

FeaturesBiodiversity

# ACB welcomes Asean's giving premium to nature in response to Covid-19

By **BusinessMirror**

July 12, 2020



The Asean Centre for Biodiversity headquarters in Los Baños, Laguna.

---

The Asean Centre for Biodiversity welcomed the call of President Duterte during the 36th Asean Summit to intensify the regional response against the Covid-19 pandemic and enable the ACB to help curb wildlife trafficking in the region.

Duterte said that as the current pandemic may not be the last, and the region has to strengthen its capacity to address future infectious disease outbreaks.

“We can do this by promoting research and capacity-building on health technology development. We must enable the [ACB] to contribute in combatting wildlife trafficking to prevent the spread of zoonotic diseases,” Duterte said in his intervention at the virtual summit chaired by Vietnam on June 26.

Ads by [optAd360](#)

In the chairman’s statement of the 36th Asean summit, on the other hand, Vietnam reaffirmed the importance of advancing cooperation on environmental protection and conservation with greater efforts to address cross-cutting issues for sustainable development, such as climate change, marine debris, biodiversity conservation, and transboundary haze pollution.

ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim expressed her support to the pronouncement of President Duterte and the thrust of Vietnam’s chairmanship for a cross-sectoral approach in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic.

“The ACB is more than ready to embark on this challenge and serve the Asean better, most especially in fulfilling its mandate of facilitating cooperation among the Asean member states to conserve the region’s rich but highly threatened biodiversity. We appreciate the Asean leaders’ efforts to take up medium- to long-term measures in order to address the emergence of zoonotic diseases,” Lim said.

She noted the Asean leaders’ unity and commitment to environmental protection and climate action, as demonstrated in previous Asean summits.

With the grave health-related risks posed by the increasing humans and animal interactions, the ACB is planning to support the development or roll-out of applicable tools for wildlife disease surveillance relating to early detection of zoonotic disease outbreaks in the region, Lim said.

“Monitoring and surveillance of species previously implicated as carriers of diseases, such as bats and pangolins, can greatly facilitate timely action and prevent the emergence of outbreaks and pandemics,” Lim said.

“We likewise need to work with existing organisations to coordinate efforts and help link ongoing activities in Southeast Asia that can give us a better understanding of the nature of zoonotic diseases that could occur in the region, as well as propose measures on building immunity or developing cures against newly discovered pathogens,” she added.

The ACB has been carrying out initiatives linking health and biodiversity and facilitating regional discussions on the development of One Health approaches.

One Health is a collaborative, multisectoral and transdisciplinary approach with the goal of achieving optimal health outcomes recognising the interconnection between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment.

On May 21 the ACB and the Asean Secretariat led an online discussion with officials of the Asean and experts from different parts of Asia on the interlinkages of biodiversity and health and how biodiversity considerations can be integrated into the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and other nature-based solutions to avoid pandemics in the future.

Representatives from concerned Asean sectoral bodies participated in the webinar.

Lim cited some of the existing Asean initiatives and mechanisms that ensure and promote the effective management of protected areas in the region and thus, also safeguarding wildlife habitats and helping address poaching and illegal wildlife trade to keep zoonotic diseases at bay.

One such initiative is the Asean Heritage Parks (AHPs) Programme, a flagship programme of the ACB, which recognises protected areas of regional importance.

The ACB recently conducted an online survey for the managers of AHPs and other protected areas in the region in May 2020 to assess the impacts of the Covid-19 on protected areas and their communities in the region.

The results of which will inform the ACB’s future actions on enhancing the role of AHPs in disease prevention, and feed into the development of the regional action plan for the program.

Similarly, the ACB, in an ongoing collaboration with NatureServe, is developing the Asean Biodiversity Dashboard, an interactive user-friendly platform that will visualise the progress of the Asean member states in meeting the biodiversity conservation targets.

The dashboard can help in raising awareness of and support for evidence-based policy-making in biodiversity-related issues, including the occurrence of zoonotic diseases, Lim explained.

“The ongoing public health crisis presents a unique opportunity to scale up efforts in integrating nature and biodiversity into the medium- and long-term plans for pandemic prevention and maintaining public health,” Lim said.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2020/07/12/acb-welcomes-aseans-giving-premium-to-nature-in-response-to-covid-19/>