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U.S. Announces Support for Coral Triangle Initiative

KUALA LUMPUR – The U.S. pledged nearly \$40 million today to support implementation of the Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI), an international effort lead by the governments of the six Coral Triangle (CT6) nations of Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste. The CTI constitutes a regional program to save the world’s most biodiverse concentration of coral reefs, mangroves, and fish, which is currently under threat from pollution, unsustainable fishing practices and climate change. This new USG support was announced during the second CTI Senior Official’s Meeting in Manila this week.

The U.S. government will distribute \$40 million over the next five years to support commitments made by the six nations in completing the CTI plan of action, which will promote sustainable fisheries and coastal resource management programs in the marine eco-region shared by the CT6 partner nations. From the funds, \$32 million will be allocated to a consortium of NGOs who will work with the CT6 nations and private-sector partners to strengthen local governance, protect livelihoods, promote eco-tourism, and conserve reefs and mangroves to shield coastal communities from storms. An additional \$6.7 million will be dedicated to ensure that the CT6 nations’ efforts are closely coordinated with other governmental and NGO partners, and that all players are utilizing the best regional and international expertise to implement the CTI plan of action. These funds supplement the U.S. State Department’s allocation of \$750,000, announced in December 2007, to help the CT6 nations during the CTI’s formative stages.

The CTI seeks to protect 6 million square kilometers of ocean and coasts, an area that has been called the “Amazon of the Seas” for its biodiversity. The Coral Triangle, where the Indian and Pacific oceans meet, is home to 30% of the world’s coral reefs representing 75% of known coral species. “The degradation of the Coral Triangle is so great that we must hurry to preserve the best of it,” said Dr. J.E.N. “Charlie” Veron, the marine scientist who discovered that the Coral Triangle as being the global epicenter for marine life. “The CTI will encourage responsible fishing practices while raising the profile of the CT6 and their marine ecosystems,” Veron added. “That will attract tourist dollars, generate local income and encourage changes in laws to support conservation.”

The Coral Triangle’s marine and coastal resources – and the goods and services they provide – are threatened by over-fishing, blast and cyanide fishing, sedimentation and other forms of pollution from coastal development, agriculture and deforestation, as well as ocean acidification due to global warming. These factors are adversely affecting the

region's fish, coral and mangroves, as well as the 120 million people dependent on them for their livelihood.

In Malaysia, 99% of the population lives within 100km from the coast and almost 100,000 people are directly employed in the fisheries industry. Malaysia's fishing industry contributes significantly to its food security. With an annual per-capita consumption of 45 kg, Malaysia's consumption of fish is the highest in Southeast Asia. Malaysians derive almost 20% of their protein supply from seafood. The output of marine fisheries is targeted to rise by 200,000mt in the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010). However, Malaysia's marine resources are declining and its biodiversity is under threat due to human activity.

The new \$40 million pledge will help the CT6 governments to protect the Coral Triangle's biodiversity while enhancing regional security and prosperity. The CTI's plan of action, which the CT6 nations aim to complete next year, will address the challenges of food security, sustainable livelihoods, responsible trade, good governance, biodiversity preservation, and climate change.

"Preserving biodiversity and ensuring that there are fish to catch for future generations are issues that cross geographical and political boundaries," stated U.S. Ambassador to Malaysia, James R. Keith. "We are pleased to be working closely with Malaysia and with the other CT6 countries to preserve these vital and extraordinary marine ecosystems." The US government supports Malaysia's efforts in preserving its marine biodiversity and applauds all six Coral Triangle partner nations in combining their efforts to ensure the survival of this critical marine eco-region for generations to come.

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