

**Your Royal Highness, fellow Whitley Award winners, ladies and gentlemen,**

Almost exactly a decade ago, the Whitley Award took a chance on me—a young woman from Aceh, just four years into her conservation journey, trying to protect a vast and irreplaceable landscape: the Leuser Ecosystem in Sumatra, Indonesia.

At the time, we came to the Whitley Fund for Nature with a bold and perhaps unconventional idea: to file a citizen lawsuit against our own government, in defense of our forests.

Since then, the journey has been anything but linear.

Like many in conservation, we have lived through its full spectrum—losses that humbled us, and victories that sustained us.

We lost our court case. But in that loss, we gained something deeper: trust and grassroots support. Together with communities, we halted a geothermal project that threatened the last habitats of the critically endangered Sumatran rhino. We stopped a large hydropower dam that would have submerged over 4,000 hectares of elephant habitat.

And perhaps most importantly, we invested in people—training and supporting hundreds of community paralegals and forest patrol teams, trusting that those who live closest to the forest are also its strongest defenders.

But conservation is never just about protecting landscapes. It is about living within them—and sometimes, surviving them.

CYCLONE SENYAR TAUGHT US THAT

I began working in conservation for simple reasons.  
Because I loved wildlife.

But I stayed in conservation because I witnessed something far more profound:  
the inseparable relationship between people and the ecosystems they depend on.

DISASTERS made that relationship undeniable.

In those weeks, our roles changed overnight.

And in that moment, we learned a lesson that continues to shape our work:  
We cannot separate conservation from human well-being. They are one and the same.

None of this work is ever done alone.

And if I am honest, it has often felt uncomfortable to stand on stages like this, receiving recognition that carries my name—when the reality is that this work is deeply collective.

But the Whitley Award has always understood that.

So tonight, I would like to share this moment with the people who have built this work with me from the very beginning.

I would like to invite my co-founder, Badrul Irfan, to join me on stage—along with Irham and Lukman—who represent the many individuals and communities who continue to protect the Leuser Ecosystem every single day.

Badrul speak four languages, and English is not one of them, HE IS ABOUT TO GIVE A GIVE BLESSING IN THE LANGUAGE OF ACEH AND GAYO, THE LANGUAGE OF LEUSER