

Asian Rhino Specialist Group

(Editor's Note: In October 1991, IUCN, the SSC Asian Rhino Specialist Group, WWF, and the Government of Indonesia jointly convened a workshop on Indonesian Rhino Conservation in Cisarua, Bogor, Indonesia. Over 130 people participated in the meeting, representing diverse opinions and backgrounds. The official proceedings of the workshop, including the reports from 11 working groups on different aspects of rhino conservation, are being prepared by Dr. Nico Van Strien, and should be available early in 1992. The following text is from the opening address delivered by Ir. Sutisna Wartaputra, Director General of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (PHPA), Ministry of Forestry, Indonesia.)

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this important meeting convened to discuss the strategies that would help enhance the long-term survival prospects in the wild of two of the most endangered species of large mammals, the Javan and Sumatran rhinos in Indonesia.

The evolutionary history of the rhinoceros dates back 50 million years. Rhinoceroses were, at one time, the dominant large land mammals in all the northern continents and in Africa. In prehistoric time, there were over 65 genera of rhinos that occupied diverse ecological niches. Today, however, only five species remain: three in Africa and two in Asia. All five species are threatened by habitat loss and poaching for their valuable horns. Conservation of the remaining rhino populations has become a matter of international concern and a global responsibility.

Here in Indonesia, we are fortunate to have two species of rhino: the Javan rhino confined to the Ujung Kulon National Park in West Java, and the Sumatran rhino, which formerly ranged throughout Sumatra and Kalimantan but is now confined to a few discontinuous populations in Sumatra and perhaps East Kalimantan. The conservation of these species of large mammals is one of our prime concerns. We in Indonesia are committed to do our very best and to take all appropriate measures to protect these two species in their natural habitats.

Every country in the world has three forms of wealth: material, cultural, and biological. The first two are the basis of almost all of our economic and political life. The third, composed of fauna and flora and the uses made of natural diversity, is far more potent for long-term human welfare.

The Government of Indonesia, in recognition of the importance of biological assets, has made a long-standing commitment to protect the nation's biodiversity. Already we have more than 400 conservation areas covering 52,000 km² of forest land. Twenty-four of these areas are national parks and four of these protect populations of rhinos. Although there is a small population of Javan rhino in Vietnam, the only viable and secure wild population of Javan rhinos is here in Indonesia in the 300 km² Ujung Kulon National Park.

In Sumatra, three major national parks, covering more than 25,000 km² of forest, protect not only Sumatran rhinos, but also vital watersheds as well as thousands of other animal and plant species, many of them rare or endangered. The Indonesian government has already allocated considerable financial and manpower resources to protect Sumatran rhinos in Gunung Leuser, Kerinci-Seblat, and Barisan Selatan National Parks. This reflects our commitment to the primary objective of conserving rhinos *in situ* in their natural ecosystems.

These national parks become increasingly important for our conservation efforts as forest clearance continues and more natural habitat is lost. They are "islands" of biodiversity set amidst an expanding agricultural landscape dominated by man.

Outside the parks the Conservation Department of PHPA, in cooperation with British and American zoos, has established a program to capture "doomed" Sumatran rhinos in fragmented forest blocks. The animals captured so far have gone to captive breeding programs. In the future, some of these rhinos will be translocated to remaining large areas of natural habitat and to semi-wild breeding facilities. Surveys will also be carried out to determine the possibility of

establishing new sanctuaries for reintroduction of translocated and captive-bred animals.

In the case of the Javan rhino, we have concentrated on *in situ* conservation in Ujung Kulon National Park. In the 1960s, the population sunk to an all-time low of 25 animals. PHPA, with assistance from WWF, concentrated on improving the protection and management of the Park. This policy has indeed paid off. By 1980, the population of Javan rhinos had more than doubled to over 50 animals. Sadly, in 1981 five rhinos were found dead in the park, victims of an unknown disease. Today, between 55 and 60 animals are known to survive with several newborn calves.

Concern has been expressed that the population may now be at carrying-capacity within the peninsula. This is one of the issues that must be addressed at this meeting. We must now determine whether the population is indeed at carrying capacity, and if it is, what are the most appropriate management activities to help the rhino population continue to expand. This will require a program of systematic research and monitoring. This population of Javan rhinos is so precious that we cannot afford to take any unacceptable risks.

The Government of Indonesia is serious in its determination to protect the Javan and Sumatran rhinos. Already these species are protected by law. Killing a rhino is a criminal offense punishable by a heavy fine and a long prison sentence. Poaching is still one of the most serious threats faced by the rhinos. The recent poaching of some Sumatran rhinos in Kerinci-Seblat National Park only serves to highlight the continuing need to improve protection of the parks. This will require increased manpower, funding, equipment, and training as well as extension programs to convince local people of the need to conserve our natural resources. Indonesia alone cannot bear this burden. We need the help and support of international organizations as well.

I am happy to report that within Indonesia, ordinary people and private organizations are already taking an increased interest in the PHPA's ongoing conservation efforts. The Indonesia Rhino Foundation (Yayasan Mitra Rhino Indonesia) was founded in 1990 and has already raised substantial funds for rhino conservation. Bank Indonesia International has generously donated funds for rhino conservation from credit cards depicting the Javan rhino. Some of the overseas conservation organizations present here today, in particular WWF-International and the Minnesota Zoo, have already contributed toward rhino conservation efforts in Indonesia, and we look forward to further collaboration.

Today there may be no more than 60 Javan rhinos and perhaps 400 Sumatran rhinos in Indonesia. But we are confident that with improved protection and management of the reserve system, we can look forward to a more secure future for the rhinos in Indonesian forests. We will manage these two species of rhinos both as national treasures and as global rarities. For Indonesia this is both an honor and a responsibility, and we are determined to succeed in our conservation efforts.

As many of you will have noticed, the Javan rhino has been chosen as the mascot of Visit Indonesia Year 1991. In the spirit of hospitality and the name of the Javan rhino, we extend to you all a warm welcome to our archipelago. May this meeting and your visit be memorable, productive, and above all, enjoyable.

With the blessing of Allah the Great, I open this meeting officially.