

# FOREWORD

It is my pleasure to introduce this excellent report on Southeast Asian coral reefs. As an avid scuba diver and underwater photographer, I know first hand the beauty and value of coral reefs. As a former Head of State of the Philippines, I understand the reliance of Southeast Asian nations on their coastal and marine resources for food and the livelihoods of their people. I have always considered the protection and conservation of these reefs to be a high priority.

With more than 100,000 km<sup>2</sup> of coral reefs along the coastlines of Southeast Asia, the region has more coral reef area than any other part of the world. The reefs contain the highest coral biodiversity on the planet. This abundant endowment provides food for millions of people and generates millions of dollars in tourist revenue every year.

In the last 50 years, Southeast Asia has undergone rapid industrialization and population growth. As human populations have grown, so have pressures on the natural systems that sustain us. Economic market expansion has stimulated the construction of ports, airports, cities, and other infrastructure—often in ecologically sensitive areas. Coastal resources are being stressed at unsustainable rates. However, the exploitation is not only local in nature. The trade in live reef food fish and ornamentals has fueled regionwide overexploitation of lucrative species, often using destructive capture techniques. Many of the region's reefs have already been severely damaged.

Better information about the location of reefs and their accompanying threats is critical to alleviating the many pressures that threaten their future. Yet in most areas, resource managers lack the information they need for effective stewardship of coastal resources.

The Reefs at Risk project series is a valuable contribution to reducing this information gap. The global analysis released in 1998, *Reefs at Risk: A Map-Based Indicator of Threats to the World's Coral Reefs*, has been successful in raising awareness of the extent of human impact on coral reef ecosystems. It has also given the public useful information for evaluating relative threats around the world and identifying regions and countries most at risk. The analysis identified Southeast Asia as the region with the most threatened coral reefs.

This new analysis, *Reefs at Risk in Southeast Asia*, draws on much more detailed information and a more refined modeling approach, and it benefits from input and review by over a dozen universities and institutions within the region. The analysis highlights the value of coral reefs across the region, identifies the threats, and shows what will be lost unless current destructive activities are curtailed. The report and detailed accompanying data will be valuable to local resource managers for identifying threats and developing plans to mitigate them.

A commitment to sustainable development was a hallmark of my tenure as President of the Philippines. I continue to believe in the idea that development must be planned to minimize impacts in environmentally sensitive areas. We already have many laws to protect coral reefs—from bans on fishing with explosives and poisons to restrictions on fishing and criteria for coastal development. Enforcement of existing regulations is a first step toward protecting these resources. This report shows that it is in a country's economic self-interest to protect and properly manage its coastal resources for both current and future generations. I urge governments, policy makers, the private sector, and coastal communities to read it and seriously consider its recommendations.

**FIDEL RAMOS** | *President of the Philippines, 1992-1998*

