Media Release

4th Meeting of the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee on Transboundary Haze Pollution in the Mekong Sub-Region

30 October 2014, Vientiane, Lao PDR

1. The Fourth Meeting of the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee on Transboundary Haze Pollution in the Mekong Sub-Region (MSC Mekong) was held on 30 October 2014 in Vientiane, Lao PDR and attended by Ministers/representatives responsible for land and forest fires and haze from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, and the Deputy Secretary-General for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

2. The Ministers noted the ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre’s (ASMC) weather outlook where, among others, rainfall is expected to be slightly below average to average for most parts of the northern ASEAN region for the next few months. The current rainy season is expected to ease in the coming weeks, and hotspot activities are likely to remain subdued. However, with the onset of the Northeast Monsoon or traditional dry season towards the end of the year, hotspot activities may escalate. ASMC also updated that neutral conditions (neither El Niño nor La Niña) continues to prevail with a likelihood of a weak El Nino developing towards the end of 2014/early 2015. The MSC countries will continue to be vigilant and take additional preventive measures and immediate fire suppression in the event of any occurrence of transboundary haze in the coming months.

3. The Meeting 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 current dry season. Cambodia continues to undertake fire prevention and control measures which include conducting annual Fire Fighters Training of
Trainers and promoting forest fire education and awareness to communities. Lao PDR has set up an onsite ambient Air Quality Monitoring station in Vientiane on 8 March 2014 with support from Thailand. Thailand implemented a number of prevention and mitigation measures, including strictly controlled burning during January to April 2014, forest fire prevention, suppression and control, public dissemination of haze information through mass and social medias, fire and haze early warning and cooperation with neighboring countries including establishment of one air quality monitoring station in Vientiane, Lao PDR. Myanmar is developing National Fire Hazard Prevention and Control Plan and undertaking efforts in reducing vulnerability of forest communities and ecosystems to climate change and human-induced forest fires. Viet Nam continues to strengthen forest fire control activities including monitoring, prevention and mitigation; and work with local administrations and communities on forest protection, fire prevention and suppression.

4. The Meeting agreed to work towards achieving a renewed sub-regional target of hotspot reduction, i.e. reducing cumulative hotspot count not exceeding 75,000 hotspots (based on 2008 data) to be achieved by 2017, with a goal of returning to a cumulative hotspot count of 50,000 (based on 2006 data) by 2020.

5. The Meeting commended the significant achievements made upon the completion of activities under the 5-year ASEAN Peatland Forests Project (APFP) funded by Global Environment Facility (2009-2014), and the good progress made under the EU-supported SEApeat Project, which aim to promote the sustainable management of peatlands in ASEAN to sustain local livelihoods, reduce the risk of fires and associated haze and contribute to global environmental management. The Meeting noted the good progress of the development of the successor ASEAN Programme on Sustainable Management of Peatland Ecosystems (2014-2020) which was endorsed by the 9th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-9) to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution in 2013.

6. The Meeting expressed their appreciation to the Government of Lao PDR for hosting the 4th MSC Mekong Meeting and the excellent arrangements made and generous hospitality provided.