



**8<sup>TH</sup>**  
**INTERNATIONAL**  
**WILDLAND FIRE**  
**CONFERENCE**

**GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES:**  
Towards an International  
Framework  
[www.wildfire2023.pt](http://www.wildfire2023.pt)

Porto-Portugal  
May 16-19<sup>th</sup>  
2023

## **8<sup>th</sup> International Wildland Fire Conference**

### **Global Wildland Fire Network – Statement of the South East Asia Region – Regional Fire Management Resource Center – South East Asia (RFMRC-SEA)**

16 May 2023

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#### ***Introductory remarks***

Character, occurrence and impacts of wildfires and land-use fires in South East Asia – in the region of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) – are quite different from fires in other regions of the world. Compared to the extreme wildfires, which occurred in Europe and America, especially those in 2021 and 2022, the ASEAN region was not much affected by similar events. However, the application of fire in land use and the land-use change continued to be a major challenge for the authorities concerned.

#### ***Specific landscape fire problems of the region***

In South East Asia, there is a variability of the annual occurrence of wildfires and land-use fires, resulting in smoke pollution episodes of varying inter-annual duration and severities. However, the problem of forest and land fires in the region is actually not much different from previous years, because rural people continue applying fire for land clearing and preparation of agricultural lands. A major problem in the region is the illegal use of fire in converting natural vegetation to agro-industrial plantations (land-use change).

During dry spells or extended droughts, such as those caused by the El Niño phenomenon, the problem of wildfires, which are escaping from land-use fires, continues to be a high risk for degradation and destruction of natural ecosystems including rain forest and peat-swamp biomes.

The application of small-scale fires by indigenous communities, which follows traditional practices, are requiring participatory approaches in fire management at community level by building capacities and skills in the safe use of fire and wildfire prevention. The illegal activities in fire use for land-use change, however, constitute a challenge to law enforcement and the jurisdictional system.

#### ***Main advances achieved since the last International Wildland Fire Conference: Action taken between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Conferences***

Many things have been achieved after the last International Wildland Fire Conference in Campo Grande, Brazil in 2019- After the establishment of the Regional Fire Management Resource Center – South East Asia (RFMRC-SEA) in 2017, sponsored by a project of the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) and financed by the Government of Germany (implementation period for setting up and operationalize the center – 01 March 2017 to 31 July 2021), the main activities focused on the national inter-agency dialogue in Indonesia and the regional cross-boundary cooperation in the South East Asian region.<sup>1</sup> The pandemic caused some restrictions in field work and impacted in-person training and other meetings. However, right from the beginning of the pandemic, the tool of online meetings was successfully brought to practice – with a steep learning curve and active participation throughout the region.

Given the above-mentioned problem of law enforcement of prohibition of fire use in land-use change, the activities of RFMRC-SEA focused on training and capacity building of police and judges in collaboration by the Supreme Court of Republic of Indonesia. During the pandemic his was accomplished by webinars, e.g. webinars about law enforcement in connecting with peat restoration efforts by the Peat Restoration

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<sup>1</sup> <https://rfmrc-sea.org/>



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Agency. Furthermore, the head of RFMRC-SEA served as forest fire expert witness in court investigations and verification of illegal use of fire in various Indonesian Provinces.

In the frame of the UNFCCC COP-26 the head of RFMRC-SEA served as speaker at the Indonesian pavilion activities in Glasgow, United Kingdom, 30 October to 14 November 2021

Additional activities included webinars and seminars with the support of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), training activities for law enforcers, and research activities with domestic and foreign experts, including training activities that involve the community and awarding awards for success in controlling forest and land fires. Including cooperation with distant countries – such as France – in wildfire control and improvement of quality of education, especially at the Master of Science level.

### ***Conclusions and recommendations***

There are indications that the frequency and incidence of fires in the ASEAN region has tended to decrease over the last three years, especially since after the fires that occurred in 2019. Hopefully this is a good sign that the reduction in the extent of fires occurring is not only due to favorable rainfall which is still dominant as a result of the La Niña impact, but also as a result of fire control efforts being carried out simultaneously.

To maintain consistency so that the incidence of forest and land fires does not increase, it is necessary to build good cooperation between countries. This can be achieved through various activities ranging from webinars, using certain platforms to conducting joint research activities, which are still constrained to this day due to the lack of funds available from donor countries, and research themes that are still not in synchrony with the needs of each country.