

BY LAXMI IYER ON MARCH 18, 2015 • (LEAVE A COMMENT)

NTU signs landmark MoU with Smithsonian institution for research in tropical ecology



NTU Provost Professor Freddy Boey (right) and Smithsonian's Interim Under Secretary for Science Dr W. John Kress (left) sealing the partnership at Smithsonian Castle in Washington, DC, United States. — PHOTO: NTU

Smithsonian institution, the world's largest museum and research complex based in US has decided to partner with Singapore's Nanyang Technological University (NTU), to collaborate on educational and research efforts in the areas of tropical ecology, biodiversity, forest and marine ecology and environmental change in Asia.

The two institutions represented by NTU Provost Professor Freddy Boey and Smithsonian's Interim Under Secretary for Science Dr W. John Kress, **signed** a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to this effect at the Smithsonian's Castle in Washington, D.C, United States yesterday. This is Smithsonian Institution's first formal research agreement in Asia, and NTU will be established as the Asian scientific hub for the Smithsonian's Forest Global Earth Observatories programme (ForestGEO).

ForestGEO is a global network of more than 60 tropical and temperate forest plots in 24 countries where scientists examine forest function and diversity. It also includes MarineGEO, the first long-term, worldwide research programme with seven sites to focus on understanding coastal marine life and its role in maintaining resilient ecosystems around the world.

NTU's new **Asian School of the Environment** will be the main partner to the **Smithsonian Institution**, supported by the university's premier research centres – the **Earth Observatory of Singapore (EOS)**, the **Singapore Centre on Environmental Life Sciences Engineering (SCELSE)** and NTU's **Complexity Institute**.

NTU Provost Professor Freddy Boey while hailing the landmark collaboration, said "Together with the Smithsonian Institution, our combined research efforts will be instrumental in advancing forest and marine ecological science, to better understand nature and the world around us. The discovery of such knowledge will allow scientists to tackle the huge challenges we have today, such as climate change and environmental degradation."

Professor Alexander Zehnder, member of the NTU Board of Trustees said, "Both NTU and the Smithsonian Institution share the same vision that many of the answers to climate change issues can be found in the tropical Asia region. Starting with forest ecology and science, the research will be beneficial in designing sustainable strategies, which will play an important role in the survival of mankind."

Prof John Stephen Lansing, co-director of NTU's Complexity Institute says, "The tropics are home to about 80% of the world's terrestrial biodiversity. Just to the south of Singapore is the Coral Triangle, and most of the world's marine biodiversity. These are the crown jewels of our planet. Half of the world's children live in the tropics, and that number is projected to rise to two-thirds by the middle of the century. But the future is a time that we can change."

At a time, when Singapore is facing problems like deforestation and haze- which is beginning to affect the air quality, it becomes imperative to find a solution for this, stresses Prof. Lansing.

NTU has some ambitious environmental science projects lined up which includes establishment of observation sites at the Sumatra subduction zone for seismic activity, the study of biofilms in urban waterways, the building of a comprehensive global oceanographic database and the sequencing of air microbiodome.