

Conservation of Protected Areas with the Hands and Energy of Youth in Asia

Youth Declaration to the first Asia Parks Congress

17th November, 2013

We, the voice of youth in Asia, would like to thank the organisers of the first Asia Parks Congress for this opportunity to participate in this congress. The organisers of this congress have given the youth from countries in Asia and other areas a chance to discuss and present our thoughts, hopes, and concerns as follows;

1. Nature and Culture in Asia

We respect our nature in Asia which have long been utilised and conserved. We also can find a variety of wisdom in Asia's relationship between nature within traditions and folklore. Such wisdom has been rooted deeply in our lives and nurtured the sense of respect and reverence for nature.

We would like to inherit those traditional knowledge, views, and experiences that were handed down through generations, in and around protected areas and the vicinities. We welcome and endorse the necessity of programmes that provide opportunities for the enhancement of such inheritance. Networking would also be critical to make these programmes effective.

We clearly realise the importance of such wisdom and appreciate the traditional old trails' pivotal role as an evacuation route during the Great East Japan Earthquake tsunami disaster of 2011. The reverence and wisdom are, however, being forgotten or lost with changes in lifestyle. Resurging abandoned traditional trails can provide an opportunity to learn history and culture as well as natural features and lead to disaster risk management based on such wisdom and traditional views. Also, the integration of traditional practices and contemporary practices can bring the balance and synergistic effects and provoke participation and sense of ownership among the local stakeholders.

2. Involvement and Education

Experience with nature in one's childhood is the key to nurture imagination, sensing, and creativity which are required to make a sustainable society. To do so, school education is crucial, because most of younger generations are in schools. Schools should provide more opportunities (e.g. curriculum) for both students and teachers to learn in and about nature including protected areas.

In order to conserve protected areas, the participation of various stakeholders is necessary. There have been many conferences for nature conservation, though, we feel that the follow up of the meetings is not enough. More efforts should be made for better implementations of the recommendation. Moreover, participants of such meetings are those who are already interested in nature conservation. We need to create new outreach approaches which can attract those who are not directly involved in nature conservation. We will be able to change society by making people notice hidden interrelationship between the cause and effect at the local, regional and global conservation levels.

3. Job Opportunity and Capacity Building

We expect commitments from both public and private sectors to enhance opportunities and incentives to work for nature conservation. For example, the number of rangers in protected areas should be increased with the increase in the number and the area of protected areas. Without such enhancement, it is difficult for youths to sustainably contribute to the conservation and management of protected areas. To encourage youths to get such jobs, social recognition and income standards related to nature conservation should be improved.

We hope for such a social environment that we can continue our studies and activities on nature and environment for longer time. It is important for us to have further opportunities to apply what we have learned at educational institutions and to build more capacity in conservation. For instance, we can create and participate in new activities or businesses such as wise use of the natural resources and tourism that can contribute to revitalise local societies. We welcome our increased opportunity for mutual collaboration with various kinds of stakeholders including private companies which are conscious about their CSV.

4. Networking

This Asia Parks Congress gave the youth in Asia an excellent opportunity for networking. We propose that more opportunities should be provided in interdisciplinary and international way. We knew through the discussions that communication through interactive network of flexible minded youths from different parts of the world accelerates the innovative creation, effective outreach and even fund-raising. Such activities also help local people re-evaluate their nature and culture that they have overlooked. In actual fact, we have established a social network named Asian Youth Network for Conservation among the participants. We will contribute to make the youth's dedication more visible and popular to societies in Asia.

Conclusion

We, the youth in Asia, appreciate the opportunity granted to us to deliver voices in the first Asia Parks Congress. We hope that the voice of youth in Asia will be considered in the World Parks Congress. We would like to emphasise that youths are indispensable for the future protected areas, and the agent for change. We keep what we have spoken and now strive for implementation. We expect collaborative and supportive opportunities from the Congress for a direct and better involvement of youths in establishing, managing and promoting protected areas. Last but not least, we would like to show our readiness and commitment to protect the natural environment and work for the conservation of protected areas.

Participants of the Youth Session of the first Asia Parks Congress