

SUSTAINABLE TROPICAL FOREST MANAGEMENT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I feel privileged to present this plenary address to the FORTROP '96 Conference which is celebrating the centenary of the Royal Forest Department of Thailand and the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the Forestry Faculty here at Kasetsart University.

I commend the achievements of these two bodies to date and look forward to their continued success in working towards meeting the challenges facing our tropical forests now and in the 21st Century, which is in fact right around the corner.

Today I will review some of the key issues in the fight to conserve tropical forests both at home and abroad, and highlight some forward steps which are needed towards sustainable tropical forest management.

I do believe that the main question among all of us gathered here today is, why, after 60 years of forest research and education and 100 years of forest management, we are still losing the war against forest encroachment and destruction.

And Thailand is not alone. The same mistakes and misfortunes are recurring now in other developing Southeast Asian countries, and in the tropical countries of Africa and Latin America, wherever a large section of the population still has to rely on harvesting forest resources to obtain a decent living.

My key message to you forestry researchers and forest managers today is to become more vocal and reach out to all other sectors of society. With your accumulated knowledge and expertise, you should be instrumental in calling for decisive and rapid action in the move towards sustainable tropical forest management in the 21st Century.

We cannot and should not wait, because the loss of tropical forests is not only the loss of trees and timber; it is the loss of biodiversity which is fundamental to the enrichment and survival of humanity.