. Our economies rely on the “services” of the ecosystem, and its disruption due to biodiversity collapse can have severe economic repercussions.

6. Consider, for instance, the role of tropical rainforests in regulating the climate. These forests serve as a carbon sink, absorbing vast amounts of atmospheric carbon dioxide. Simultaneously, they release oxygen into the atmosphere, supporting all life forms, including human beings.
7. However, according to the Global Assessment Report of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services issued by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in 2019, the fifth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook, and many other scientific documents, the past few decades have seen an alarming decline in biodiversity worldwide, largely due to human activities. We've witnessed species extinction rates accelerate at an unprecedented pace, threatening the stability of ecosystems.

## **BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE INTRINSICALLY LINKED**

8. This biodiversity crisis is not isolated; it is intrinsically linked to climate change. As temperatures rise and extreme weather events become more frequent, biodiversity loss exacerbates the negative impacts of climate change, creating a vicious cycle.
9. Malaysia has not been insulated. Our nation has suffered habitat loss, poaching, illegal wildlife trade, and invasive species. These threats endanger our unique and diverse flora and fauna.
10. I recently had the privilege to visit the Tasik Temenggor within the Royal Belum State Park as part of Global Tiger Day. The thought that

these magnificent creatures—who are depicted on our national coat of arms—could one day disappear from the face of the earth should fill any sensible person with alarm. As such, the work of His Royal Highness the Regent of Pahang in the “*Save the Malayan Tiger Campaign*” is truly inspirational and should be supported by all.

11. The consequences of unchecked climate change would be dire for the entire planet. Indeed, it has been estimated by the **United Nations High Commission For Refugees (UNHCR)** that an annual average of 21.5 million people were forcibly displaced each year since 2008. The **Institute of Economics and Peace (IEP)** has also warned that some 1.2 billion people could be displaced globally by 2050 due to climate change.
12. As such, protecting biodiversity, at home and abroad is not an ideological project or scientific abstraction. It is a political, economic and social imperative that nations ignore to their peril.

## **MALAYSIA'S BIODIVERSITY RECORD**

13. Malaysia has not been idle in these weighty issues. It boasts rich biodiversity, but this wealth also brings significant responsibilities. In 1992, at the **UN Conference on Environment and Development**, which was also known as the **Earth Summit**, our country pledged to maintain a minimum of 50% forest and tree cover, provided that developed nations maintain at least 30% of their land as forest cover, a promise we have kept with 54.6% forest cover today. This foresighted commitment has positioned Malaysia among the 25 developing countries with high forest cover and low deforestation rates.

14. Our approach to preserving biodiversity is holistic and forward-thinking. We have adopted pragmatic, progressive, and long-term development strategies that recognize the intrinsic value of our natural heritage. Key among these strategies is the alignment with the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF)**, an international commitment aimed at reversing the decline in biodiversity. This framework, adopted during the **15<sup>th</sup> CBD COP15** in 2022, emphasizes ambitious goals and global collaborative action.
15. 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 a significant step forward. Our participation and support for these targets in international negotiations, such as COP15, reflect the nation's commitment to global biodiversity conservation.
16. The allocation of **ecological fiscal transfer (EFT) for Biodiversity Conservation** to encourage states to better protect their forests has also been increased from RM70 million in 2022 to RM150 million in 2023. These are given conditionally, depending on the state's efforts to conserve existing protected areas and the gazettlement of new protected areas. We have likewise been forging close ties with state governments to ensure development activities can be balanced with environmental conservation, including better coordination between the State Excos Responsible for the Environment.
17. We have recognised the important roles of non-governmental actors, notably indigenous peoples and local communities, in biodiversity conservation. The employment of community rangers

under the **Biodiversity Protection and Patrolling Programme (BP3)**, which began in Peninsula Malaysia in 2019, has been expanded to Sabah and Sarawak this year.

18. However, as a megadiverse country, Malaysia always seeks to take a more proactive role. Indeed, our goal is to emerge as a "biodiversity superpower" among nations with such rich ecosystems. 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.
19. 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, at international forums like the COP28, to advocate for equitable contributions, recognizing the shared responsibility of nations in preserving biodiversity.
20. I think it is worth noting, for those who are unaware, that the COP28 in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates will be graced by His Majesty the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong. Also, our Malaysian delegation will be led by YAB Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim. Again, this is proof that when it comes to sustainability, Malaysia's leaders lead from the front.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

## THE ROAD AHEAD

21. Of course, as I highlighted earlier, more can always be done. For instance, we can never have too much public awareness and understanding of the importance of biodiversity. Conservation efforts can only succeed if citizens are informed and engaged.
22. Also, Malaysia's strong conservation laws must be enforced consistently. While we have made strides in policy development, ensuring these laws are implemented in a nation with diverse ecosystems and interests can be complex. This is where a more robust and integrated biodiversity legal framework is needed.
23. Therefore, I propose that strengthening this must be a priority. This includes enforcing newly passed legislation such as the **Wildlife Conservation (Amendment) Act 2022** and the **National Forestry (Amendment) Act 2022** that empowers authorities to protect vital habitats and species in Peninsular Malaysia. Furthermore, the **National Biodiversity Council (MBN)** should continue to emphasise a whole-nation approach to biodiversity management.
24. Besides this, several possible policy initiatives include:
  - a. **Enhanced Conservation Education**: That is to say, investing in comprehensive conservation education programs not only for schools and universities but also for the general public.
  - b. **Strengthen Legal Frameworks**: We must ensure the strict enforcement of conservation laws and consider stronger penalties for wildlife-related crimes as a deterrent.
  - c. **Research and Data Sharing**: We must encourage scientific research and data sharing related to biodiversity. We must collaborate

with local and international institutions to gain a deeper understanding of Malaysia's unique ecosystems.

- d. **Support Indigenous Communities:** We ought to be providing more support and recognition for the role of indigenous communities in conservation. I recently had the privilege to speak at the **12<sup>th</sup> Orang Asli Land Conference** and hearing from these communities was a moving experience. Their traditional knowledge can be harnessed to preserve and protect our nation's biodiversity.

The **Belum-Temenggor landscape** stands as a shining example of successful conservation efforts that integrate indigenous communities. Traditional knowledge passed down through generations enriches biodiversity conservation strategies, reinforcing the interconnectedness between human communities and nature. In many ways, the indigenous communities are our nation's conscience when it comes to environmental conservation and stewardship of the land. We cannot do it without them, and we owe it to them.

- e. **Climate Adaptation Strategies:** We must develop climate adaptation strategies to safeguard biodiversity from the impacts of climate change. This includes restoring and protecting habitats that act as climate refuges. The strategic formulation of the **National Adaptation Plan** is also taking place to increase our resilience and readiness in facing the impact of climate change.
- f. **Invest in Green Technologies:** We also need to encourage investments in green technologies and industries that are sustainable and eco-friendly. This can create economic opportunities while minimising harm to the environment.

g. **International Cooperation:** Malaysia must also collaborate with international organizations and neighbouring countries to address transboundary conservation issues and participate in global efforts to combat climate change. Developing nations in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, provide enormous carbon sinks. While we have a responsibility to protect them, our aspirations for economic development must also be met, and the developed nations must support both imperatives.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

## **CONCLUSION**

25. Malaysia has done and is doing a lot in terms of biodiversity conservation and climate action, but there is much more work to be done. Our climate ambitions must align with biodiversity preservation, for they are intertwined destinies.
26. In doing so, Malaysia can secure its natural heritage, strengthen its economy, and serve as a beacon of hope and inspiration for nations around the world. As Malaysians, let us never doubt our capacity to achieve great things, including protecting our biodiversity—a precious heritage we must pass intact to our children—we have no other option.
27. My Cabinet colleagues and I must provide this leadership in government—but we hope that it can also emerge in civil society, academia, the private sector and society in general. We must all be leaders in the fight against climate change.
28. The journey ahead is challenging, but with unwavering determination, informed policies, and collaboration among diverse

stakeholders, we can navigate towards a future where climate ambition and biodiversity conservation are not mere aspirations but tangible realities. Let us remember that protecting our planet's biodiversity is not a choice; it is an obligation we owe to ourselves and generations yet to come. Together, we can be the stewards of a thriving and sustainable Malaysia and a planet that thrives in harmony with nature.

29. With that, I thank you for your kind attention, and I wish you all a most productive Summit. Thank you.