

CLOSING ADDRESS

Dr. RUBINI ATMAWIDJAJA

Director—General

Directorate of Forest Protection and

Nature Conservation

Indonesia

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I must express my thanks to everyone here for contributing to an excellent meeting with a series of well prepared, thoughtful and relevant papers which stimulated most useful discussion. You can be certain that these deliberations will help us enormously in our efforts to conserve the two species of rhinoceros here in Indonesia.

We can be encouraged by the fact that much has already been achieved. The Directorate of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (PHPA) has been able to bring down poaching on Javan rhino in Ujung Kulon National Park to a very low level by improving security. In fact we have lost only one rhino there through poaching in the last five years. Protection of the Sumatran rhino is inherently more difficult as its population is scattered over a much larger area and the PHPA has only very limited financial and manpower resources to effectively deal with the protection of the rhino and its habitats. Nevertheless the situation in this case too has greatly improved.

When looking to the future, we must keep in mind that the goal must be the maintenance of the two species in perpetuity and that the primary need in this respect is the maintenance of adequate, well protected habitats where the animals can live. We must accept the fact, however regrettable it may be, that for the foreseeable future, the financial incentive for the intending poacher will remain very high. Therefore, it is even more important that the reserves where the rhinos live shall be substantial in area and are not at risk of fragmentation into small, unviable units. The areas must therefore be large enough to hold significant populations and easy enough to guard against intruders. It is therefore essential that land-use planning for economic development becomes more sophisticated, taking into account the wildlife needs, from the outset and by proper use of environmental impact analysis.

However it is inevitable that some wildlife habitat will be lost, and with international cooperation, there has been, as you have heard at this meeting, a most encouraging start to translocating Sumatran rhinos from an area where their continued survival in the wild is problematical, and using the animals to establish captive breeding programmes both here in Indonesia and in the United Kingdom. The strategy to be adopted for increasing the numbers and range of the Javan rhino is much more difficult. The carrying capacity of Ujung Kulon peninsula is uncertain. If the population there is left alone, the slow rise in numbers believed to have occurred in recent decades may continue, but it is possible that the carrying capacity has already been reached. At the current level of population, it would be taking a big risk to attempt the removal of a section of the population for breeding in captivity, given the lack of experience of maintaining and breeding this species under zoo conditions.

However, there are many aspects and problems to consider and a decision on the matter can only be taken after thorough consideration of all the options. We are still ignorant about several aspects of the rhino and so a priority should be more research both in the field as well as in the zoos. A sound scientific understanding of the ecological requirements of the rhino is fundamental to any management programme designed for its conservation. On this I am sure you all will agree.

Finally, I would like to thank you all for your participation which made this meeting worthwhile and interesting. To the Chairman, Mr. Mohammed Khan, I would like to express my special thanks for his help and enthusiasm in making this meeting a success. On this optimistic note of progress for the future, I will close the meeting.