

EU and ASEAN Ambassadors to the Philippines join Green Wave

Ambassadors of European Union (EU) countries and Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) took a break from their diplomatic duties on September 30 to plant Apitong (*Dipterocarpus grandiflorus*) trees in Mount Makiling, Philippines. The tree planting activity was part of the global Green Wave campaign of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the EU-ASEAN Ambassadors' Day to celebrate the 3rd founding anniversary of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB).

According to ACB Executive Director Rodrigo Fuentes, the tree planting activity symbolizes the commitment of ACB to promote the Green Wave campaign in Southeast Asia.

Ambassador Alistair Macdonald of the Delegation of the European Commission to the Philippines said the event provided an opportunity for EU and ASEAN Ambassadors to promote tree planting as a way to save the region's threatened biodiversity.

The Green Wave tree planting site was developed in cooperation with the College of Forestry and Natural Resources through Dr. Jose Sargento, Director of the Makiling Center for Mountain Ecosystems and Forester Roberto Cereno, Head of the Makiling Botanic Gardens.

Joining Director Fuentes and Ambassador MacDonald in the tree planting activity were Ambassadors Herbert Jager of Austria, Gregoire Vardakis of Belgium, Leuane Sombounkhan of Lao PDR, and Valeriu Gheorghe of Romania; Minister Counsellor and Charge d'Affaires Win Myint of Myanmar, First Secretary and Consul Nop Chanvannak of Cambodia, Scientific Attaché Isabelle Epailard and Academic Attaché Marie Aurousseau of France. The Philippines was represented by Director Theresa Mundita Lim of the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau-Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and Vice Chancellor for Community Affairs Dr. Virginia Cardenas of the University of the Philippines Los Baños.

Apitong, the tree that the Ambassadors planted, is a medium to large-sized resinous tree which grows up to 43 meters tall, and up to 135 centimeters in diameter. It grows in other parts of Asia including

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Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. Apitong is used for fuel and timber and as pulp for paper production. Its gum or resin is coat for waterproofing paper, caulking baskets and boats, and as a varnish for walls and furniture.

Apitong is an important part of biodiversity, providing services for nitrogen fixing, erosion control, and soil improvement. It can make up the biggest forest cover component of watersheds, and store rainwater and regulate its flow on the slopes to streams, lakes, and reservoirs for the irrigation of food crops and the generation of electricity to provide energy for homes and industry.

Celebrating its third founding anniversary this year, ACB is an intergovernmental regional centre of excellence that facilitates cooperation and coordination among the members of ASEAN, and with relevant national governments, regional and international organizations on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, guided by fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of such biodiversity.

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Captions

Photo 1: Ambassadors of European Union (EU) countries and Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and the University of the Philippines Los Baños joined the tree planting activity organized by the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity.

Photo 2: Ambassador Alistair MacDonald of the Delegation of the European Commission to the Philippines plants an Apitong tree.

Photo 3: Ambassador Leuane Sombounkhan of Lao PDR tries his hand at tree planting.

Photo 4: The EU-ASEAN Trees symbolizes the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity's commitment to conserving Southeast Asia's biodiversity.

Photo 5: ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity Executive Director Rodrigo U. Fuentes leads the EU-ASEAN Tree Planting activity.

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