



MEDIA RELEASE

6TH MEETING OF THE SUB-REGIONAL MINISTERIAL STEERING COMMITTEE ON TRANSBOUNDARY HAZE POLLUTION IN THE MEKONG SUB-REGION

24 February 2017, Chiang Rai, Thailand

1. The Sixth Meeting of the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee on Transboundary Haze Pollution in the Mekong Sub-Region (6th MSC Mekong) was held on 24 February 2017 in Chiang Rai, Thailand and attended by Ministers/representatives responsible for land, forest fires and haze from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam, and the Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. The Twelfth Meeting of the Technical Working Group on Transboundary Haze Pollution in the Mekong Sub-Region (12th TWG Mekong) preceded the Meeting.
2. The Meeting noted the ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre's (ASMC's) outlook of the weather and smoke haze situation from March to October 2017 for the Mekong Sub-Region. The Meeting also noted ASMC's forecast of the prevailing dry weather conditions to extend until early April 2017. With the prevailing Neutral (neither El Niño or La Niña) conditions projected to persist at least until mid-2017, normal to above normal rainfall can be expected for the Mekong Sub-Region, and hotspot activities are expected to be generally subdued during the rainy season from April to October 2017. The MSC Mekong countries agreed to continue to be vigilant and take preventive measures and immediate fire suppression procedures to mitigate land and forest fires and to minimise the occurrence of transboundary haze during periods of drier weather.
3. The Ministers discussed and shared various initiatives undertaken by the MSC Mekong countries to mitigate land and forest fires, and to control smoke haze pollution during the dry season. The Ministers noted the continuous efforts by MSC Mekong countries on sharing of best practices and techniques in providing alternatives to the use of fires for land clearing, and developing activities focusing on action-oriented, community-based and on-the-ground programme with specific targets and outputs to achieve.
4. The Ministers recalled that ASEAN cooperation towards transboundary haze pollution control has been highlighted at many high-level meetings, including the 28th and 29th ASEAN Summits held in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 6-7 September 2016 and the 12th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution held in Malaysia in August 2016. The Ministers reiterated their commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Roadmap on ASEAN Cooperation towards Transboundary Haze Pollution Control with Means of Implementation through enhanced regional cooperation efforts. The Ministers expressed appreciation to

Thailand as the lead country in the Roadmap development and supported Thailand's continued leadership in the implementation of the Roadmap.

5. The Ministers recognised the need to further strengthen and synergise cooperation in the implementation of the Roadmap, and tasked the TWG Mekong to work on Chiang Rai 2017 Plan of Action to identify a common set of priorities for the implementation of the Roadmap on ASEAN Cooperation towards Transboundary Haze Pollution Control with Means of Implementation; which includes information technology, public awareness and engagement, reduction of health and environmental risks, and needed technical support for the MSC Mekong countries such as air quality monitoring network. The Ministers tasked the TWG Mekong to work with the ASEAN Secretariat in order to finalize this set of priorities by end of March 2017.
6. The Ministers welcomed technical and financial support from AMS and international partners for the implementation of the Roadmap on ASEAN Cooperation towards Transboundary Haze Pollution Control with Means of Implementation.
7. The Ministers attached great importance to the role of local community in preventing, monitoring, mitigating, and addressing transboundary haze pollution. The Ministers encouraged measures to empower local community including disseminating guidelines information and best practices in local language.
8. The Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to work towards achieving the target of hotspot reduction which was approved at the 4th MSC Mekong Meeting in 2014 in Vientiane, Lao PDR, specifically in reducing cumulative hotspot count to less than 75,000 hotspots by 2017 and to 50,000 by 2020. In line with this, the Meeting noted the success story of Thailand to achieve the said target, and appreciated the lessons learnt and best practice shared amongst MSC Mekong countries in realisation of the targets with the relevant indicators of the Roadmap, such as an increase of numbers of days having good or moderate air quality in terms of Pollutant Standard Index (PSI) or Air Quality Index (AQI) based on PM10 and/or PM2.5.
9. The Ministers commended the substantive progress of the implementation of the ASEAN Programme on Sustainable Management of Peatland Ecosystems – APSMPE (2014-2020) and the encouraging support and assurance from ASEAN dialogue and development partners. The Ministers noted the signing of the Financing Agreement for the ASEAN-EU Programme on Sustainable Use of Peatland and Haze Mitigation in ASEAN (SUPA) on 27 December 2016 with an indicative budget of EUR 24,556,000 for the duration of 60 months. The Ministers looked forward to the effective implementation of SUPA project and renewed their commitment to coordinate the implementation of programmes/projects under APSMPE (2014-2020) through ASEAN mechanisms, enhanced national level efforts and multi-stakeholder partnership.

10. The Ministers noted the progress of the Air4ASEAN which was developed in 2014 with the approval of COP-10 to provide quick access to air quality and haze information in the ASEAN region through smart phone and tablet. The Ministers encouraged MSC Mekong Countries to provide feedback on the application to improve the function of the tool, as well as to share online data.
 11. The Meeting expressed their appreciation to the Royal Government of Thailand for hosting the 6th MSC Mekong Meeting and the excellent arrangements made and generous hospitality provided. The 7th MSC Mekong Meeting will be held in Viet Nam in 2018.
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