



Opening Remark by Dr. Nguyen Phu Hung

At the 7th Annual Meeting of the CSO Forum on Social Forestry in ASEAN

25 June 2018. Da Nang, Vietnam.

CSO Forum organizers,

CSO representatives,

Friends and colleagues,

On behalf of Vietnam Administration of Forestry, I would like to welcome you all to the beautiful city of Da Nang. Thanks the organizers for giving me this space to open this year meeting and share our thoughts on social forestry and the way forward for ASEAN.

Southeast Asia is endowed with a windfall of forests, which make our region one of the world's biodiversity hotspots with not only richness of species and living habitats but also unique cultural identities. Unlike other extractive resources, we can turn our forests into a renewable and sustainable sources of livelihoods and materials for economic development, in addition to strengthening resilience capacity to climate change. Nevertheless, it only happens when our society joins hands and work together.

Cooperation between the Civil Society Organizations Forum on Social Forestry and the ASEAN Working Group on Social Forestry (AWGSF) since 2012 is an example of collaborative efforts between civil society and government actors in advancing social forestry. AWGSF has adopted many recommendations from CSO Forum and advanced them to the ASEAN Senior Officials on Forestry (ASOF). The interface between civil society and government counterpart has been a productive tool for dialogues, learning and sharing. This year, as the host of AWGSF, we continue to maintain this cooperation spirit.

From our engagement with regional processes in social forestry, I would like to make some observations and remarks as follows:

First, regional and national policies in forestry need to embrace the multi-stakeholder and participatory approach, which involve important key non-state players, including private sector, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, networks and

coalitions, communities, and research institutions. I would like to highlight meaningful contribution and engagement of civil society at different levels, from grassroots to national and regional, in advancing policies and practices in social forestry in ASEAN.

Second, the forestry sector requires inclusive development approach to improve productivity and economic values while maintaining the environmental security objectives through strengthening climate change resilience capacity of both ecosystems and forest-dependent communities. Civil society plays an important role in this process as they can serve the space between government and communities. We need more initiatives and efforts in capacity building, knowledge dissemination, field experimentation, research and development in many areas such as REDD+, FLEGT/Lacey, forest-based economic development, community and social enterprises in forestry, raising social and environmental standards in private sector ... And we need to support local communities to improve adaptation and resilience capacity, as well as poverty reduction and wealth creation. These all require proactive engagement of civil society partners.

Third, we in ASEAN accept unity in diversity. We share differences in political systems, cultures, economic regimes, natural conditions, and so on. However, there is a strong consensus among governments and civil society on the “people-centered ASEAN” and it is reflected well in the social forestry processes. Civil society can help build a sustainable future for ASEAN through more effective investment in “people factor”: capacity development and enabling environment for young generations; connecting disadvantaged groups, especially women and ethnic minorities; and active engagement with the private sector. You can help build a healthy, vibrant and lively ASEAN community!

Fourth, through our efforts in social forestry, we actually contribute to a larger goal: realizing the ASEAN community. Since 2012, there have been enormous efforts from both civil society and governments to build up and maintain discussions, information and knowledge sharing, and policy dialogues – such as what we’re doing today. We’ve seen improvement in the relationship and partnership among different stakeholders, especially between state and non-state actors. Actions at regional level, like this CSO Forum, help facilitate people-to-people diplomacy and peace building.

I would also like to share that since the last AWGSF meeting, we, Vietnam, have made some important progresses in social forestry. Notably, the Forestry Law was passed by the National Assembly in late 2017 and will become effective in January 2019. This legislation also covers four major areas of our common interests: forest tenure and access rights, safeguards, governance mechanism, and community economy and livelihoods. Following last year theme on forest restoration, the government of Vietnam and NGO sector have carried out many activities to foster policy discussions and field implementation with aim to contribute to the global goal of restoring 150 million hectares of forests. I think in next sessions, our friends and colleagues

from Vietnam will share more information about these progresses. At least, in 2017 Vietnam has restored more than 500 000 hectares of degraded forests and newly planted 250 000 hectares.

I appreciate that the CSO Forum to feature the theme “Sustaining Collaborative and Innovative People-centered Actions and Contributions in NDCs and the Sustainable Development Goals” for this year meeting. And I welcome your continuing cooperation and contribution to the AWGSF. As the host of this year meeting, the government of Vietnam looks forward to receiving your ideas, inputs, and recommendations to advance social forestry in each member state and at ASEAN levels. We will encourage our counterparts from other ASEAN countries to review, consider, and adopt meaningful inputs and recommendations for further actions.

I believe that you will have a productive meeting with fruitful discussions and sharing. Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to open this important event.