Our Conference Chairman, the Honorable Chief Justice, senior justices, members of the high court, other dignitaries and delegates present, ladies and gentlemen.

First, I would like to thank the organizers and sponsors, specially the USAID Wildlife Asia, for the invitation to speak before this first Conference on Innovations in Counter Wildlife Trafficking. The Asian Development Bank nominated me, with the approval of our Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno, to talk about the programs and activities on environment of the ADB, particularly the Asian Judges Network on Environment (AJNE).

The ADB has been working with the judiciaries across Asia on a program on environment to strengthen the capacity of the judiciary to decide environmental cases, and to enhance or develop expertise in environmental law. It encompasses two sub-regions: the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

ADB formally works with judiciaries in recognition of their key role in environmental protection and enforcement. Indubitably, judges influence the entire legal system, how the laws, rules and regulations are interpreted and enforced.

In the area of environmental justice, the ADB has been working on a program of building capacity for environmental prosecution, adjudication, dispute resolution, compliance, and enforcement. National activities include judicial trainings on environmental laws, bench books and similar publications, and support for the establishment of green benches.

Aside from ASEAN and SAARC judiciaries, judges from other countries have worked with and participated in AJNE events: Australia, Brazil, Costa Rica, East Africa, Fiji, New Zealand, the People’s Republic of China, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

In these events, the Chief Justices and Senior Justices discussed not only new developments in environmental law and adjudication, but also shared experiences on diverse topics on environment, such as, biodiversity, pollution, deforestation, illegal fishing and illegal wildlife trade. As a result, they become aware of, and increasingly concerned about, the environment in general, and the illegal wildlife trade in particular. They noted the magnitude and consequence of the illegal wildlife trade, which are often committed as transnational organized crimes.

In 2010, the ADB hosted the Asian Judges Symposium which was co-hosted by the Chief Justice of the Philippines. Around 120 senior judges, environment ministry officials, members of civil society, and experts in environmental law discussed ways to promote environment protection through effective environmental adjudication and law enforcement. At the Symposium, judges called for the creation of an Asian Judges Network on Environment. They expressed enthusiasm for an informal trans-governmental network that would foster closer ties among members over shared issues and challenges, and ultimately, facilitate judicial capacity-building through sustained multilateral exchanges.
In response to the request from the judiciaries in the region and of like-minded judges, lawyers, government officials, and multi-disciplinary experts on environmental law - the Asian Judges Network on Environment (AJNE) was formally launched in Manila in December 2010 - as an information and experience sharing arrangement among senior judges. This informal trans-governmental network is committed to providing a dynamic forum for judicial capacity building and multi-lateral exchanges on environmental adjudication and enforcement.

In the ASEAN, its members include: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

In the SAARC, its members include: Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The AJNE is supported by the Asian Development Bank, under its Law and Policy Reform Program which continues to provide technical expertise, institutional support and financial assistance to the AJNE and by hosting the website, facilitating face to face meetings; facilitating the Chief Justice Roundtable on the Environment, and supporting national projects with member judiciaries. The activities of AJNE are demand-driven and ADB only implements initiative with the approval and in close coordination with the member judiciaries.

By way of outcome, AJNE had supported the establishment of green benches in some jurisdictions, assisted the publication of green bench books, promoted the integration of the study of environmental law in law school curriculum, facilitated the creation of judicial working groups on environmental governance, aided in the adoption of a judicial certification program on environment, produced knowledge products in the form of country reports and reports of the proceeding of each roundtable that serve as repository of the discussions and presentations, and it promoted the dissemination and sharing of innovative concepts and new doctrines in international environmental law.
AJNE strengthened the judges’ capacity by providing them with a like-minded support group, introduced innovative ideas, and made available economic and technical information. They now have a neutral forum where stakeholders can come together and conduct frank discussions without any pressures or biases.

Moving forward, to build on the success of its work with judges, ADB has approved a new project on Developing Judicial Capacity for Adjudicating Climate Change and Sustainable Development in Asia. It aims to assist judiciaries in developing seminal jurisprudence that is responsive to climate change and sustainable development issues.

Lastly, AJNE has a dedicated website which contains laws, rules, regulations, and case laws on environment of several Asian countries. It also contains information and materials from past AJNE events and activities. It is presently administered by ADB, and it was recently revamped to make it more comprehensive, more user-friendly and easy to navigate. You are invited to visit the website anytime – www.ajne.org.

Thank you and a pleasant day to all.

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