



“ THE RAINFORESTS OF SABAH, MALAYSIAN BORNEO : WILL WE STILL SEE THEM IN THE NEXT CENTURY ? ”

**DATUK SAM MANNAN
DIRECTOR OF FORESTRY, SABAH, MALAYSIA**

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SPEECH

- 1.0. Bismillah nirahman nirahim.
- 2.0. Thank you MC for your kind introduction.
- 3.0. Honorable members of the Brazilian government, Honorable members of the Government of Acre, WWF of Brazil, the United Kingdom and Malaysia, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen. Good evening. **BOA NOITE !!**
- 4.0. It gives me great pleasure to be here in Brazil – a truly great country: **Brazil Grande, Brazil Magnifico, Brazil Amour !! Amour !! (oooohaaa!!). (Do Meu Coracao) (From my heart).**
- 5.0. What little I have seen of Brazil, particularly through the graciousness of our host, the State of Acre, Sabah certainly has much to learn from the successes here, particularly in addressing the sustainability of tropical rainforests.
- 6.0. Now, why am I here ? Why at this Rio+ 20 conference ?
- 7.0. Ladies and Gentlemen, it all happened in London last year at a meeting with HRH Prince Charles, President of WWF, U.K. My old friend and advisor, who taught me how to fight the establishment, Dr Glen Davies, convinced me that this Rio+20 conference, would be a good place to show case 2 contrasting rainforest states, trying to achieve sustainability of rainforests, where WWF assists to promote good practices: one with still a lot of resources, Acre and the other, where it has dwindled, that is Sabah. The arm twisting also helped.
- 8.0. Apart from that, the first Rio Conference of 1992, is a branded good by itself, with its defining Agenda 21. So, why not ?

- 9.0. However, at the back of my mind, I am always acutely aware that, platitudes, declarations, agendas, plan for actions, ecetera, can lull one into euphoria and a dream like State, which you never want to wake up from. **“To be or not to be, that is the question And to sleep And what dream may come**”
- 10.0. Now the **Serious Business.**
- 11.0. I come from a State and a region that has the highest capacity and the highest motivation to kill rainforests. We even export our skills. The Dipterocarp forests are perhaps the richest and most valuable rainforests on earth in terms of monetary returns and second to none. They therefore, are the most threatened rainforests today, disappearing even as I speak.
- 12.0. **“The Tyranny of The Commons”** and bad practices of the past, have dwindled Sabah’s rainforests to only about 10% or some 1 million ha. of primary rainforests, and the rest of about 3 million ha, are in various stages of degradation.
- 13.0. A dipterocarp forest devoid of commercial timber, brings very little or no income at all. However, the virgin soils underneath, can be a bonanza – rich, moist and productive for other uses.
- 14.0. Many policy changes have been made, since, including:
- Obtaining political support at the highest level.
 - Phasing out of short term licences and adopting Long Term Forest Management Licence Agreements.
 - Raising standards through Ril (Reduced Impact Logging) practices.
 - Compulsory Certification through a 5 – year notice period.
 - Increasing the areas of totally protected ecosystems by legislation and restoring degraded areas.
 - A “ no net loss” policy if land use compromises have to be made, and so on. (You may want to go to our website for more).

15. So, are we happy with our present State of affairs ? In particular, my question: **Will Sabah's Rainforest Survive the next century ?** Or shall they virtually disappear ? Or just be a residual Rump ? And Why so, if so ?
16. My Audience, for so long, the issue of conserving rainforests, including those in Borneo, have been driven by emotions, they have been driven by concerns, even driven by Love – even by threats and intimidation. Now Love is a great thing. I love my Nonong !! And she loves me too. That is sustainable !!

But Love Alone will not address forest sustainability when poverty and development continue to be a major problem in rainforest nations, particularly in Sabah. So long as a significant part of the population continues to struggle, not being part of the money economy, with a poor educational attainment level and not empowered with low expectations, the rainforests are endangered.

- 17.0. I am proud therefore, that my country, despite the challenges of a diversified ethnic makeup, has, from the beginning, addressed this poverty issue seriously, prevalent in rural areas, meaning rainforest country, since the birth of the nation, instead of adopting runaway industrialization at the outset, which does not have that much of a distributive value.
- 18.0. SFM must therefore be addressed together with socio-economic development, which I note, the United Nations, also believes in, as evident in the Rio Declaration of 1992.
- 19.0. Ladies and Gentlemen, despite our follies, the rainforests of Sabah, biologically are still rich – arguably, we have the best protected orang utan population in the world. For instance, 75% of which are in protected and certified forests, no real evidence of genetic erosion or species extinction.

- 20.0. Nevertheless, as the landowner and protector of the masses, the government of Sabah, as the Trustee, continues to evaluate if retaining rainforests in such a big expanse of land (53% under reserves), is in the best interest of the people.
- 21.0. If I may ask, why 53%? New Zealand only has about 28%, the UK 10% and Singapore even less. But these countries are wealthy despite having so little forest. New Zealand destroyed some 70% of her rainforests over 50 years and became very wealthy in the process. The UK destroyed her forests and those belonging to others, and also became very rich. Is the morale then that, the more forest you have, the poorer you become ? Must you destroy to get wealthy ?
- 22.0. I shall go back to this “retention” policy at a later stage.
- 23.0. Ladies and Gentlemen, the main thesis of my speech is this: **The Rainforests of Sabah are endangered, or at best threatened, because their direct socio-economic return to the State continues to dwindle.**
- 24.0. When Glen Davies was young in 1979, and I was younger, and a virgin, Sabah earned RM1.1B in revenue which translates, to an income of about RM300.00/ha/year from reserve forests. Tiny Sabah, **Minusculo**, was the biggest tropical log exporter in the world, at the time.
- 25.0. Now that I am old and still a virgin, Sabah will be lucky to earn RM100m/year or a mere RM25.00/ha/year – in the next 20 years while we build up our resources again – less than 8% of what was earned before. This is the critical **Famine Period**.
- 27.0. Compare this with the income from oil palm, which earns the government of Sabah, not less than RM2500.00/ha. in direct income in oil palm taxes : a 100 times more !! Not counting the multiplier effect and off spins. By the way, oil palm is the greatest gift endowed by the UK to the people of Malaysia. I thank the pioneers. (**Muito obrigado**).

- 28.0. Therefore, I ask you, ladies and gentlemen, on what justification then does one keep so much rainforest lands in a state with a bare per capita income of USD. \$3000.00, in a country with a per capita income approaching USD \$10,000.00 ?
- 29.0. Do you justify it on the basis of the morale high ground ? Do you also appeal to emotions ? Do you say, **AMOUR** ?
- 30.0. Ladies and Gentlemen, all things being equal, including continuous political support, we in Sabah, have decided to adopt instead ruthless pragmatism to conserve rainforest – Ruthlessly thought of, and Ruthlessly pursued.
- 31.0. We have decided, may my mother forgive me for this, to deal with the Devil – **Diabo !!**
- 32.0. We have to deal with **Diabo** in order to survive, with no remorse, because in a war, the few must be sacrificed in order to save the many. And the pursuance of SFM is VWAR in its many manifestations. In a war: you need a grand strategy, a good tactical plan, operational plans and the resources to make war and not forgetting, how to exit and end it. **You Follow Desert Storm !!** What you need to make Love, I do not need to tell you..
- 33.0. I have then **personally**, I do not want my colleagues to be tainted by it, to allow some 130,000 ha. of relatively degraded rainforest lands, or 3% of the reserved forest lands, for oil palm cultivation, in order to sustain the department, to sustain our conservation efforts in areas that need so, and to make defining decisions before control over land use is taken away from us, on the grounds of economics or inertia.

In the next 20 years, as forest revenue continues to dwindle due to conservation efforts and the sheer force of depletion, before they build up again, oil palm income will tie us over this critical period. **You must be shocked.** What happened to my Forestry Training ?

34.0. The economic threats must be addressed head on and now before it is too late. So we just do it. If I am condemned by my brethren professionals, I say, **So WHAT ? SFM is of no use if we all become Green Beggars!!**

35.0. Are there other threats to the rainforests of Sabah ? Plenty.

36.0. Let me just list a few.

(1) **Political Instability** – Malaysia is a stable country. But in a democracy, anything can happen. In the remote history of Sabah, Political Instability pushed us down to Pariah Level and on the brink, in forest governance. Will populist people not come in one day to dismantle the reform programme for political expediency ? How do you address this danger ?

(2) **Native Rights Overriding Human And Universal Rights** – I fully subscribe to the UN declaration on the need to mainstream indigenous rights in forest management. We are doing exactly that but sometimes, the **world is not enough.**

Sabah now faces a new and growing phenomenon of NCR (Native Customary Rights) claims over forest reserves, much of which has little justification. This affects security of tenure which SFM must have. Ladies and Gentlemen, keeping people in desolation in or near rainforests, a hostile environment of pests and killer diseases, is a crime. If you want dualism in your development, one in urbanized areas with the best socio-economic facilities and opportunities, while

keeping another group in isolated splendor, then it is an **injustice**. Once I talked to an MP, who expounded on his views that he needed a certain reserve to be excised to accommodate his constituents. I then told this MP, X Man 3, let us call him that, why did he not instead get his younger constituents to become doctors, lawyers, engineers etc. or even politicians like himself? Doctors do not need lands, after all. Maybe, they can even discover an alternative to Viagra, and we will all be happy, including MP X Man 3. He did not answer me back. I must have shaken him. By the way, I am still Director by courtesy of the Chief Minister – most other politicians want me crucified, followed by a thousand deaths and a thousand cuts. But, try to choose your own master.

(3) **The Frustration Of Getting Certified**

Do you see this as a threat? I do. Certification brings credibility and improved performance. But for my money, its most important attribute is a multi-stakeholder approach to governance which means, you have lots of friends and like minded people in your team. If SFM is war, then you need the numbers and a multitude of talents and skills to fight. Our approach in Sabah is to have lots of friends, lovers and partners as we do not have a monopoly over good ideas or resources. I would like to single out WWF as an NGO that has been successfully promoting good governance on the ground, including our certification efforts in Sabah. There are others like LEAP, environmental philanthropists, corporations and individuals.

Now, when an area is certified, it reflects a team effort and numbers and there is strength in numbers. It also strengthens my SFM hand. In the unlikely event of political turmoil, a certified forest has a better chance of surviving that because its management is what I called, institutionalized: verified, prestigious, successful, reflects the interest of a wide section of society and famous.

Nevertheless, despite having some 800,000 ha. of rainforests partially or fully certified, there are issues that now impede our further efforts on certification expansion - the most critical of which is some conversion for better productivity and economic viability. I therefore appeal to the different certifying organizations, that there must be greater flexibility in approaching conversion. Each must be looked at on a “ case by case ” basis and not drowned by dogma.

In the end, do you want good forest governance or absolute principles with no rainforest to certify ?

and lastly

(4) Irrational Expectations

In 1997, I tried to impose my will and my own notion of sustainability on the government of the day, resulting in them seeing me as a threat. Ril was to be imposed overnight, short term licences were to be phased out quickly, I managed my organization with arrogance and I was trying to achieve “ **Ecological Nirvana** ”, in a short cut manner. Worst still, my networking including the vital political network, was weak at the time and I was living on youthful Adrenaline.

In the end, my irrational expectations resulted in me being sent to Gondwanaland, and many of my team, perceived to be sympathizers, being rewarded with placements to MARS, to JUPITER and TIMBAKTU. In the meantime, the rainforest burnt and it was party time. In hindsight, my irrational expectations, caused turmoil in my organization, havoc in the forest and in the end, a principle stand that resulted in more bad than good.

The lesson is this : **whether you like it or not, politicians provide leadership. At the end of the day, a policy thrashed down their throats, which threatens their very existence, will not be sustainable.**

I have since then, tried to understand politics, and accommodate what can be accommodated and stand firm on what needs to be fought for. So long, as it is (5) steps forwards, and (2) steps in reverse, to me it is success.

This need for Rationale Expectations is also, as far as I know, acceptable to our stakeholders and Advisors. They have kept quiet – maybe – this is acquiescence.

37.0. Now to the United Nations and the organizers of Rio+20.

38.0. You have done a great job and I must congratulate you for maintaining the enthusiasm on the complex subject of Sustainable Development, after so many years. This issue is very wide ranging and well beyond my core competence, to deal with, in depth. However, please (**Pur Pavor**), allow me to share some of my thoughts on the relevance of Rio and UN efforts in conserving the rainforest of Sabah.

39.0. Many years ago the UN helped us to inventory our forests, with the good intention, I believe, to manage the forest sustainably. The information was then used by us, amongst other decisions, to provide protective legislation for our most important ecosystems such as: Maliau Basin, Imbak Canyon and Danum Valley.

40.0. Unfortunately, you also provided us with **Treasure Maps** – blue prints for Rent Seeking, for successive governments.

41.0. At the same time, I admire your efforts in trying to introduce new concepts to add value and life for the retention of rainforests – amongst them : introducing the REDD concept, followed by REDD+.

- 42.0. However, much as I acknowledge the sincerity of REDD, I abhor the principle by which it appears to thrive on : i.e. the concept of fear, the concept of intimidation, the notion of threats in order for a real estate of rainforest to have value and of rewarding blackmail. Perhaps, I do not know enough. However, if one's " business as usual " is good governance of rainforests, if it is a certified forest and well managed and a conservation area of world standing and so forth, REDD+ cannot apply. It has been explained to me that, there is no additionality – i.e. **the additionality of fear !!**. Since there is no additionality, the carbon there upon, is of no value – it will not sell. Nobody wants it. Zelch !!.
- 43.0. On the contrary, if you destroy and then stop halfway, threaten to do more harm, there is additionality and the retained carbon therefore sells.
- 44.0. Ladies and Gentlemen, this is madness and a system that rewards Rogues, rewards Blackmailers and rewards people who intimidate. Al Capone must now be smiling in his grave saying," **Compadre, My Culture is Aliveeee, Si, Si, !!**
- 45.0. Is this what REDD is all about ? I ever hear of certain places being promised billions for temporarily, **temporarily I emphasise**, halting rainforest destruction.

Perhaps in the course of this Conference, the REDD+ concept will be better explained. I am curious to know who has actually received substantial REDD+ money and on what possible basis ? Sabah must be doing something very wrong since we cannot qualify. Maybe, we should truly follow the Devil to be eligible for REDD+ funding. Come on, let us go to Hell !!.

46.0 Ladies and Gentlemen, Agenda 21, on the issue of forests, emphasized amongst others, that :

- (1) Cost of SFM will be equitably, shared by the international community.
- (2) SFM is to be supported by international financial and technical co-operation.
- (3) the provision of new and additional financial resources.

47.0. I fully understand that the UN has limited resources and the international community may mean individual rich countries which can, through bilateral engagements, and their capacity, finance such SFM endeavors, directly – by the way, all our logging machines and chainsaws come from industrialized countries.

48.0. But is this happening ? Rio+5 looked at appraising the Rio declaration. The Johannesberg Summit of 2002 affirmed the commitment. The bottom line is: **promise, re-affirm, assess, re-affirm again and the cycle continues.**

It would seem that the earlier emotions have hardly translated into real work on the ground while rainforests continue to disappear ? They are disappearing despite what the statistics show, especially in South East Asia.

49.0. It is easier for Bernie Madoff to get USD\$2 Billion in a pyramid scheme than it is to get financing for conservation of USD\$ 1 million. I shall make a point of consulting Madoff next time and make him my Fund Manager.

- 50.0. Similarly bad practices and living beyond one's means propped up in astronomical figures (150B, 700B, One trillion, etc.) by the International Community, whilst, minute rainforest funding in comparison, for the greater good of the world, receives lip service only ? Not even for UZ0 money. **Desfrutar (enjoy)**. Therefore, are we really serious ? Is Rio+ 20 another "Coffee Shop" Talk ? Can Rio+ 20 mobilize resources within a human life time and not in biblical proportions ? Only prophets of the testament lived for hundreds of years, while rainforest decisions must be made within a political timeframe, by mere mortals. Is there a sense of urgency? Maybe, rainforest conservation is not such a serious matter, after all.
- 51.0. Going back to the UN and its agencies. Ladies and Gentlemen, my recent engagements with you have been more frustrating than invigorating. Your technical wizards scrutinize full stops, exclamation marks, etcetera, **Ad Infinitum**, at the expense of Speed and Execution. Anything to prolong the agony and to avoid making decisions. A proposal takes years to get implemented if it ever does, and miles of reports are then prepared which nobody reads – literally, an open and shut case – I open the report and close it quickly. And I say, **CARAMBA !! This is LOUCO !! LOUCO !!**
- 52.0 It is easier to get frozen to death in the Sahara Desert than it is , to get GEF Funding.
- 53.0. Ladies and Gentlemen, if rainforest conservation is a burning issue, why have a culture of Malaise in dealing with it ?
- 54.0. I admit, I have given up in dealing with particular UN Agencies in formulating rainforest conservation projects. I am an old man. But I do not stop my infinitely patient Generals in dealing with them. They have Long Lives and Sustainable Patience.

55.0. Can't UN agencies then be more pro-active, pragmatic and URGENT ??

56.0. **My Conclusions** – Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your patience. Please now allow me to suggest my “ take home points ” which you may may or may not agree with.

They are as ***follows***:

- (1) Is a 53% reservation policy a realistic guideline ? It is so, so long as there is significant socio-economic development and if not, we may have to adopt pragmatism to sacrifice the worst, to save the best in the interest of raising living standards. To avoid arbitrariness, my successors, should not go for less than 45% reservation, below which, my gut feeling is, we shall lose the strategic Buffer and Depth. There is safety in size and distance.

- (2) For independent thinking and freedom to act in your best long term interest, you must have the resources, and if not, create them, for financial independence. Do not be a Green Beggar !! Therefore, our Devil Recipe in the interest of long term survival – this is Adam Smith and the invisible hand to first promote, self-interest and preservation for the common good.

- (3) We are beyond concepts, ideas and principals. Follow Shakespeare who said: “ **Things Won Are Done – Joy’s Soul Lies In The Doing** ”. Do it our way, which is, **MY WAY !!**.

- (4) Love and Emotions alone will not conserve Rainforests. You need to be pragmatic and remember that the bottom line rules.

(5) There must be a sense of urgency in addressing rainforest issues – cut the red tape, get your hands dirty and do not add more confusing jargon and platitudes. The Brundtland Commission of 1987 is the cardinal principle. Keep life simple.

(6) Concern must be translated into funding of scale – **ESCALA!!**
Otherwise, just accept, what rainforest nations do.

With that, Ladies and Gentlemen, **Muito obrigado (thank you very much) Brasil, N'os amamos Vo'ce (Brazil We Love You).**
