

15th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on the Environment and the 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution



SIEM REAP, Cambodia, Oct. 15 -- Top officials from the environment ministries of the ASEAN Member States convened on 8 October 2019 in the 15th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on the Environment (15th AMME). This meeting was set to discuss the most pressing environmental issues in the Region, including the alarming rate of biodiversity loss due to climate change, plastic pollution, and transboundary haze.

The meeting kicked off with a tree planting ceremony held in front of the world-renowned Angkor Wat. This marks the soft launch of the ASEAN Green Initiative, a testament of ASEAN's commitment to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, and to ensure that its regional policies and strategies are supported by a broad base of stakeholders, including the youth, and traditional and local communities.

Deputy Prime Minister Aun Pornmoniroth of Cambodia, stressed the need for intensified regional cooperation in preventing and responding to environmental challenges in the now disaster-prone ASEAN. "Climate change and environment-related issues are not a responsibility of a single country. It is our problem. Our responsibility," he said in his speech as he officially opens the 15th AMME.

1. Ministers responsible for the environment, for land, forest fires and haze, from ASEAN Member States (AMS), held their 15th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on the Environment and 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution on 8-9 October 2019 in Siem Reap, Cambodia. The Ministers acknowledged the achievements and progress of regional environmental protection and cooperation on a number of environmental issues, in particular prioritised actions and initiatives taken on environmental sustainability to further promote environmental cooperation in the region.

2. The Ministers recognised that key cross-cutting and emerging environmental issues such as climate change and marine debris pollution remain a challenge which requires regional collective action. [In line with the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, the Ministers looked forward to the finalisation of the ASEAN Strategic Plan on Environment (ASPEN) 2025. The ASPEN shall serve as a comprehensive guide for ASEAN cooperation on environment towards the achievement of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025]. The Ministers also noted the continuing dialogue between ASEAN and partners in the key cross-cutting and emerging environmental issues such as climate change, environmentally sustainable cities, and circular economy in the ASEAN-EU High-Level Dialogue on Environment and Climate Change held on 8 July 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand.
3. The Ministers noted that the ASEAN Joint Statement to the United Nations (UN) Climate Action Summit 2019 was conveyed at the UN Climate Action Summit 2019 on 23 September 2019 in New York, USA. The Ministers looked forward to a successful outcome of the 25th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP25) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which will take place on 2-13 December 2019 in Santiago, Chile, including the convening of an ASEAN event under the Indonesia and Thailand pavilions at the sideline of the COP25. In this regard, the Ministers endorsed the ASEAN Joint Statement on Climate Change to COP25 to UNFCCC for the consideration by the Leaders. The Ministers also noted continued efforts to promote cross-sectoral coordination and partnership through the 2nd ASEAN Climate Change Partnership Conference held on 27 August 2019 in Singapore.
4. The Ministers recognised the high and rapidly increasing levels of marine debris, and reaffirmed their commitment for the implementation of the Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris in ASEAN Region and the ASEAN Framework of Action on Marine Debris. The Ministers noted the progress of implementation of marine-debris related projects and initiatives, including among others the ASEAN Plus Three Project on Strengthening Capacity for Marine Debris Reduction in ASEAN region through Formulation of National Action Plan for AMS and Integrated Land to Sea Policy Approach (Phase I) supported by Japan, the ASEAN-PROBLUE Activities on Marine Debris supported by the World Bank, the ASEAN-Norwegian Cooperation Project on Local Capacity Building for Reducing Plastic Pollution in the ASEAN Region (ASEANO), and the ASEAN-EU Partnership on Circular Economy.
5. The Ministers noted the submission of 'ASEAN Inputs to the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework' to the Secretariat of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) on 1 August 2019, and looked forward to the adoption of the Global Biodiversity Framework and successful outcome of the 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15) in 2020. The Ministers also noted that the Third ASEAN Conference on Biodiversity (ACB2020) will be held in Putrajaya, Malaysia on 16-19 March 2020. The ACB2020 will consolidate ASEAN's effort in biodiversity conservation and to enhance its presence as a strong regional bloc in the CBD COP.

6. The Ministers congratulated the four ASEAN Heritage Parks approved last year in 2018; namely (a) Bantimurung Bulusaraung National Park (Indonesia), (b) Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary (Philippines), (c) Bidoup Nui-Ba National Park (Viet Nam), and (d) Vu Quang National Park (Viet Nam) for their designation as the 41st, 42nd, and 43rd and 44th ASEAN Heritage Parks respectively in 2018. The Ministers also approved the nominations of five protected areas as ASEAN Heritage Parks this year, namely: (i) Hat Chao Mai National Park and Mu Ko Libong Non-hunting Area (Thailand); (ii) Mu Ko Ang Thong National Park (Thailand); (iii) Lo Go-Xa Mat National Park (Viet Nam); (iv) Ngoc Linh Nature Reserve (Viet Nam); and (v) Htamanthi Wildlife Sanctuary (Myanmar) as the 45th, 46th, 47th, 48th and 49th AHPs, respectively. These add to ASEAN's collective efforts in raising awareness, protection and conservation of the regional network of national protected areas for the benefit of current and future generations. The Ministers looked forward to the Sixth AHP Conference which will take place in Pakse, Lao PDR on 21-24 October 2019, and to further strengthening the ASEAN Heritage Parks Programme and network.
7. The Ministers noted the progress of implementation of the Cooperation Framework between ASEAN and Mekong River Commission (MRC), which was adopted in 2018, through the development of an annual work plan conducted on 30 July 2019.
8. The Ministers commended the development of the Guideline on ASEAN Green Meetings, which could serve as a reference to support AMS or ASEAN organs or other entities in organising ASEAN-related meetings that are more resource-efficient and environmentally responsible. The Ministers encouraged ASOEN and subsidiary bodies to make use of the Guideline as reference in hosting and organising ASEAN environment meetings.
9. The Ministers presented, for the third time, the ASEAN Eco-schools Awards, to selected eco-schools in ASEAN Member States, and for the first time, the ASEAN Youth Eco-champions Awards to selected youth individuals from ASEAN Member States, on the occasion of the ASEAN Environment Day 2019. Through the Award Programmes, the Ministers acknowledged the exemplary efforts by schools and youths in inculcating environmental awareness to their surrounding communities and in advocating for sustainable development in the region. Furthermore, the Ministers further recognised youth participation at the ASEAN Plus Three Youth Environment Forum (AYEF) 2019 held on 8-13 September 2019 in Phuket, Thailand, which provided an additional opportunity to promote and strengthen the role of youth as champions of the region in environmental protection and conservation.
10. The Ministers expressed concern over the severity and geographical spread of the recent smoke haze affecting various ASEAN countries in the northern and southern ASEAN. They also expressed sympathy to the millions of people affected by the haze. The Ministers noted and appreciated the efforts undertaken by the ASEAN countries, and the offers of assistance by countries to address the forest fires and the associated smoke haze.

11. The Ministers noted the ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre's (ASMC's) assessment that the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD), which was in its positive phase since mid-2019, has been a key driver that contributed to the significantly drier-than-normal weather over parts of the southern ASEAN region this year. The positive phase of the IOD was predicted to persist over the coming months and gradually weaken toward the end of the year. For the rest of 2019, the ASMC forecast the prevailing neutral (neither El-Niño nor La-Niña) conditions to persist, and that drier-than-normal conditions were expected over some areas in the ASEAN region, particularly in the southern ASEAN region, but a return to near-normal conditions was expected by December. The ASMC also forecast warmer-than-normal conditions over the ASEAN region. ASEAN Member States pledged to remain vigilant and to monitor and step up their haze preventive efforts to minimise any possible occurrence of transboundary smoke haze during periods of drier weather.
12. The Ministers noted ASMC's efforts to deliver objective and reliable services to the ASEAN region in weather and climate prediction, and in monitoring, assessment and provision of early warning for transboundary haze. The Ministers also noted ASMC's continual efforts in upgrading its technical capabilities in monitoring and assessment of weather and haze in the region, and weather and climate prediction modelling. The Ministers noted with appreciation the training courses and technical fora conducted regularly by the ASMC as part of its five-year Regional Capability Building Programme, which has been well attended by ASEAN colleagues. ASMC will be rolling out new initiatives as part of the Programme.
13. The Ministers reviewed the implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (AATHP) and reaffirmed their commitment through concerted national efforts and regional cooperation to effectively implement the AATHP and the Roadmap on ASEAN Cooperation towards Transboundary Haze Pollution Control with Means of Implementation to achieve a Haze-Free ASEAN by 2020. The Ministers commended the various initiatives and actions undertaken by ASEAN Member States and noted with appreciation the continuous efforts in strengthening national capabilities for action and regional cooperation in assessment, prevention, mitigation and management of land and/or forest fires and the resulting haze. The Ministers recognised the need to expedite the final review and evaluation of the implementation and achievement of a haze-free ASEAN.
14. The Ministers recalled the commitment and guidance of the ASEAN Leaders at the 33rd and 34th ASEAN Summits held on 13 November 2018 in Singapore and 23 June 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand, as they looked forward to the establishment and full operationalisation of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Transboundary Haze Pollution under the AATHP which will provide a strategic framework for the implementation of collaborative actions, to address transboundary haze pollution in the ASEAN region. 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.

15. The Ministers noted with satisfaction the significant 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). The Ministers expressed appreciation for the support and cooperation that has been further strengthened with ASEAN Dialogue and Development partners as well as with other International Organisations. The Ministers conveyed their appreciation for the valuable support extended by European Union (EU) through the Sustainable Use of Peatland and Haze Mitigation in ASEAN (SUPA), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) on the Measurable Action for Haze-Free Sustainable Land Management in Southeast Asia (MAHFSA), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for the GEF-6 Project on Sustainable Management of Peatland Ecosystems in Mekong Countries. The Ministers called upon the strong support from the ASEAN Member States and its relevant agencies to the successful implementation of the activities of above said programmes. The Ministers also welcomed the final review of APMS to be undertaken by the ASEAN Task Force on Peatlands with the support from SUPA.
16. The Ministers commended the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee on Transboundary Haze Pollution in reaffirming their readiness to provide assistance such as deployment of the technical resources for firefighting assistance on emergency response situation, if requested, and to collaborate among MSC countries with enhanced cooperation and coordination to mitigate land and forest fires, when necessary. The Ministers noted with appreciation the sharing of hotspot information among MSC countries and supported the call for timely actions of national and local agencies to prevent land and/or forest fires and haze pollution arising from such fires.
17. The Ministers commended the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee on Transboundary Haze Pollution in the Mekong Sub-Region (MSC Mekong) in reaffirming their commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Chiang Rai 2017 Plan of Action. The Ministers supported the aim in targeting 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.
18. The Ministers met their counterparts from Japan and Plus Three countries (People's Republic of China, Japan, and Republic of Korea) at the ASEAN-Japan Ministerial Dialogue on Environmental Cooperation and the 16th ASEAN Plus Three Environment Ministers Meeting respectively on 9 October 2019 to review current activities and discuss future strategic cooperation in such areas of biodiversity, climate change, environmental education, environmental science and technology, environmentally sustainable cities, and marine plastic debris, amongst others.

19. The Ministers agreed to meet again in the Philippines in 2020 on the occasion of the 16th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution, and in Indonesia in 2021 on the occasion of the 16th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on the Environment, and 17th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution.

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