

Ten conservation advocates receive 2017 ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes Award

Ten biodiversity conservation advocates representing the grassroots, government, academic, and business sectors received the 2017 ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes Award at a ceremony held in Manila, Philippines on 07 August 2017. The inaugural award forms part of the celebration of ASEAN's Golden Anniversary.

The ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes is a program designed to recognize outstanding individuals from the ASEAN region who have contributed significantly to biodiversity conservation and advocacy efforts in their respective countries.

From an indigenous community leader who is protecting Papua's forest to a national scientist who is championing coastal resources management, the inaugural ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes honors inspirational and valiant individuals who have risen to the challenge of helping curb biodiversity loss. Each of the heroes, in their own different ways, have made significant impact on biodiversity conservation in their respective communities, countries, and the region.

The 2017 ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes are:

1. **Mr. Eyad Samhan**, Former Field Supervisor, Tasek Merimbun, Brunei Darussalam
For significant contributions to research on fauna and flora in Brunei and in the region
2. **Mr. Sophea Chhin**, Government Official, Department of Biodiversity, Cambodia
For sparking interest in wildlife research among Cambodians
3. **Mr. Alex Waisimon**, Conservation worker, Indonesia
For protecting Papua's forests for future generations
4. **Mr. Nitsavanh Louangkhot Pravongviengkham**, President, Union Development Agricole Import-Export Public Company (UDA Farm), Lao PDR
For promoting environment-friendly agricultural production and protecting migratory species
5. **Prof. Zakri Abdul Hamid**, Science Advisor to the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Malaysia
For making a lasting impact on analysis and assessment of global biodiversity and ecosystem services
6. **Dr. Maung Maung Kyi**, Chairman, Rakhine Coastal Region Conservation Association, Myanmar
For effectively promoting community participation to conserve various habitats
7. **Dr. Angel C. Alcala**, Professor Emeritus, Silliman University, National Scientist, Philippines
For championing coastal resource management and terrestrial biodiversity conservation
8. **Prof. Leo Tan Wee Hin**, Professorial Fellow and Director (Special Projects), Faculty of Science, National University of Singapore
For championing biodiversity outreach and education

- 9. Dr. Nonn Panitvong**, Founder and Webmaster of Thailand Biodiversity Conservation Group, Director, NakornPhet Sugar Limited and other companies
For raising public awareness of biodiversity through taxonomy
- 10. Prof. Dang Huy Huynh**, Vice Chair, Viet Nam Association for Conservation of Nature and Environment
For fostering the exchange of knowledge and solutions to conserve Viet Nam's biodiversity

“At the heart of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2025 is the commitment to lift the quality of life of its peoples through cooperative activities that are people oriented, people-centered, environmentally friendly, and geared towards the promotion of sustainable development. Today is a celebration – where we rejoice the achievement and recognition of these ten remarkable individuals. It is also a celebration for the peoples of ASEAN. The Heroes will bring to the peoples of ASEAN a better understanding, awareness and appreciation of the diverse values of biodiversity and underpin the willingness of individuals to make real changes and actions that will bring about a more sustainable future for all of us,” said H.E. Vongthep Arthakaivalvatee, Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) Executive Director Roberto V. Oliva said, “We are honoring 10 ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes who have dedicated their lives for the cause of biodiversity conservation. Under great sacrifice to themselves and their families, they have shown tenacity, perseverance and focus to protect our web of life. Our heroes have shown us clearly what love for self, what love for children and grandchildren and what love for one’s country is. It is embracing the cause of biodiversity conservation. ASEAN biodiversity which is the region’s life support system is still rich because of you,” he said. The ACB serves as awards secretariat.

Representing Secretary Roy Cimatu of the Philippines’ Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Undersecretary Jonas Leones said the search for the ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes holds a special significance for the Philippines and the entire ASEAN region. “Without biodiversity, there will be no life, for biodiversity is life in itself. Without biodiversity in its myriad forms and inter-interdependence, we will not survive and prosper. Biodiversity feeds us, sustains healthy living, maintains a healthy and productive environment, helps nations develop and grow economically, promotes human development and well-being, and provides recreational facilities. In short, biodiversity is with us and around us, every moment, and in every breath we take,” he said.

The ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes is supported by the ASEAN Secretariat; the Philippines’ Department of Foreign Affairs; the European Union through the Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN (BCAMP) project; and HARI Foundation, Inc. (HFI), the corporate social responsibility arm of Hyundai Asia Resources, Inc. (HARI).

Mr. Michael Bucki, EU Climate Change and Environment Counsellor to the ASEAN, expressed pride in supporting the ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes through the Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN (BCAMP) project. “We need a global vision and a political will at the highest level to halt biodiversity loss and I have no doubt that the ASEAN – EU partnership can reinforce that vision towards a common objective and interest. We also need biodiversity champions who are making outstanding efforts, always acting beyond their personal interest and often taking personal risks. They

make a significant difference in our day to day life and more importantly they lead by example in order that each and every one can contribute 'to make the planet great again'."

Each ASEAN Biodiversity Hero received a cash prize worth USD 5,000, a special Heroes medal and trophy.

Apart from receiving the ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes Award, the 10 heroes also received the Hyundai Icon for Biodiversity Award, a special prize from HARI Foundation, Inc. (HFI). "HFI opens a new leg in our journey of working and caring for Man and Planet as the Philippine automotive industry's champion for biodiversity. We have covered substantial ground in our advocacy for education in environmental stewardship, but we know we can still do more to heed Mother Nature's desperate call for help. Partnering with the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity is an important step towards expanding the scope and scale of our advocacy for social and environmental sustainability. I warmly congratulate this year's ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes. With you in the spotlight as models for everyone to emulate, we can do more in broadening the awareness about biodiversity and in creating actionable measures toward its conservation," Ms. Ma. Fe Perez-Agudo, president of HFI, said.

The ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes were selected by the ASEAN Member States. The nominating agencies considered the relevance of the nominees' contributions to biodiversity conservation, the impact of these contributions to biodiversity conservation efforts in their respective countries and the region, the replicability of their actions, and the recognition they received in communities where they belong.

The heroes from the 10 ASEAN Member States will be known as the faces of biodiversity conservation in the ASEAN region. They will be invited to speak in forums, workshops, press conferences, and other relevant events to share their experiences in conserving biodiversity with the aim of inspiring others to do the same.

To know more about the ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes, log on to heroes.aseanbiodiversity.org. For questions, send an e-mail to heroes@aseanbiodiversity.org.

Notes to Editors:

For individual feature stories and photos of the 10 ASEAN Biodiversity Awardees, please visit: heroes.aseanbiodiversity.org.

Photo Credits: She Aguiba

Photo Captions

- **Photo 1** – The ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes named are (left to right) Mr. Eyad Samhan (Brunei Darussalam), Mr. Sophea Chhin (Cambodia), Mr. Alex Waisimon (Indonesia), Mr. Nitsavanh Louangkhout Pravongviengkham (Lao PDR), Prof. Zakri Abdul Hamid (Malaysia), Dr. Maung Maung Kyi (Myanmar), Dr. Angel Alcala (Philippines), Prof. Leo Tan Wee Hin (Singapore), Dr. Nonn Panitvong (Thailand), and Prof. Dang Huy Huynh (Viet Nam).
- **Photo 2** – The ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes named are (left to right) Mr. Eyad Samhan (Brunei Darussalam), Mr. Sophea Chhin (Cambodia), Mr. Alex Waisimon (Indonesia),

Mr. Nitsavanh Louanghot Pravongviengkham (Lao PDR), Prof. Zakri Abdul Hamid (Malaysia), Dr. Maung Maung Kyi (Myanmar), Dr. Angel Alcala (Philippines), Prof. Leo Tan Wee Hin (Singapore), Dr. Nonn Panitvong (Thailand), and Prof. Dang Huy Huynh (Viet Nam).

- **Photo 2** – The 10 ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes committed to lead the ASEAN region by posting their pledges for the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity's *We Can Be Biodiversity Heroes* campaign.
- **Photo 3** – The 10 ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes wrote their pledges on wooden leaves and posted them on the *We Can Be Biodiversity Heroes* tree.