Comments by the Prizewinner

Dr. Akito Arima, Chairperson of the International Cosmos Prize Committee; Committee Members; Mr. Takashi Imai, Chairperson of the Expo '90 Foundation; Board of Directors; Your Excellency Nguyen Phu Binh, Vietnamese Ambassador to Japan; Distinguished Guests; Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am very much delighted and honored to have been awarded the prestigious International Cosmos Prize for 2008. This honor belongs not only to me, but also to my entire country and the whole community of environmental scientists. Please allow me on this occasion to sincerely thank my international and Vietnamese friends and colleagues, as well as local residents and officials in the coastal areas of Vietnam who have, over many years, tirelessly assisted and encouraged me as well as shown me the right directions in my research work.

After a challenging but stimulating period of research, my colleagues and I have discovered the significant practical values of Vietnam's mangrove ecosystems in protecting the coastal areas against pollution and natural disasters, accommodating and nurturing aquatic resources, and contributing to the life of poor people. This research has enabled us to successfully educate the local people in a number of provinces and raise their awareness in protecting and developing this precious form of submerged resources. It has also helped to reduce the problem of deforestation and to increase the activity of planting protective mangroves in a number of localities. Our empirical research has, moreover, contributed data to the body of knowledge regarding mangrove ecosystems.

My research work has enabled me to introduce certain reforms into the teaching curriculum at my university and train a number of researchers who are now highly qualified and experienced. They now work as academics at universities and colleges or serve as civil servants in various localities throughout Vietnam.

The very difficult days I spent doing research during the time of war, as well as after the national reunification under harsh economic conditions, have given me the stamina to reach new heights in scientific research. Inside my heart, there is always the desire to contribute my small part to improving the environment and alleviating the difficulties and poverty of the coastal residents.

The International Cosmos Prize has given me the great honor of being recognized for my lifetime dedication to research into mangrove ecosystems and their interrelationship with coastal communities. But more than that, the monetary award of the prize will also help me realize my dream of furthering mangrove-related research in Vietnam through the establishment of a scholarship fund for Vietnamese students and scientists involved in mangrove studies. In this manner, I believe, this prestigious Prize will provide an ongoing, significant benefit, both for the scientific community and for the coastal communities in our country.

Finally, I would like to extend my deep gratitude to the International Cosmos Prize Committee for having bestowed on me this great honor. For this generous prize and your warm hospitality, I once again thank the EXPO '90 Foundation and all my Japanese hosts. You have made me feel most welcome in your beautiful country.

My special thanks go to His Highness, the Crown Prince, for his gracious invitation. My family and I look forward to a memorable audience in Tokyo. I also thank His Excellency Mr. Nguyen Phu Binh, the Ambassador of Vietnam, for his attendance today.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my wife, Ngo Kim Thu, and my two children for their continuous support all the way through to my success.

Phan Nguyen Hong