



MEDIA RELEASE

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

(9TH MSC MEKONG)

14 August 2020

1. The Ninth Meeting of the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee on Transboundary Haze Pollution in the Mekong Sub-Region (9th MSC Mekong) was held on 14 August 2020 through Video Conference. 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 Secretary-General of ASEAN, under the Chairpersonship of H.E. Dr. Saynakhone Inthavong, Vice Minister, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Lao PDR. The Fifteenth Meeting of the Technical Working Group on Transboundary Haze Pollution in the Mekong Sub-Region (15th TWG Mekong) preceded the Meeting.
2. The Ministers expressed concern over the transboundary haze pollution which occurred in the northern part of the ASEAN region early this year and affected the air quality up to very unhealthy level. The Ministers appreciated the tireless commitment and efforts by the respective MSC Mekong countries to mitigate and suppress fire and haze incidents and the collaborative efforts undertaken through the convening of the Teleconference Meeting on Smoke Haze Incident in Mekong Sub-region on 3 April 2020.
3. The Meeting noted the presentation of the ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre (ASMC) on the review and outlook of the weather and smoke haze situation for the Mekong sub-region. The Meeting also noted that while the current status of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is neutral, observed indicators and models suggest La Niña conditions may develop within the next three months. Rainfall over the Mekong sub-region is expected to be near-normal for the rest of 2020. Warmer-than-normal temperatures are expected in August and September 2020, and mostly near-normal temperatures for the rest of the year. The hotspot activities in the sub-region are expected to be generally subdued until October 2020, but an increase in hotspot activities can be expected toward the end of the year with the start of the traditional dry season of the Mekong sub-region following the onset of Northeast Monsoon in November/December.
4. The Ministers recognised the COVID-19 situation posed unprecedented threats and challenges to the community and livelihood, including limited enforcement availability and response which may lead to increase illegal forest activities and a higher risk of lowered capacity to respond to spreading wildfires. The Ministers further recognised that coupled with increasing threat of climate change, the effects of increasing pollution on society may have a larger impact than before the

pandemic. The MSC Mekong countries agreed to improve and strengthen vigilance 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, while combating the pandemic.

5. The Ministers reaffirmed their commitment realising the vision towards a haze-free ASEAN by 2020 as stipulated in the Roadmap on ASEAN Cooperation Transboundary Haze Pollution Control with Means of Implementation in accordance with the principles of the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution. The Ministers agreed to further strengthen cooperation to effectively realise the objectives of this Agreement in its entirety as well as to 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.
6. The Ministers welcomed the commencement of the Final Review of the Roadmap on ASEAN Cooperation Transboundary Haze Pollution Control with Means of Implementation. The Review allows ASEAN Member States to take stock of the progress and sustain momentum in ensuring demonstrable improvements so as to achieve the vision of a haze-free ASEAN. It will also include recommendations for a revised or renewed Roadmap for ASEAN. We look forward to considering the outcomes and recommendations resulting from the Review at the 17th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (COP-17).
7. The Ministers commended the progress of implementation of the Chiang Rai 2017 Plan of Action that complements progress of the Roadmap in areas of information technology, public awareness and engagement, reduction of health and environmental risks, and air quality monitoring network. The Ministers appreciated the joint efforts and pro-active commitment in intensifying the works towards achieving the target of hotspot reduction below 50,000 by 2020 with enhanced efforts to exchange best practices and providing assistance, if necessary, in fire and haze control management. The Ministers agreed in principle to extend the Chiang Rai 2017 Plan of Action to 2025 with renewed hotspot reduction target. The Ministers tasked the TWG Mekong with the support of the ASEAN Secretariat to prepare the details taking into account the Final Review of the Roadmap.
8. The Ministers were pleased to note the significant progress of the ASEAN Programme on Sustainable Management of Peatland Ecosystems (APSMPE 2014-2020) and the valued the contributions of our Dialogue Partners and external partners by 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). The Ministers encouraged the interest of ASEAN external partners to cooperate and collaborate in addressing haze issue and enhancing sustainable peatland management in the region.

9. The Ministers welcomed the continued progress of the implementation of the ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy (APMS 2006-2020) and noted its Final Review is being undertaken. The Ministers looked forward to its consolidated national and regional assessments and achievements of the targets to inform the formulation of the next strategy at the upcoming 16th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (COP-16).

 10. The Ministers noted with appreciation the continuous efforts by MSC Mekong countries in enhancing their respective National Action Plans and intensifying in-country actions through continuous monitoring of hotspots and air quality, public awareness raising on open-burning/controlled burning and mitigation measures, and coordination amongst national and local authorities, and between bordering countries to suppress the forest fires and prevent the transboundary haze pollution. The Ministers committed to fostering and enhancing collaborative actions among the MSC Mekong countries to explore opportunities for technical assistance, capacity building, knowledge sharing, at bilateral and regional levels.
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