

## Coral triangle ratification needs RI's leadership

The six-country Coral Triangle Initiative created to ensure the survival of one of the most critical coastal and marine habitats on earth is at a decisive moment. The Indonesian government, as both the brainchild of the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) and the leader of its interim secretariat, should push forward on formal establishment of the institution before political will and funds run out. After seven years in the making, the world is looking to the six countries — Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Timor Leste — to cement their commitment through the May 2014 launch of the permanent CTI-CFF Secretariat. The lives and livelihoods within the Coral Triangle region depend on a multi-national approach to reverse the imminent collapse of this incredibly important and severely threatened shared coastal and marine resource. As the largest of the CTI-CFF countries and most populous, Indonesia's leadership at this moment is crucial.

Stretching across marine waters that bridge the natural resources of the Pacific and Indian Oceans and their related seas, the Coral Triangle is recognized as the global center of marine diversity. It is home to more than 600 species of coral (over 75 percent of the global total), more than 3,000 species of reef fishes (almost 40 percent of the global diversity), six out of seven marine turtle species, over 30 percent of the world's coral reef area (17 percent are within Indonesian waters), and the largest extent of mangrove forests in the world. More than 130 million people in the six countries depend directly on these fish and marine resources as their principal source of income, food and livelihoods. But these resources are under significant and increasing threat, with more than 85 percent threatened by overfishing, destructive fishing, watershed-based pollution and the impacts of coastal development. When the influence of rising sea temperatures is combined with these local threats, the portion of coral reefs rated as threatened increases to more than 90 percent.

In response to these threats and in recognition of the incredible value of natural marine resources at risk, in May 2009, the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Solomon Islands and Timor Leste signed the Coral Triangle Initiative Declaration on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF). The CTI-CFF is a multilateral partnership that aims to safeguard the marine and coastal resources of the Coral Triangle region. The six Coral Triangle countries collectively adopted a regional plan of action, followed by each country's adoption of a national plan of action. More than US\$200 million in multiyear grants has been committed by various international donor agencies to directly support implementation of the Coral Triangle Initiative, and each Coral Triangle country has substantially increased its own national investments in coastal and marine resources management.

For example, Indonesia has mandated the 3.3 million hectare Savu Sea National Marine Park, the largest in the Coral Triangle region and has instituted a process to review and improve the effectiveness of all of its marine protected areas. The Philippines has budgeted for a major national coral reef restoration program, Malaysia is progressing to gazette its largest marine protected area to date located in Sabah which will utilize state-of-the-art design criteria, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands have both scaled up their national marine resources management programs through improved legislation and capacity building at the local scale, and Timor Leste is actively beginning implementation and community engagement in its one large marine protected area. But the six Coral Triangle countries must still ratify the CTI-CFF agreement which will authorize the operation of a permanent regional secretariat and establish the CTI-CFF as a permanent program, to coordinate the enhanced protection and stewardship of the coastal resources and well-being of coastal communities in the region. The ratification is not yet done and several key actions are pending which must be accomplished in the next two months, because the official launch of the CTI-CFF Permanent Secretariat is scheduled for mid-May in Manado. Of the six countries, only Malaysia has ratified the CTI-CFF agreement in 2013 and the other five countries, including Indonesia, are still completing the ratification procedures.

The initiative has attracted support from members of the G8 and global and regional bodies. Today, the core CTI-CFF partners include the United States, Australia, the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Development Program, the Global Environment Facility, international NGOs — The Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, Conservation International — and the Coral Triangle Center. These partners believe that it is critical for the ratification to be accomplished very soon to ensure that the investment of the last five years by all concerned is not jeopardized. In the case of Indonesia, it was President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono who initiated and led the CTI-CFF process in the margin of the UN Convention on Climate Change meetings in Bali in 2007. Then in May 2009, Indonesia hosted the six Presidents of each CTI-CFF country in Manado to endorse the CTI-CFF regional plan of action. Indonesia also contributed the time and expertise of key staff in the Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Ministry to assist in guiding the CTI-CFF activities since 2009. We strongly encourage the government to sign for ratification of the document soon. This action will once again show the true leadership of Indonesia and President Yudhoyono of the CTI-CFF, which will encourage the other countries to follow so that the Permanent CTI-CFF Secretariat can be formalized in May in Manado on the fifth anniversary of the CTI-CFF launch.

***Alan T. White is a senior scientist of the Indo-Pacific division at The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Abdul Halim is senior marine policy advisor of the Indonesian Program at TNC.***