

ADB R-CDTA
Strengthening Capacity for Environmental Law in the Asia-Pacific:
Developing Environmental Law Champions
Train-the-Trainers Program, 19 – 23 June 2017
Chiang Mai, Thailand

Opening Remarks
Sonia Chand Sandhu

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(8:30 – 8:40am, Monday, 19 June 2017)

Sawadee kha !

- Very good morning to this distinguished audience of professors and experts.
- On behalf of ADB, I would like to welcome you all to the first Train-the-Trainers program in Thailand, and the fifth in-country TTT program under ADB's Developing Environmental Champions technical assistance.
- I am absolutely humbled and very inspired to be amidst this rich gathering of nearly 30 law professors and lecturers from 19 different institutions.
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- My name is Sonia Chand Sandhu, and I am the Senior Advisor in the office of ADB's Vice-President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development. With a multi disciplinary background in environment engineering and planning and as a practicing environment and climate resilience specialist in the field of infrastructure operations for over 23 years, I have a long association and deep commitment to environmentally sustainable development.
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- It is my pleasure to be here in this beautiful city of Chiang Mai with the Chiang Mai University Law School, our host institution that has made this program possible.
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- I take this opportunity as a chance for immense learning through the sharing of valuable experiences.
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- Learning began yesterday, when I had a chance, to experience a day in the life of the Elephant at one of Chiang Mai's jungle parks. We absorbed the amazing experience of witnessing the eco foot print of these huge and gentle animals. along with the reality of an ecosystem with its social fabric struggling to survive. This is a first hand evidence of the value of environment protection and comprehensive preservation of our socio-ecosystem, which is under threat both by anthropogenic means and the reality of climate change.
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- We appreciated the inclusive business model that Chiang Mai's jungle parks were trying to develop together with the local communities. It is sad to imagine a world without elephants in their natural habitats, which are fast depleting.

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- We live in a changing world, in particular, the Asia Pacific region with countries rapidly advancing in income and status. Shared and balanced growth in this dynamic economic and social landscape is challenged by ageing populations, rapid urbanization, inequalities in incomes and opportunities, increased risks from climate change and natural disasters and severe environmental degradation. This cumulatively impacts the quality of growth and livability of citizens.
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- To stimulate inclusive and sustainable growth, it is imperative for the region to comprehensively preserve its natural capital as it develops its physical and human capital to fulfil persisting shortfalls in infrastructure and services. ADB's report on "Meeting Asia's Infrastructure Needs" (2017) projected a need for about US\$1.7 trillion every year from 2016—2030. Asia's development choices will clearly have profound implications for their people and for the planet, at large.
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- An impetus in the direction of sustaining this rapid economic growth is provided by recent transformational global developments. These include (i) the Sustainable Development Goals (September 2015), which respond to the challenges of conserving natural and human capital and; (ii) the Paris Agreement (December 2015) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit global warming.
- In the same token, ADB is also developing its new Strategy 2030 with environmental sustainability and inclusive growth as its key pillars. This helps to better align ADBs systems and processes with the global agreements to, in turn, guide countries to sustainable development pathways. ADB's sector and thematic groups are also re- vitalized to collaborate and find comprehensive solutions to persistent development challenges.
- Institutions at all levels are challenged to explore integrated, cross-sector solutions, appropriate technology, assured financing and improved governance which are key to achieving these global commitments
- Yours is the group of professionals that plays a pivotal role in ensuring the effectiveness of both, governance and institutions to optimize benefits to people and maintain the balance with the health of the eco-system in its entirety.
- You are all better informed – however allow me to share few personal sentiments, derived from impacts of certain landmark judgements which go a long way in resurfacing the human face of our development work and help us to re-focus our resources meaningfully.
- To name just a couple that struck a chord - the 1993 Philippines Supreme court ruling which brought to the fore the idea of "intergenerational equity". The judgement, earlier this year on the mighty Indian rivers the Ganga and the Yamuna declaring them as living entities, following a bill passed by the New Zealand parliament declaring the Whanganui River as a legal person. This is an

important institutional step toward fighting severe pollution of the river waters and surroundings which we as a society take for granted. Just last week, a federal judge ruled in favor of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in its year-long battle against the Dakota Access pipeline highlighting once again the value and rightful use of decision making tools such as the environment and social impact assessments.

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- The list is long and learning is key !
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- Our mission for this program is to build a cadre of teachers and practitioners that will champion the teaching of environmental law and practice across the Asia-Pacific region. We aim to establish a cycle of ever-increasing knowledge, skills and experience – ultimately contributing to better environmental laws, and more effective implementation and enforcement.
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- ADB, IUCN Academy of Environmental Law, and the Chiang Mai University Law School, are privileged to bring you together. In 2015, ADB, in conjunction with IUCN Academy of Environmental Law, trained 57 law professors and lectures from 14 countries, including Thailand. Your very own Chacrit Sitdhiwej and Nuthamon Kongcharoen (*may we ask them stand*) now lead in-country programs in their own countries such as this Thailand TTT
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- ADB places high value on local, on the ground knowledge and believes that it is you, our local partners who can construct the most practical solutions. Together we can play complimentary roles to find sustainable solutions with the most lasting impacts on our planet. THANK YOU once again for joining us for this 5-day journey to become environmental law champions in your countries and to further develop teaching, leadership and advocacy skills.
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- I would also like to thank the IUCN Academy for its partnership and stewardship of the TTT program. The Academy is a leader in supporting environmental law education and capacity, recognizing that environmental legal education is a vital contributor to the rule of law and to robust environmental governance that is essential for sustainable development.
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- This week's training is supported under ADB's "Developing Environmental Law Champions" Technical Assistance, executed by ADB's Office of the General Counsel, which is our Law Department – under our Law, Policy and Reform ("LPR") Program,
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- Many thanks for this chance to share some thoughts on a topic very close to my heart. I encourage you to collaborate and try "doing things differently" rather than "doing different things".
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- I wish you all a week of constructive discussions and progressive learning.

- Khapuun Kha !!