



Media Release

15th Meeting of the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee (MSC) on Transboundary Haze Pollution

**17 July 2013
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**

1. Ministers responsible for the environment from Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, the Vice-Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Thailand and the Secretary-General of ASEAN met on the occasion of the Fifteenth Meeting of the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee (MSC) on Transboundary Haze Pollution on 17 July 2013 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
2. The Ministers noted the ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre's (ASMC's) weather outlook of occasional periods of dry weather for the next few months until the end of the Southwest Monsoon season in early October 2013. An increase in hotspot activities leading to the occurrence of transboundary smoke haze can be expected during extended periods of dry weather conditions. Indonesia reported that the occurrence of tropical cyclones could also increase the severity of transboundary smoke haze. With the prevailing neutral conditions (neither El Niño nor La Niña) expected to persist for the rest of 2013, the MSC countries agreed to continue to be vigilant and be prepared for any occurrence of transboundary haze from fires during extended periods of dry weather in the coming months.
3. The Ministers noted the seriousness of the recent severe transboundary haze situation. The Ministers commended Singapore for their efforts in the development of the ASEAN Sub-Regional Haze Monitoring System (HMS) as agreed at the 14th MSC meeting. The Ministers acknowledged that the HMS is a useful tool that could assist in monitoring and internal enforcement actions against irresponsible

parties contributing to fires. The Ministers agreed to recommend adopting the HMS as a joint haze monitoring system among MSC countries, with digitized land-use maps and concession maps of fire-prone areas that cause transboundary haze to be shared on a Government-to-Government basis subject to the ASEAN Leaders' approval at the ASEAN Leaders' Summit in October 2013.

4. The Ministers expressed appreciation on the substantive efforts by Indonesia in implementing its Plan of Action (PoA) in Dealing with Transboundary Haze Pollution, particularly in addressing the recent land and forest fires which resulted in transboundary haze pollution. Command posts were established and resources from various stakeholders, such as the military, police and the fire brigades under the Ministry of Forestry, community fire brigades, private sector were mobilized. Ground and aerial fire suppression, including water bombing and artificial rain, were conducted. The local communities' active participation in prevention and mitigation of fires were also secured. Intensive law enforcement was carried out by the Task Force comprising national and local police, relevant ministries and the civil investigators. The Ministers expressed appreciation for Indonesia's efforts in putting out the fires in a matter of days which led to a drastic drop in fires.

5. The Ministers noted that the efforts undertaken by Indonesia demonstrate its capacity to mitigate the occurrence of fires. However, the Ministers acknowledged the need for better early warning systems and to be better prepared to anticipate any fires in future, so that immediate mitigation actions could be undertaken even before the fires get out of control. The MSC member states reaffirmed their offer of assistance for emergency response should the situation warrant it.

6. The Ministers commended Indonesia's commitment to expedite the process of ratification of ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution.

7. An ASEAN Workshop on the Enhancement of the Fire Danger Rating System (FDRS) will be held in Malaysia in September 2013, which aims to enhance the ASEAN-wide FDRS currently run by the Malaysia Meteorological Department, through training and capacity building of relevant member states to operate the system in their respective countries.

8. The Ministers provided guidance on the implementation of the Strategic Review of the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee (MSC) Programmes and Activities, which covers enhancing haze control management through early warning/monitoring, fire prevention and fire suppression, including refinement of the Fire Danger Rating System; conducting training courses offered by member states under the Regional Haze Training Network, and organisation of the MSC Forum.

9. Indonesia expressed appreciation to Malaysia and Singapore for continued efforts in bilateral collaborations and noted that such collaboration to address transboundary haze issues is necessary. Malaysia and Singapore extended offers to renew existing bilateral collaboration projects and extend the cooperative activities to other provinces in Sumatra. Indonesia welcomed the offers and is currently identifying the areas of cooperation which will maximize and bring mutual benefits for all the parties concerned.

10. The Ministers noted the progress of implementation of the project on Rehabilitation and Sustainable Use of Peatland Forests in Southeast Asia (funded by Global Environment Facility) and the SEApeat Project (funded by European Union), including the various activities conducted at the pilot sites in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Viet Nam. The Ministers emphasized sustainable management of fire prone areas especially peatlands remain a high priority for prevention of fires and smoke haze, as well as the mitigation of the impact of climate change. The Ministers supported the proposed development of a second phase for further sustainable management of peatlands building on the achievements of the current phase. A concept proposal would be further elaborated for consideration by the Ministers at the upcoming meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution.

11. The Ministers expressed their appreciation to the Government of Malaysia for organising the 15th MSC Meeting and the excellent arrangements made and hospitality provided.
