



**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR JOHN SAVILLE, BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE ISB BORNEO GLOBAL ISSUES CONFERENCE V ON SATURDAY, 3 MARCH 2007 AT ICC, BERAKAS.**

---

Your Royal Highness, Distinguished Bruneian and International Guests, Excellencies, BGIC Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted and proud to be addressing you this morning as the principal sponsor of BGIC V. Less than 3 weeks ago, along with David Taylor, I was honoured to be asked to attend the signing by Pehin Ahmad Jumat (who is also here with us today) and his Indonesian and Malaysian counterparts of the historic 3-nation Heart of Borneo Declaration. This has committed the 3 countries to co-operate in ensuring the effective management of forest resources and the conservation of a network of protected areas and sustainable land uses within an area to be designated as “**the Heart of Borneo**”.

As David has explained and the backdrop behind me reflects, BGIC V aims to focus on and highlight this visionary and voluntary trans-boundary environmental co-operation. I hope that by doing so, it will provide the opportunity for delegates not just from the 3 countries involved, but also from further afield in this region, to get to know better what the initiative is all about. And to begin to understand both how it has direct practical relevance to you and how you personally can help make it work.

But why, you might ask, is a British diplomatic mission spending UK taxpayers’ money supporting a Global Issues Conference like this on Borneo?

The answer, in a nutshell, is that the UK believes that tackling climate change and associated environmental issues is an imperative for today, not a choice for tomorrow.

Month by month and year by year the news about the pace and scale of the environmental challenges that mankind faces seems to get worse. I personally, and the UK Government collectively, believe that the science linking this creeping catastrophe to human activity is no longer in practical doubt. So responding to this threat is now a top strategic international priority for the United Kingdom.

For us, then, there is no bigger challenge in the world today: not just an environmental challenge – but an economic, a social, a security and indeed a moral challenge for us as the world's first industrialized nation. We want to create a shared global vision for the future. So our task is nothing less than to build the biggest coalition of ideas ever imagined, underpinned by real-world mechanisms that will drive markets towards low carbon solutions. And these mechanisms will need to be built simultaneously at every level – national, regional and global.

It is crystal clear to me that part of meeting this challenge involves reducing emissions from deforestation. You'd think mankind would guard such a precious resource as our forests jealously. But that's simply not happening. Between 2000 and 2005 the planet lost an area of forest 14 times the size of Brunei EVERY SINGLE year.

This frightening scale of deforestation contributes nearly a fifth of global emissions according to a major recent UK study into the economics of climate change by our Chief Economist Nick Stern. That's a share greater than is produced by all the transport networks on the globe. It also destroys plants and species we've barely begun to discover; robs mankind of potential medicines; causes hardship for people who rely on the natural resources in the forests; and brings extra problems like drought, floods and mudslides.

I am truly proud therefore that the UK Government is working with partners around the world to protect forest ecosystems and increase our understanding of the impact of climate change upon them. In South East Asia for example, we have already helped fund the Global Canopy Programme in Malaysia which is building human capacity to conserve forest biodiversity. And we have been supporting the Indonesian Government's work on sustainable forest management, through the very successful Multi-stakeholder Forestry Programme there.

But, as Head of the only British Sovereign Mission on Borneo itself, I am even more excited at the prospects that the Heart of Borneo initiative holds out. Just before Christmas, I did something that I know you, YRH, have yourself done in the past and joined the Brunei 4x4 Association on a thrilling off-road adventure. Ours took us two and a half thousand kilometres across Brunei and Sarawak, West, Central, South and East Kalimantan, as far as Balikpapan. So I was able to see at first hand some of the outstanding natural landscapes and riches of this unique island.

But I also got a real sense of some of the challenges, too. Many in this room will know about, or have experienced at first hand, the haze caused by smoke from uncontrolled burning, which has been a regular irritation and health hazard, both here on Borneo and as far away as Singapore and Malaysia. Indeed so regular has it been, and so often accompanied by other bad news about the environment that the outlook can sometimes seem unremittingly gloomy. So for the three governments to make this bold public commitment together offers a marvellously refreshing and positive perspective.

Of course agreeing the Declaration was only the first step. Now comes the really hard part – drawing up and implementing a work plan in each country. But, nevertheless, this has been a huge first step and all three Governments are to be saluted for their leadership, courage and vision in taking it. If I may, I would now like to invite the BGIC delegates in particular, as tomorrow's environmental stewards, to join me in a special round of sincere applause that recognises this.

Thank you for joining me in that appreciation. It may help remind us that although we must never lose sight of the big threats that face us and the major weaknesses we have to address, equally we must not forget to celebrate strengths and think positively about opportunities.

That is why we should also remind ourselves how lucky we are to be supported this weekend by you YRH, by the Ministers in his Majesty's Government here today, as well as by Professors Wangari Maathai and David Bellamy, and all the other distinguished conservationists and experts who have come to help make this Conference what I'm sure will be a huge success. I join David in his thanks, and include too those he mentioned who have worked so hard here in Brunei on the conference preparations. As they say at the Oscars: 'You know who you are'.

Last but not least – and at the risk of turning this into a mutual admiration society even worse than the Oscars – as I sit down, I once again invite all delegates to express your appreciation to David Taylor himself, on whose own leadership and energy the annual success of BGIC so much depends.

Thank you all very much indeed. Have a really great conference!