



Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation

THE BANDA ACEH DECLARATION The Crucial Importance of Aceh's Forests

WHEREAS, the Aceh people through their unique culture, such as the *Mukim* and *Panglima Uteun* customary bodies, have preserved the forests of Aceh, Sumatra, through the centuries for their welfare, well-being and future generations; and

WHEREAS, the Aceh forests are essential for food security, regulating water flows in both the monsoon and drought seasons to irrigate rice fields and other cash crops; and

WHEREAS, forest disruption in Aceh's upland areas will increase the risk of destructive flooding for people living downstream in the coastal lowlands; and

WHEREAS, the special autonomy enjoyed by Aceh in Indonesia provides a unique opportunity for the province to develop innovative spatial planning to show that economic development and sound environmental management are fully compatible; and

WHEREAS, Aceh's forests, such as in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Leuser, are internationally renowned for being the only place on Earth where elephants, tigers, rhinoceros and orangutans all co-occur; and

WHEREAS, further conversion of lowland forest will increase conflicts between people and surviving wild elephants, posing a significant threat to farming livelihoods; and

WHEREAS, components of the current Spatial Plan in Aceh, especially certain forest developments and new infrastructure projects, will elevate the risk of serious local environmental problems, a loss of key nature hydrological functions, and serious disruption

of lowland river systems and fisheries, which could negatively affect human livelihoods and biodiversity.

THEREFORE, be it declared that the Asian Chapter of the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC), the world's largest scientific organization devoted to the study, protection, and wise use of tropical ecosystems:

- RECOMMENDS that the Spatial Plan for Aceh be based on the extensive, high-quality spatial data that are available within the Government of Aceh agencies, especially maps on watershed forest areas, environmental risk, soil types, geological hazards, human population centres, rainfall and the distribution of Aceh's wildlife; and
- RECOMMENDS that the Government of Aceh collaborate with national and international scientists to identify environmentally sound alternatives for road infrastructure that meet local development aspirations without irreparably damaging the integrity of Aceh's natural environment; and,
- SUGGESTS that the most appropriate economic development model for Aceh is one that prioritizes clean development and payments for environmental services, while limiting unsustainable natural resource extraction; and
- APPEALS TO the Government of Aceh to ensure that the rule of law is immediately upheld, to halt ongoing illegal logging, forest conversion and road building and to ensure that developments within its forest estate are based on sound forest-management principles.