

Abdul Hamid Zakri (Malaysia)

Former Science Advisor to the Prime Minister of Malaysia



Remarks

I am truly honoured and humbled to be one of three recipients of the coveted Midori Prize for Biodiversity for 2018. The Midori Prize honours individuals who have made outstanding contributions to conservation and sustainable use at local and global levels, and who have influenced and strengthened various biodiversity-related efforts, as well as raised awareness about biodiversity.

My involvement with biodiversity has been a life-long preoccupation. Born in Malaysia, one of the 17th mega-diverse countries in the world, appreciation of nature and biodiversity comes naturally. The sound of birds in the morning, the soft

rustling of the leaves blown by the wind and the freshness of the air are all too familiar to me since I was young. It was only later in life that I discovered that I was living in one of the greatest biology laboratories on the surface of the planet – Southeast Asia – the natural work setting of fabled British naturalist, Alfred Russel Wallace who conceived with Charles Darwin the theory of evolution by natural selection in 1858.

Thrust into the international arena as a member of the Malaysian delegation in the negotiations of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (1990-92), I subscribe fully to the three objectives of the CBD, namely conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of its components and access and benefit-sharing of genetic resources.

I believe, sustainable development, and the future of human civilisation hinges heavily on biodiversity – our web of life.

Achievement

For decades, Prof Zakri has contributed to the observation, analysis and evaluation of global biodiversity and ecosystem services, encouraging the restoration, protection and sustainability of the natural environment. He has also provided strong leadership in the dialog on biodiversity, both at national and global levels.

Serving prominently on the Malaysian delegation that helped negotiate the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), he is regarded as one of the Convention's founding fathers. He became the first Asian to chair the CBD's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA). From 2000 to 2005, Prof Zakri co-chaired, with Sir Robert Watson, the Board of the landmark UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), one of the world's largest-ever scientific collaborations. Involving over 2,000 leading scientists in a comprehensive synthesis and analysis of the state of the Earth's ecosystems, the MA represented a ground-breaking scientific assessment of their services, causes of changes, and consequences thereof for humanity.

Zakri went on to become a driving force behind the creation of the UN-affiliated Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), an independent body established to bridge the gap between science and policy, providing impartial, accurate and up to date data and scientific information to assist in policymaking related to biodiversity management. He was elected as the founding Chair of IPBES in 2013.

Earlier in his career, as Director of UN University's Japan-based Institute of Advanced Studies, he contributed to the SATOYAMA initiative and promoted the Japan Satoyama Satoumi Assessment (JSSA). Closer to home, Zakri played an important role in forming the bedrock to biodiversity governance in Malaysia. He was the architect behind the first National Policy on Biological Diversity launched in 1998, going on that year to chair a national task force leading to the framework for the "Access and Benefit-sharing of genetic resources" mechanism in Malaysia.

According to his peers, Zakri has always attached high importance to biodiversity centered on local livelihoods and indigenous and local knowledge (ILK). It was under his leadership as Chair of IPBES that, for the first time, ILK became embedded within the mechanisms of intergovernmental science policy.

Zakri was appointed to the Scientific Advisory Boards of both the UN Secretary-General and the President of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), served for eight years as Science Advisor to the Prime Minister of Malaysia, and is Vice-Chair of the Governing Council of the UN Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries. Until recently, he was also the Joint Chair of the Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (MIGHT).