



Media Release

Eighth Meeting of the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee (MSC) on Transboundary Haze Pollution Singapore, 19 August 2009

1. Environment Ministers and their representatives from Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand and the ASEAN Secretariat met at the Eighth Meeting of the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee (MSC) on Transboundary Haze Pollution on 19 August 2009 in Singapore.
2. The Ministers noted with concern the report of the ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre (ASMC) that the prevailing weak El Niño condition is forecast to intensify to a moderate to strong El Niño event in the last quarter of 2009. The El Niño event is likely to exacerbate and prolong the current dry season till October 2009. An increase in hotspot activities can continue to be expected in the fire-prone areas in Sumatra, Kalimantan and Sarawak over the next few months. This is likely to lead to more incidences of transboundary smoke haze pollution in the region.
3. The region experienced sharp increase in the number of hotspots up to 15 August 2009, compared to the same period in 2006 when the region last experienced severe smoke haze pollution. The Ministers noted that while there have been sporadic incidences of air quality reaching unhealthy levels, the situation is still under control due to the mitigation actions taken by the MSC countries. The Ministers urged all MSC countries to put in place enhanced measures to prevent and mitigate fires during this critical period. Vigilance must be stepped up and more has to be done to mitigate escalation of hotspot activities during this extended dry period.
4. The Ministers agreed to ban all open burning including suspending permits for prescribed burning activities in fire-prone areas. The Ministers also agreed to step up enforcement measures, and to promote public awareness to control fires. The Ministers agreed to expeditiously provide assistance for joint emergency response to mitigate the fires should the need arise.
5. The Ministers noted the enhanced efforts by Indonesia in implementing its Plan of Action (PoA) in Dealing with Transboundary Haze Pollution. The Ministers noted several new actions taken by Indonesia to further enhance its efforts to prevent and mitigate land and forest fires, among others:
 - a. Issuance of warning letters to local governments and companies in fire-prone provinces;
 - b. Cloud seeding operations;
 - c. Fire suppression activities including mobilisation of *Manggala Agni* fire brigade in relevant operation areas;
 - d. Training on zero burning for 600 palm oil farmers and 240 people in 8 *Manggala Agni* operation areas;
 - e. Pilot project on zero burning in 5 provinces covering 8 districts;
 - f. Revision of Law no. 23/1997 on Environmental Management for enhanced law enforcement;
 - g. Enforcement actions against offenders in Riau and Central Kalimantan Provinces;
 - h. Provision of equipment for mechanical land clearing for communities; and

- i. Ban on open burning by Central Kalimantan provincial government since early August 2009 and to subsequently impose ban on open burning in other fire-prone areas.
6. In the last 3 years Indonesia has undertaken preventive efforts in the area of community capacity building such as promoting awareness, providing training, equipment, and technical assistance on making compost, charcoal and briquette. These measures contributed to the decrease in the number of hotspots in the assisted fire-prone areas.
7. The Ministers noted further progress in the collaboration between the governments of Indonesia and Singapore for Muaro Jambi Regency in implementing various action programmes under the Jambi Master Plan. Two capacity building workshops were held from 11-12 August 2009 and 12-13 August 2009 for the Jambi community. A third aquaculture training workshop will be held in October 2009 as part of the second new action programme on the "Enhancement of Aquaculture Expertise in Jambi".
8. The Ministers also noted further progress in the collaboration between the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia in Riau Province, including installation of an air quality monitoring station in Bagan Siapi-api, Rokan Hilir Regency that was handed over to the Indonesian government on 8 August 2009. Fire and haze prevention programmes through rehabilitation and improved management of peatlands in 5 selected villages in Rokan Hilir Regency are also being implemented.
9. The Ministers agreed for Singapore to host a Ministerial Steering Committee (MSC) forum in October 2009, back-to-back with the 11th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on the Environment, involving representatives from local authorities of MSC countries, and regional and international organizations to share experiences and best practices, and to coordinate assistance of partners in addressing land and forest fires and transboundary haze pollution.
10. The Ministers also agreed as a long term measure to focus more attention on peatland management, and in this respect welcomed the recommendations of the Workshop on ASEAN Peatland Forest Management hosted by Thailand on 28-29 May 2009 to further intensify collaboration and cooperation, among others, by implementing the ASEAN Peatland Management Initiative and the Project on the Rehabilitation and Sustainable Use of Peatland Forests in Southeast Asia.
11. The Ministers agreed to continue to review the situation and to decide as and when necessary to meet again.
12. The Ministers expressed their appreciation to the Government of Singapore for hosting the 8th MSC Meeting and the excellent arrangements and hospitality provided.