

Opening speech delivered by U Soe Win Hlaing Director General, Forest Department, Ministry of Forestry at the Opening Ceremony at the Inception Workshop on National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)

Good Morning,

Distinguished Representatives of United Nations Development Program and, Food and Agriculture Organization in Myanmar, Distinguished delegates from the United Nations Environment Program of Asia and the Pacific Region, Distinguished guests, participants, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of Ministry of Forestry and on my own behalf it is indeed a great honour to me to have this opportunity to welcome all of you on this very significant occasion of opening ceremony of Inception Workshop on National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP).

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Myanmar, a country in the main land of South East Asia is rich with diverse flora and fauna. According to Forest Resource Assessment 2005, about 50% of the total land area of Myanmar is covered by Forests. These forests ranging from beach and dunes, mangroves in the coastal and delta regions to varied terrestrial vegetation of dry, moist deciduous, evergreen in the central and coniferous dominated sub-temperate on the high mountain parts in the far north. Occurrence of diverse forest types is largely due to the influence of rainfall, temperature, type of soil, topography, tidal action and closeness to the sea. Moreover, in Myanmar unique ecosystems are recognized according to the interaction between physical components in the environment of a locality and plant communities thriving there in. Different types of forest ecosystems in Myanmar are habitat to a great variety of wild fauna where they take refuge and, consequently, very complex and dynamic interrelationship between plants and wildlife species **continuum** which are known as biodiversity, have evolved all over the country. Today, the existence of such ecosystems in Myanmar is testimony to the long term effect of the scientific management of forests towards

the achievement of sustainable forest management. Myanmar Forest Department has been managing forests not only to realize sustainable production of timber and non timber products but also for enjoying the ecological values as well as life supporting functions for all including human being.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

The Convention on Biological Diversity, in short, known as CBD, adopted the following areas of conservation.

- Mountain Biodiversity
- Forest Biodiversity
- Dry and Sub humid land Biodiversity
- Inland water Biodiversity
- Agricultural Biodiversity; and
- Marine and Coastal water Biodiversity.

All of these biodiversity which are not usually observed in many countries are found and are well conserved in our country. Wild plant and wild animal species diversity is not fully known in Myanmar and they are still need to be explored. However, those of about 350 mammals, 360 reptiles, 1,200 birds and 10,800 plants have been recorded scientifically. Such wild animals of tiger, gibbon, blyth's tragopan and gunney's pitta are globally rare and endangered are found in our forests. It is estimated that about 20,000 species are living in different ecosystem types in Myanmar about which quarter of them are endemic species including *Cervus eldi thamin*, *Muntiacus putaoensis* (leaf deer), *Geochelone platynota* (star tortoise), *Amherstia nobilis* (Thawkagyi) and many others, which are not mentioned here.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Our country, Myanmar is also relatively rich with natural resources belonging to the agriculture, livestock and fishery. Although rice is grown as staple food of Myanmar people, other cereal crops such as corn, wheat, as well as numerous vegetable crops and crops useful for consumer goods and

industrial use are of potential agricultural biodiversity that is contributing the development of the nations.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Diversity of livestock is another important genetic resource for the well being of the people. In Myanmar cattle such as cows, buffaloes, goats are traditionally domesticated by the villagers and today they are integral part of rural development. Traditional farming of domestic livestock including indigenous chickens is major source of income for the people living in the country.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

As I mentioned earlier Myanmar is rich with diverse wetland ecosystem. Rivers, lakes, flood plains are habitats of varieties of fresh water fish species. Therefore, these wetlands provide people with different fish products. Besides, wetlands are very useful for navigation and are the cheapest mode of transportation. Many useful plants also grow in these wetlands. Wetlands are important sources for day to day life, industry and agriculture. About 2,000 mile coastal line is important biodiversity where diverse mangrove and marine fishes including coral reefs develop in very dynamic and complex ecosystems. They are, like other biodiversities, potentials for the development of our country. Around 775 fish species have been recorded so far from the marine, brackish and fresh waters of Myanmar: 465 from marine and brackish waters and 310 native species from fresh waters.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to take the opportunity to say something about the concept of biodiversity conservation in Myanmar very briefly. Biological diversity means the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they themselves are part and partial of it. While the number of species currently described is in the order of 1.4 million, the big question is how many species are there totally? Current estimates of the total number of species run

from 10-100 million. The conservation of forests cannot be isolated from the conservation of biological diversity in general. Ecosystem means a dynamic complex of plant, animal and micro-organism communities and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit. The natural areas of intact forest comprising both flora and fauna with varied ecosystem, species and genetic diversity are the natural heritage of a country. Natural areas with universal values can be designated as world natural heritage.

There should be a rationale for protecting natural heritage and biodiversity. In an ecological sense, human existence depends upon the proper functioning of earth's present ecosystems. People are a part of nature. Their spiritual and material well-being depend upon the wise application of knowledge and experience to the protection and sustainable use of living resources. The earth is the only place in the universe known to sustain life, yet as species are lost and ecosystems degraded, its capacity to do so is rapidly in decline. Contemporary problems leading to environmental degradation include rising populations, excessive consumption and misuse of natural resources. The benefits of living resources that will be enjoyed by future generations will be determined by the decisions of today. A holistic and balanced approach is necessary in the formulation of forest policy, taking into consideration the multiple functions and uses of forests as well as the potential for development that sustainable forest management can offer. The object of the maintenance of the natural heritage is to ensure Earth's capacity to sustain development and to support all life. The relationship between the Man and the Biosphere will continue to deteriorate unless ecologically sustainable development is guaranteed by all nations.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Biodiversity conservation is regarded as integral part for the livelihood of people in Myanmar. Being a developing country many sectors depend directly or indirectly on the natural resources to produce goods and services. In spite of a great deal of efforts being given to conserve biodiversity human pressure on them is unavoidable and there was a general decline of biodiversity over the past

fifty years in Myanmar. The Government acknowledges to maintain a healthy environment so as to attain sustainable productions of goods and services by development sectors including private entrepreneurs. Sector wise Laws and Regulations such as Forest, Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries have been enacted. Myanmar acceded to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity CBD in 1994 and since then closely collaborating in the context of biodiversity conservation. For instance, National Biosafety Framework is being drafted with the financial and technical assistance of United Nations Environment Program. However, due to inadequate resources National Biodiversity and Strategy Action Plan, essential part of CBD is lacking until now.

This workshop is going to be the first step towards for the preparation of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan of Myanmar. Therefore, I would like to request all the participants to share information and knowledge as much as possible because your ideas are very important for the development of our National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan.

In conclusion, I am grateful to His Excellency Brigadier General Thein Aung, Minister, Ministry of Forestry for his permission and support to draft National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. I would like to express my thanks to every one at this opening ceremony for sparing your precious time. I would like to extend my appreciations to the Forest Department for all its efforts in organizing this important workshop. The assistance rendered by National Commission for Environmental Affairs is highly acknowledged. Last, but not the least, I would like to convey our thanks to the United Nations Environment Program of Asia and the Pacific Region for its financial and technical contribution to make this workshop a success.

Thank you very much.