



MEDIA RELEASE

THIRTEENTH MEETING OF THE SUB-REGIONAL MINISTERIAL STEERING COMMITTEE (MSC) ON TRANSBOUNDARY HAZE POLLUTION

Brunei Darussalam, 8 May 2012

1. Environment Ministers and their representatives from Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand met at the Thirteenth Meeting of the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee (MSC) on Transboundary Haze Pollution on 8 May 2012 in Brunei Darussalam.
2. The Ministers noted that from February to April 2012, MSC Mekong countries were affected by smoke haze from open burning activities in the Mekong Sub-Region. PM10 concentrations exceeded national standards and reached unhealthy levels. As for the southern ASEAN region, the hotspots were generally subdued due to wet weather conditions during the same period.
3. The Ministers noted the ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre's (ASMC's) weather outlook for the region in the coming months, in particular, the prevailing neutral conditions (neither El Nino nor La Nina) expected at least until October 2012. However, drier weather may be expected during the coming traditional dry season between June and mid-October 2012. The MSC countries agreed to remain vigilant and step up their efforts to minimize any possible occurrence of transboundary haze from land and forest fires during extended periods of dry weather in the coming months.
4. The Ministers noted that MSC countries are closely monitoring the regional hotspots and weather outlook. The Ministers also noted the update of fire and haze situation and recognised various initiatives undertaken by the MSC countries to prevent and mitigate land and forest fires. In particular, Brunei Darussalam is currently undertaking the expansion and improvement of its existing air quality monitoring network, and has put in place a hotline for public query and receipt of complaints of open burning. Malaysia shared its experience and achievements in implementing fire prevention and peatland management programme, which has significantly reduced the number of hotspots in the project area by more than 70% in 2011 as compared to 2010. Thailand has promoted the concept of Zero-Burning Village and implemented the Guidelines on Agricultural Residual Burning. Indonesia shared its experience in mapping burnt areas utilising satellite imagery.

5. The Ministers expressed appreciation on the substantive efforts by Indonesia in implementing its Plan of Action (PoA) in Dealing with Transboundary Haze Pollution especially in reducing the number of hotspots by 20% every year based on 2006 baseline, and to meet its national target of reduction of GHG emissions by 26% below the BAU by 2020. Indonesia has implemented Presidential Instruction No. 16 year 2011 for relevant ministries and institutions to better coordinate their efforts and law enforcement measures to overcome land and forest fire issues. Indonesia also strengthened its Manggala Agni (fire-brigade) program; allocated decentralised funds to fire-prone provinces to assist in preventing land and forest fires; and strengthened the capacity in fire-prone areas through pilot projects and establishment of *masyarakat peduli api* (village fire brigade community). The Ministers noted that the process of ratification of the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution by Indonesia is underway.
6. The Ministers acknowledged the successful completion of the Indonesia-Singapore collaboration in Jambi Province and the Indonesia-Malaysia collaboration in Riau Province. The Ministers further noted that Malaysia and Singapore have offered to continue their collaboration with Indonesia. Indonesia welcomed the interest expressed by Malaysia and Singapore and informed that this is being considered by the Coordinating Ministry for People Welfare.
7. The Ministers noted Brunei Darussalam's interest to explore possible areas of collaboration with Indonesia, similar to that of Malaysia-Indonesia and Singapore-Indonesia. Indonesia would consider the proposal and both sides would discuss the details further.
8. The Ministers provided guidance on the implementation of the Strategic Review of the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee (MSC) adopted at the last MSC Meeting, which covers enhancing haze control management through early warning and monitoring, fire prevention and fire suppression, including refinement of the Fire Danger Rating System; enhancing bilateral collaboration and replication of bilateral projects, where appropriate; conducting training courses offered by member states under the Regional Haze Training Network, and the organising of the Second MSC Forum in Brunei Darussalam on 8-9 May 2012. A training course on Interpretation of Satellite Imageries was successfully conducted in Singapore on 28-29 November 2011; and a training course on Haze and Peatland Management is scheduled for 15-17 May 2012 in Singapore, to be jointly organised by the Singapore Environment Institute and the Environment Institute of Malaysia. The Ministers also noted that Thailand will organise the Peer Learning Programme on Best Management Practices on Peatlands for Community Groups during 16-18 May 2012 and also the ASEAN Training Workshop on Air Quality Monitoring and Haze Control in June 2012.
9. The Ministers noted with appreciation the significant progress in developing national Fire Danger Rating Systems (FDRS) in Malaysia and Indonesia. The Ministers also noted that the ASEAN-wide FDRS map is being regularly updated by Malaysia. The Malaysian and ASEAN-wide FDRS maps are also displayed on Google Earth. Both Malaysia and Indonesia have further refined their systems by integrating weather data and ground conditions such as fire

prone peat areas, installation of more automatic weather stations to improve further the resolution of FDRS, and to improve on the short term and medium term forecasts. Other MSC countries have expressed their interest to consider establishing their national FDRS with the assistance of Malaysia and Indonesia. The FDRS provides early warning on potential fire occurrences, which enables preparedness and preventive actions during dry weather periods. Considering the usefulness of the FDRS, the Ministers agreed to recommend the development of the proposed ASEAN-wide FDRS to be considered by the ASEAN Leaders.

10. The Ministers expressed appreciation to Brunei Darussalam for organizing the 2nd MSC Forum on 8-9 May 2012, with the theme “Management of Forest Fires: Leveraging Partnerships”. The 2nd MSC Forum builds upon the 1st Forum in 2009 in Singapore and aims to provide a platform for various stakeholders – academics, researchers, think tanks, civil society organisations, private sector, financial institutions, etc. – to interact with the ministers and local government representatives on collaborative efforts to address fires and transboundary haze pollution.
11. The Ministers noted the good progress made by the ASEAN Peatland Forest Project and associated SEApeat project undertaken with financial support from the Global Environment Facility and European Union respectively. The projects are supporting the implementation of the ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy 2006-2020, and National Action Plans on Peatlands as well as showcasing practical measures for peatland management at pilot sites in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Viet Nam. Such measures include: the development and refinement of FDRS, improved water management in peatland areas; sharing of best management practices; partnership with local community for rehabilitation and alternative livelihood options; and encouraging plantation companies to adopt best management practices in peatland areas. The ministers invited collaboration from relevant parties to further expand and deepen cooperation on peatland management and fire prevention.
12. The Ministers expressed their appreciation to the Government of Brunei Darussalam for organising the 13th MSC Meeting and the excellent arrangements made and hospitality provided. The next MSC meeting will be hosted by Indonesia in Bali in September 2012.
