

## 2021 UNESCO Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Conservation

The 2021 UNESCO Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Conservation has been jointly awarded to the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM), Malaysia and the University for International Cooperation (UIC), Costa Rica. The Prize consists of a diploma, a medal and a cash endowment of US\$ 100,000 and awarded every alternate year. It was established by a generous endowment by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said Al Said of Oman<sup>1,2</sup>. The year 2021 marks the 30th anniversary of the Prize. This year, the award ceremony was held at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France, on 17 November 2021, as part of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Man and the Biosphere Programme during the 41st General Conference of UNESCO. In previous years, the award ceremony was held during the World Science Forum and the 2021 WSF was postponed to 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>3</sup>.

FRIM is the oldest and largest recreated tropical rainforest and is located in the Kepong municipality, 16 km northwest of Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia<sup>4</sup>. The Institute had its origins in 1926, with extensive experimental plantation of trees over an area of 42 ha damaged by tin mining. The initial plantation trials covered about 100 indigenous and exotic species. In 1985, FRIM became autonomous under the Malaysian Forestry Research and Development Board. In this system, the statutory boards are organizations which have substantial autonomy. Now, it has grown to 600 ha with about 300 plant species<sup>4</sup>. FRIM promotes biodiversity, forest ecosystems management and restoration, and sustainable forest products<sup>5</sup>. It is recognized by the following citation: ‘In recognition of initiatives to monitor and preserve endangered species of national interest, producing publications such as the Malaysian Plant Red List in efforts to monitor the conservation of critically endangered species, and documenting the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and local communities.’ The Institute has contributed substantially towards the inclusion of environmental education in curricula

and training teachers in ‘education for sustainable development’. It has an active publication programme and also has a wide range of books/manuals/guides on various aspects of environmental concerns<sup>4</sup>. The diverse activities and the rich experience of FRIM are excellent examples to emulate. Its experience can benefit reforestation efforts across the globe.

UCI is a non-profit private university founded in 1994 in San José, Costa Rica. It addresses the need for having interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary programmes that promote regenerative and evolutionary development<sup>6,7</sup>. UCI is recognized by the following citation: ‘In recognition of support to create new biosphere reserves in Latin America such as Sumaco (Ecuador), Cabo de Hornos (Chile) and Agua y Paz (Costa Rica) and the promotion of regenerative practices in the biosphere reserves’. The thrust areas of UCI are conservation of biodiversity, territorial management, local development, food safety from farm to table, regenerative agriculture and livestock, sustainable tourism and project management using a transversal ecosystem regeneration approach. UCI conducts training programmes, notably the Latin America School of Protected Areas, contributing to the capacity building across Latin America and Caribbean. It has initiated the Regenerative Communities Network, which is contributing to reverse the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss on ecosystems.

In order to strengthen international efforts in the field of environmental conservation, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said of Oman established this Prize during his visit to the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris in 1989 (refs 1, 2). The Man and the Biosphere Programme at UNESCO administers the Prize<sup>8,9</sup>. It is the first Arab environmental protection prize to be awarded at the international level<sup>8,9</sup>. It has been awarded 16 times during 1991–2021. To date, 18 organizations from 18 countries and four individuals from four countries have received this Prize. Mexico is the only country to receive it twice in 1991 (as an organization) and in 2005 (individually).

India received the Prize once in 2019 represented by the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, Bengaluru<sup>8</sup>. The other major science prizes instituted by the Middle Eastern region are the King Faisal International Prize for Science by Saudi Arabia<sup>10</sup> and the Mustafa Prize for Science by Iran<sup>11</sup>.

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