

KOTA KINABALU DECLARATION

PARKS FOR NATURE AND PEOPLE

Message from Sabah, Land below the Wind

Over 1,250 delegates from 49 countries participated in the Second Asia Parks Congress in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia from 25-29 May 2022. It was jointly convened by Sabah Parks, Malaysia and IUCN, in one of the most diverse natural and cultural regions of the world. One of the first large, environmental gatherings to be held in Asia since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Congress attracted participants from across Asia and beyond, representing government agencies, NGOs, international organisations, youth, Indigenous peoples and local communities, academia and the private sector.

Under the theme of Parks for Nature and People, the Congress identified the priorities for the next decade to strengthen systems of protected and conserved areas across the region, and to contribute to the achievement of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework being negotiated under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

As the Congress draws to a close, we, the delegates to the Second Asia Parks Congress:

- Call for greater inclusion and collaboration among the diverse custodians and managers of nature in the region, including respect and support for the traditional custodians of nature, building on their ancient wisdom, knowledge systems and customary laws, working with contemporary authorities and emerging champions.
- Call for conservation of at least 30 per cent of lands and oceans across Asia to ensure that the most important biodiversity areas with their associated ecosystem services and cultural and spiritual values are conserved in protected and conserved area systems that deliver their conservation and social outcomes. Recognising that the Asia region holds the world's richest marine biodiversity, we call for increased ambition to conserve our oceans, on which millions of people depend for their livelihoods and food security.
- Call for improved resourcing to restore and secure the integrity of nature as the foundation for nature-based solutions to address global challenges, and to secure the health and well-being of communities and their economic and social well-being. In particular, we call for strengthening the resilience of protected and conserved areas to help cope with the increasing frequency and intensity of climate-induced disasters, and to enhance the quality of life in Asia's burgeoning urban environments.

We deliberated on issues facing the region in six working groups:

Nature-based solutions for health and well-being

We recognised the vulnerability of the region to the impacts of climate change and the frequency and intensity of natural disasters, including floods and landslides, and environmental degradation and habitat loss leading to the emergence of pandemic diseases, and threats to food security.

In particular, the Covid-19 pandemic has focused attention on the relationship between effective conservation and human health and well-being. It is timely for nature-based solutions involving protected areas to be better understood and recognised.

We therefore call for:

- Promoting the role of protected areas, other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), Indigenous peoples' and community conserved areas and territories as nature-based solutions for society, including helping people cope with climate change.
- Developing clear guidance and tools for deploying nature-based solutions in and around protected and conserved areas, including good practices and case studies that build on traditional knowledge, and to apply the definitions and standards agreed at the global level to actions on the ground.

Governance of protected and conserved areas

We recognised the diversity of rightsholders and stakeholders in the region and the variety of governance arrangements for protected and conserved areas, including those governed by state agencies, by private actors and the territories and areas conserved by Indigenous peoples and local communities as territories of life under customary law (ICCAs), and forms of shared governance. In particular, we recognised the need to respect the rights and identity, and traditional governance systems and customary laws of all stakeholders, including women, youth and vulnerable people, as well as transparency and accountability in decision-making, and the equitable sharing of costs and benefits of protected and conserved areas.

We therefore call for:

- An ambitious post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework that enhances the diversity of governance in protected and conserved areas in all countries in the region.
- Identifying, recognising, supporting and reporting other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), privately protected areas (PPAs) and ICCAs across the Asia region.
- Using standardised assessment of governance and equity at system and site scales, to enhance governance quality in protected and conserved areas.

Connectivity and transboundary conservation

We recognised the rapid and ongoing fragmentation and disruption of ecosystems through land and sea-use changes, leading to reduced viability of populations and increasing human and wildlife conflict and impacts on livelihoods. We noted the positive benefits of cooperation among the countries and agencies in the region, including for knowledge management and capacity development to support effective decision-making at scale for nature and for people.

We therefore call for:

- Maintaining and restoring fragmented ecosystems and avoiding or mitigating the impacts of new infrastructure and environmentally destructive activities.
- Establishing and restoring ecological connectivity through networks of protected and conserved areas.
- Securing natural habitat and improving connectivity of protected areas to maintain viable populations of critically endangered species such as Asian rhinos.

- Fostering transboundary cooperation for both peace and security, and to address the transboundary movements of both animals and people.
- Supporting the continued efforts of the Asia Protected Area Partnership to convene regional exchanges for learning lessons and developing capacity.

Effective protected and conserved areas

We recognised that for protected areas to deliver positive benefits for nature and people, they must be effectively managed and equitably governed and to achieve their desired biodiversity outcomes including addressing the threats to their significant values.

We therefore call for:

- Encouraging, supporting and undertaking assessments of the governance and management of protected and conserved areas benchmarked against universal standards such as the IUCN Green List Standard, and the Conservation Assured methods.
- Working with the full diversity of conservation practitioners, both men and women, to build the necessary competences and capacities, employing traditional knowledge and scientific and technological approaches, to share experiences at national and regional scale, to apply best practices, and to celebrate and reward success in achieving conservation outcomes.

Economic and financial sustainability of protected and conserved areas

We recognised that nature is our greatest ally for building shared prosperity, health, security, and resilience at all levels. Inadequate and irregular funding is a key barrier to effective management of protected and conserved areas and the vital biodiversity they contain, and there is consequently a need to make nature visible in economic calculations and in business and government decision making.

We therefore call for:

- Sustainable financing strategies for protected and conserved areas and to bring benefits to local Indigenous peoples and communities.
- Mainstreaming nature into development, production sectors and policy, planning and practice in landscapes and seascapes to sustain ecological integrity and ecosystem services that support sustainable livelihoods.
- Mobilising and scaling up public and private investment in nature-positive actions, while phasing out harmful subsidies.

Urban conservation and a new generation

We recognised the rapid expansion of urbanisation in Asia, where people can become disconnected from nature, and lack awareness of how their lifestyles remain dependent on nature far beyond the city boundaries. In particular, we recognised that people's interaction with nature is essential for their mental and physical well-being of, especially during times of stress such as the ongoing global pandemic. We further recognise the contribution of urban protected areas and other natural spaces, potentially OECMs, to biodiversity conservation.

We therefore call for :

- Conserving and restoring nature in cities, to strengthen their ecological, social and climate resilience, and to help prevent, manage and recover from human-induced and natural disasters.
- Engaging all stakeholders, especially young people in nature-related activities within and beyond cities through regular outreach, innovative experiences and the use of science and technology.

In addition to the six Working Groups, two special forums convened to deliberate the particular role of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, and the role of Youth.

Indigenous peoples and local communities

We recognised that the unique roles of indigenous peoples and local communities as customary owners and custodians of areas of remaining high biodiversity value. We recognised the importance of the full, effective, and meaningful participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in policy making arenas that have the potential to impact on their collective and individual rights, and on their lands, territories, and resources; and that indigenous peoples and local communities continue to live with the impacts of historical injustices where protected areas were declared, or continue to be declared or expanded without their free, prior and informed consent.

We therefore call for:

- Avoiding the establishment of new protected areas and the reporting of OECMs on community lands and waters without the involvement of indigenous peoples and local communities, without recognition of their governance and customary management systems, and without their free, prior, and informed consent.
- Improving the participation of representatives of Indigenous peoples and local communities, including women and youth, in management and decision making with financial support where possible and appropriate.
- Ensuring that climate and other conservation financing instruments where affecting Indigenous peoples and local communities' are based on full respect for their rights and recognition of their roles and contributions in providing solutions to the biodiversity and climate crises.

Youth

We recognised that youth and young professionals will be future leaders in protected and conserved areas; that youth have unique perspectives, energy, and passion for nature conservation and that they require support to reach their full potential as stewards of the natural environment.

We therefore call for :

- Establishing the Asia Youth Network for Protected and Conserved Areas as a platform for youth involvement, to enable sharing of experiences in conservation, and to enable youth to voice their concerns regarding conservation.
- Ensuring access to capacity-development opportunities for young people to enhance their knowledge, and to promote the development and mentorship of young leaders.

- Sharing stories regarding protected and conserved areas and a love of nature to encourage increased stewardship and action for protected and conserved areas.

Call to Action for Nature and People

Recognizing the unique and significant biodiversity of the Asia region, and the diversity of its peoples, the Congress endorsed the need for urgent action to conserve the last remaining natural ecosystems in the face of land and sea-use change and to realise the powerful role of parks for nature and for people of the region.

We, the participants at the Second Asia Parks Congress are committed to communicate our recommendations widely, and call upon all stakeholders to support implementation.

We agree to send a strong message to COP 15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity for the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework regarding the recommendations and commitments captured at this Congress, and to COP 27 of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

We agree to convey the key messages from this Congress to the forthcoming First Africa Protected Areas Congress, the 7th ASEAN Heritage Parks Conference, the 5th International Marine Protected Area Congress, and to the next IUCN World Parks Congress.

We support the further development and growth of the Asia Protected Areas Partnership (APAP) as a unique regional forum for protected area agencies, and encourage APAP to continue convening the Asia Parks Congress at regular intervals in the future.

We call upon IUCN, the World Commission on Protected Areas, and other regional and sub-regional organisations to support these efforts.

We acknowledge the generosity and hospitality of Sabah, Malaysia and all of those who helped to convene the Second Asia Parks Congress, as well as participants who contributed to the rich content and discussions at the Congress.

We commit to taking the warmth, generosity and spirit of hope and commitment of the Second Asia Parks Congress to our home countries, as the world begins to emerge from the darkness and isolation of the global pandemic.