



MEDIA RELEASE

EIGHTH MEETING OF THE SUB-REGIONAL MINISTERIAL STEERING COMMITTEE ON TRANSBOUNDARY HAZE POLLUTION IN THE MEKONG SUB-REGION (8TH MSC MEKONG)

24 May 2019, Siem Reap, Cambodia

1. The Eighth Meeting of the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee on Transboundary Haze Pollution in the Mekong Sub-Region (8th MSC Mekong) was held on 24 May 2019 in Siem Reap, Cambodia and opened by H.E. Say Samal, Minister of Environment of Cambodia. The Meeting was 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, under the Chairpersonship of H.E Sao Sopheap, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Environment of Cambodia. The Fourteenth Meeting of the Technical Working Group on Transboundary Haze Pollution in the Mekong Sub-Region (14th TWG Mekong) preceded the Meeting.
2. The Ministers expressed concern over the recent dry season and transboundary haze pollution affecting the northern ASEAN region and expressed sympathy to the people affected by the haze. The Ministers noted and appreciated the collaborative efforts undertaken by the respective MSC Mekong countries to address the forest fires and the associated smoke haze.
3. The Ministers noted the ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre's (ASMC's) review and outlook of the weather and smoke haze situation for the Mekong sub-region. The Meeting noted that hotspot activities are expected to be generally subdued in the coming months as the rainy season sets in with the transition to Southwest Monsoon conditions in June 2019. Near-normal to below-normal rainfall and above-normal temperatures are expected for the Mekong sub-region in June and July. Toward the end of the year, there may be a gradual increase in hotspot activities as the dry season sets in with the Northeast Monsoon. There have been signs of El-Niño conditions developing in recent months, and global climate models from international climate centres have forecast a 50 – 75% chance of an El Niño in the second half of 2019. The MSC Mekong countries agreed to remain 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.
4. The Ministers extended appreciation to ASMC for its initiatives to enhance services in weather forecasting, haze monitoring and early warning for the region, and the capability development activities rolled out as part of its five-year Regional Capability Building Programme.

5. The Ministers reaffirmed the commitment to the objectives and principles of the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution and the vision towards a haze-free ASEAN by 2020 as stipulated in the Roadmap on ASEAN Cooperation towards Transboundary Haze Pollution Control with Means of Implementation. The Ministers agreed to step up cooperation to effectively realise the objectives of this Agreement in its entirety, including the 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 the 10th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-10) to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (AATHP).
6. The Ministers recognised the need to intensify their works towards achieving the target of hotspot reduction of the Chiang Rai 2017 Plan of Action which was previously 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. The Ministers agreed to aim the target hotspot count below 50,000 by 2020 with enhanced efforts to exchange best practices and providing assistance, if necessary, in fire and haze control management.
7. The Ministers emphasised the need for strengthened efforts by the MSC Mekong countries in preventing and mitigating land and forest fires and smoke haze pollution before and during the dry season, respectively. The Ministers noted with appreciation the continuous efforts by MSC Mekong countries in enhancing their respective National Action Plans and effective inter-agency coordination on fire prevention and suppression, surveillance, and early warning and monitoring. The Ministers agreed to further enhance collaborative actions among the MSC Mekong countries to exchange information and best practices on fire prevention and suppression and to improve the capacity of National Monitoring Centres (NMCs) on air quality and early warning monitoring. The Ministers further appreciated the ongoing bilateral cooperation in providing continuous support and technical assistance among MSC Mekong countries.
8. The Ministers were pleased to acknowledge the implementation of the Roadmap on ASEAN Cooperation towards Transboundary Haze Pollution Control with Means of Implementation and the Chiang Rai 2017 Plan of Action that would bring about complementary progress in areas, namely: information technology, public awareness and engagement, reduction of health and environmental risks, and air quality monitoring network. The Ministers looked forward to the mid-term review of and evaluation of the implementation of the Roadmap which will be presented at the next Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Agreement that will accelerate the necessary timeline towards the achievement of a haze-free ASEAN by 2020. The Ministers noted the progress towards the finalisation of the Establishment Agreement and Host Country Agreement of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Transboundary Haze Pollution Control (ACC THPC) in Indonesia and the urgency to further intensify efforts to bring the negotiations to conclusion.
9. The Ministers noted with satisfaction the good progress of the implementation of the ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy (APMS 2006-2020) through the ASEAN Programme on Sustainable Management of Peatland Ecosystems

(APSMPE 2014-2020) and reiterated their support to the upcoming review of APMS to consolidate national and regional assessments on the implementation of the APMS and achievements of the targets and to generate information and learning to inform the formulation of the next strategy.

10. The Ministers were pleased that cooperation with Dialogue Partners, Development Partners as well as with international organisations has been further strengthened and appreciated the valuable support extended for the implementation of the Roadmap and Chiang Rai 2017 Plan of Action by European Union (EU) through the Sustainable Use of Peatland and Haze Mitigation in ASEAN (SUPA), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for the GEF-6 Project on Sustainable Management of Peatland Ecosystems in Mekong Countries, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) on the Measurable Action for Haze-Free Sustainable Land Management in Southeast Asia (MAHFSA).
11. The Meeting expressed their appreciation to the Royal Government of Cambodia for hosting the 8th MSC Mekong Meeting and the excellent arrangements made and generous hospitality provided. The 9th MSC Mekong Meeting will be held in Lao PDR in 2020.
