

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JHM-1

Honolulu, Hawaii  
March 31, 1987

Mr. Peter Bird Martin  
Executive Director  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
4 West Wheelock Street  
Hanover, NH 03755 USA

Dear Peter,

Oahu may be the perfect place to ease a transition between Washington, D.C., my home of the past three years, and insular Southeast Asia, my destination. In addition to allowing me to learn a bit about Hawaii, I hoped that discussing some of my plans for the next few months with environmental policy and development scholars at the East-West Center and the University of Hawaii would help me begin my Institute fellowship on an informed and somewhat familiar track.

Turning a rented car away from Honolulu's airport last week, rolling past downtown Honolulu and Waikiki just before dawn, my mental images of an archetype balmy, exotic, tropical island quickly gave way to the reality of the highway, Hawaii's "Interstate" H-1. The freeway cuts through a sprawl of houses, apartments, and commercial strip developments easily comparable to those of any snowless Mainland metropolitan area, but spreading over the ridges of Honolulu's northern hills in patterns of street lights, like a negative image of molten lava flowing down.

As I climbed the Likelike Highway to the Wilson Tunnels, a shortcut under the mountains to Oahu's east or Windward Coast, an early morning radio weather report noted that the temperature had just set a record low for March 25 at 57 degrees Fahrenheit. It then warned of the potential for flash floods along Windward Coast streams due to heavy rains uphill. Two people had drowned the day before at Sacred Falls when a wall of water rushed down the valley just north of Punaluu. I perked up, no longer a victim of jetlag, as I planned to stay at Punaluu during my week in Hawaii, and arrived there just before dawn. I almost forgot the 47 McDonalds, Burger Kings, and Wendys I had counted on the way from the airport. Postcard coconut palms and pandanus (hala, as Hawaiians call them) suddenly popped into sight as silhouettes against a cloudy, glowing pink and violet sunrise over the Pacific Ocean. As the rate of rooster calls picked up at Punaluu, the tropical island images flooded back. To the south, banana, wild gingers, and ferns of all sizes stood out against snaggle-tooth volcanic ridges. I walked back to the car past a 12 foot high hedge of hibiscus.

I have spent much of the past few weeks in discussions of tropical deforestation, readings on reforestation and natural forest regeneration, agro-forestry strategies and management regimes, and the consequences and potential of economic development in Indonesia and Malaysia based on the large-scale extraction of natural resources. These topics, some of life-and-death importance to much of

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the population in Indonesia's and Malaysia's less developed regions and rural areas, have little to do with "environmental quality" as we think of it in the United States and the affluent "West." However, our activities may have profound impacts not only on the quality of life and the environment in even remote areas of Indonesia and Malaysia, but on the potential for the survival of entire species of plants and animals. We use forest products from the region, knowingly or not, in the form of lumber (plywood, chipboard), furniture (especially hardwood veneers), and a wide range of disposable items. Directly or indirectly, Americans provide capital for projects that have the potential to change the face of the earth in regions most of us have never heard of or seriously thought about.

Asian and foreign development planners, action-oriented researchers and scholars, foresters, agronomists, ecologists, anthropologists, geographers, economists, and a wide range of advocates for various kinds of conservation and development are rapidly defining the scope of environmental changes in the less developed areas of Indonesia and Malaysia. Recently, decisions on what to do about these changes (if anything), what to promote, what to retard, and what to prohibit, are also being made or demanded at an increasing rate. Opportunities to protect valuable resources and habitats or promote sustainable development and rehabilitation of seriously degraded environments have presented themselves simultaneously. The process of decision-making and prioritizing for human activities having both profound and subtle influence on change in ecosystems has become a major focus of research combining biological and social science. As the stakes in such decisions increase and become more apparent to people making them and being affected by them, the need to link decisions to ecological understanding becomes more and more pressing. The means and process of creating such connections will be the focus of much of my work as an Institute fellow. This may be a difficult business in Indonesia and Malaysia, where as an outsider I expect to need to reorder much of my own thinking on what is important, and on the nature of cause-and-effect. A major first step will be some intensive study in Southeast Asian botany and ecology.

This brings me back to what I'm doing in Hawaii, and what that has to do with ecological change, natural resource management, and environmental protection in Borneo and nearby areas. Mostly, I've been trying to get some insight into the kinds of work and concerns prevalent in tropical ecology and development studies in the Asia and Pacific region in general that could apply to areas where I hope to spend the bulk of my time over the next two years, mainly in Borneo -- Sarawak, Sabah, and Kalimantan (Malaysian and Indonesian Borneo).

Before leaving the Mainland, I sat in on several sessions of a symposium at the University of Washington on "World Trade in Forest Products." Quite appropriate to a conference scheduled immediately preceding the major meeting of the International Tropical Timber Organization in Japan, the combined sense of all the sessions is that international timber trade is increasingly dynamic, with increasingly rapid responses to changes in international demand and local or national forest policies. As a truly worldwide market has developed for major and specialty forest products, no nation's forest-based industry can

remain insulated from international market forces. Particularly fascinating were several reports pointing out connections and fragmentation in timber and forest product marketing between the nations of the the northern Pacific rim (USA / Canada / Japan / Korea / Taiwan) and those of Southeast Asia and the South Pacific (Malaysia / Indonesia / the Philippines / several South Pacific nations including Papua New Guinea and Fiji). For me, one of the most pressing aspects of the conference was to attempt to grasp what the implications are of global trade in timber and other forest commodities on forest management and conservation policies in the countries concerned. I was fascinated to learn that North America's major export partners for oak and maple of the highest quality are Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, and that Korea and Taiwan use most of this wood in manufacturing partially assembled furniture for re-export to the U.S. for final assembly and a "Made in USA" stamp.

A presentation by Dr. Soetarso Priasukmana on experimental development of products from East Kalimantan, Indonesia was very useful in pointing out several topics that may become subjects for future newsletters. Among these are the development of an intensive rattan crop and industry following the ban on raw rattan exports that will become effective in 1988. Investigations on propogation and management systems for fast-growing and nitrogen fixing trees of several genera are also yielding several alternatives for rehabilitating lands burned by the enormous forest fires that devastated much of East Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo) in the wake of "El Niño," the Pacific meteorological phenomenon that caused severe drought in 1982 and 1983. Dr. Soetarso was also very encouraging about the possibility of my visiting the Forestry Research Center in Samarinda (East Kalimantan), which he directs, and using the Center as my base for work in Kalimantan.

World forest product markets were still high in my mind once I got to Hawaii. Several people here have been extremely gracious in providing me with an opportunity to read their latest work and "pick their brains" on some current concerns with regard to resource management and development in Southeast Asia. Dr. Norton Ginsburg, the director of the East-West Center's Environment and Policy Institute, explained more than I dared ask about the organization and workings of the East-West Center, helping set up appointments with research associates and fellows at the East-West Center and the University. He and Mr. Dick Morse (a former Institute fellow, and now a research associate at the Center's Resource Systems Institute) helped to orient me to the range of perspectives represented by various people and projects connected with the Center and outside. I am leaving here with a pile of reading material that will probably play havoc with the weight limits on the plane to Malaysia, and a set of ideas that is sure to reappear in future newsletters, along with the people who have brought them to my attention.

Curiously, I haven't talked with anyone here about "environmental protection" per se. Various types of ecosystem management and the implications of research on human ecology in clearly delineated areas are more meaningful in this academic setting than they are in the administrative and regulatory context in which I've been working for the past few years (as an environmental planner and policy analyst, consulting for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency).

I look forward to the next few weeks in Malaysia, where I will be meeting with representatives of nongovernmental environmental groups from the region in Penang, and then proceeding to Sarawak.

Sincerely,

Received in Hanover 4/6/87

*Judith Meyer*