



MEDIA RELEASE

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

(11TH MSC MEKONG)

30 November 2022

1. The Eleventh Meeting of the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee on Transboundary Haze Pollution in the Mekong Sub-Region (11th MSC Mekong) was held on 30 November 2022 through Video Conference hosted by Thailand. The Meeting was opened by H.E. Varawut Silpa-archa, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Thailand. The Meeting was attended by Ministers, officials and/or representatives 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, under the Chairpersonship of Mr. Thalearngsak Petchsuwan, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand. The Seventeenth Meeting of the Technical Working Group on Transboundary Haze Pollution in the Mekong Sub-Region (17th TWG Mekong) preceded the Meeting.

2. The Meeting noted the review and outlook of weather and smoke haze situation in the Mekong sub-region presented by the ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre (ASMC). The Mekong sub-region's dry season in 2021/2022 lasted from December 2021 to May 2022. Alert Level 3 was issued for the sub-region on 11 Apr 2022. The overall hotspot count for the sub-region was around 24% lower in 2022 compared to 2021 between the period January and November. The upcoming dry season for the Mekong sub-region is expected to start in end 2022. While existing La Niña conditions are forecast to continue till the end of 2022 and weaken in early 2023, persistent dry conditions are still expected. The Meeting noted ASMC's ongoing efforts in advancing its remote sensing capabilities and haze dispersion modelling to support fires/haze monitoring, assessment and early warning. As part of the five-year ASMC Capability-Building Programme (ACaP), close to 700 participants had attended its 24 training courses and technical fora. ACaP will be extended for another five years until 2027 with new activities to complement existing workshops such as an attachment programme at ASMC for training in operational areas as well as research collaborations.

3. As the sub-region is entering its traditional dry season, the Meeting recognised the continuing rise in global GHG emissions and the compounded socio-economic impacts of climate change and of the COVID-19 pandemic climate risks will pose further environmental and human system challenges to the region. The Meeting

emphasised that fire suppression, fire prevention, surveillance, early warning and monitoring are top priorities to minimise the occurrence of transboundary haze during periods of drier weather.

4. The Meeting recalled the in-principle agreement at the 9th MSC Mekong in 2020 to extend the Chiang Rai 2017 Plan of Action to 2025 with renewed hotspot reduction target. The Meeting further recalled the 10th MSC Mekong in 2021 agreed for the MSC Mekong countries to consider joint indicators for 20% hotspot reduction for next year and tasked TWG Mekong to undertake the preparation under the leadership of Thailand. The Meeting was pleased of the overall hotspot count for the sub-region was around 24% lower in 2022 compared to 2021 between January and September. The Meeting agreed for the MSC Mekong countries to further consider the joint indicators for 30% hotspot reduction for next year. The Meeting reiterated its commitment to intensifying in-country actions through respective National Action Plans and ensure the full implementation of the ASEAN Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Monitoring, Assessment and Joint Emergency Response where the Alert Levels, Trigger Points and Actions on Fire Suppression adopted by COP-10.

5. The Meeting reaffirmed its commitment at the 17th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (COP-17) on 20 October 2022 in Singapore. The Meeting noted the progress made in developing the new Roadmap on ASEAN Cooperation towards Transboundary Haze Pollution Control with Means of Implementation (Haze-free Roadmap) 2022-2030, the new ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy (APMS) 2022-2030, and the Investment Framework for a Haze-free, Sustainable Land Management in Southeast Asia. The Meeting underscored the importance of comprehensive strategy that will address the root causes of transboundary haze pollution by strengthening and intensifying national efforts, regional and international cooperation.

6. The Meeting noted the implementation progress of haze and peatlands programmes in the ASEAN region and thanked the support and contribution of Partners through the Sustainable Use of Peatland and Haze Mitigation in ASEAN (SUPA) funded by EU and Germany, GEF-6 Project on Sustainable Management of Peatland Ecosystems in Mekong Countries by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and Measurable Action for Haze-Free Sustainable Land Management in Southeast Asia (MAHFSA) funded by International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The Meeting called upon the Partners and other external parties for stronger support to the implementation of the Roadmap, APMS and Investment Framework through on-the-ground and action-oriented programme.

7. The 12th MSC Mekong Meeting will be held in Viet Nam in 2023.