

## MEDIA RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

26<sup>th</sup> August 2015

### HAZE RETURNS TO MALAYSIAN SKIES – LETS WORK TOGETHER TO STOP IT

**Petaling Jaya, 25<sup>th</sup> August 2015:** Hazy skies are back in Malaysia, no thanks to burning peatlands in Sumatra and Borneo islands. A total of four separate smoke clouds have formed in Indonesia and are moving towards Malaysia according to the ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre (ASMC) website<sup>1</sup> (see image below). Smoke from peatland fires in central and southern Sumatra has now reached the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia with API deteriorating to moderate levels while smoke from fires in Kalimantan have contributed to poor air quality in Sarawak.

The recent Ministerial Steering Committee (MSC) meeting on Transboundary Haze in Jakarta<sup>2</sup> highlighted the “possibility of the prevailing moderate El Niño strengthening in the coming months, leading to high risks of extended periods of drier and warmer conditions, which could lead to increase in hotspot activities and transboundary smoke haze from land and forest fires in the [southern part of the ASEAN] region”.

“Ninety percent of the transboundary haze in southern ASEAN is linked to peat fires – that is why it is critical that everyone helps to prevent fires in peatlands through peatland forest protection and good water management in plantations and agriculture on peat” says Faizal Parish, Director of Global Environment Centre (GEC), an leading adviser to the ASEAN Member States on peatland management and haze issues. Despite new laws and various measures taken to control open burning and forest fires in Indonesia and Malaysia, peat fires are difficult to control once they have started in the current dry El Niño conditions.

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<sup>1</sup>[http://wip.weather.gov.sg/wip/c/portal/layout?p\\_l\\_id=PUB.1003.1&p\\_p\\_id=56\\_INSTANCE\\_UpLi&p\\_p\\_action=0&p\\_p\\_state=pop\\_up&p\\_p\\_mode=view](http://wip.weather.gov.sg/wip/c/portal/layout?p_l_id=PUB.1003.1&p_p_id=56_INSTANCE_UpLi&p_p_action=0&p_p_state=pop_up&p_p_mode=view)

<sup>2</sup> <http://haze.asean.org/?p=1142>

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Ministers from ASEAN Member States meeting in Myanmar last week<sup>3</sup> recognised the substantive progress of the development of the ASEAN Programme on Sustainable Management of Peatland Ecosystems 2014-2020 (APSMPE) which is a continuation of the successful ASEAN Peatland Forests Project (APFP) and SEApeat Project<sup>4</sup>. The Ministers renewed their commitment to implement this regional Programme through ASEAN mechanisms, enhanced national level efforts and multi-stakeholder partnership.

The Ministers also recognized the need to develop a “Roadmap on ASEAN Cooperation for Transboundary Haze Pollution Control with Means of Implementation towards a vision of Haze-free ASEAN” with Thailand offering to host a preparatory meeting next year. GEC is currently working to form a coalition of NGOs and companies to support the efforts to stop the haze and ensure that ASEAN is Haze-Free by 2020. GEC urges companies or individuals in Malaysia concerned about the haze to contact it and join the coalition.

GEC is also working with the Selangor Forestry Department, land owners and local community members to prevent peatland fires at two main sites in Selangor – Kuala Langat North Forest Reserve along the Elite Highway to KLIA and Raja Musa Forest Reserve in Kuala Selangor District. Every year these areas have been burning - making them major local sources for haze in the Klang Valley.

GEC has also developed a smartphone application called the **ASEAN Fire Alert Tool** which is available for download from Google Play stores <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.chancornerstone.my.aseanfirealert>. A free tool, it allows users to be warned of any detected hotspots in their lands. In the near future the system will also be able to advise users on the risk of fire at any specified location in ASEAN based on weather conditions. Further information on the system development can be found on <http://www.aseanfirealert.org/>

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<sup>3</sup> <http://haze.asean.org/?p=1156>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.aseanpeat.net/index.cfm?&menuid=42>

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**Figure 1: Hotspots and haze areas as shown on ASMC website 25 August 2015**

