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OCHA Situation Report No. 2 Indonesia – Fires August 2005

Situation

1. Numerous peat conversion fires, slash-and-burn agriculture fires, and wildfires affecting forests and other vegetation on the Indonesian island of Sumatra have been causing serious haze problems since the beginning of August 2005.
2. Satellite derived data from the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry - and shared by Bakornas PBP (National Coordination Board for Disaster Management) – shows a decrease in the number of wildland fires (“hot spots”). On 17 August 2005, the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) detected 12 hotspots in East Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan and South Kalimantan provinces out of 24 hotspots detected in Borneo Island. Scattered thundershowers affected most parts of Sumatra, which has prevented the detection of more hotspots. According to the Global Fire Monitoring Center, the number of hotspots is a very crude method with limited applicability in Indonesia as no indication is provided about the characteristics (forest, deep peat, bush, etc) of a fire recorded (see also <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/>).
3. In Brunei Darussalam, on 17 August there was one reported incidence of a short-lived bush fire in Brunei Muara District affecting 0.05 hectares of land. Some showers are expected in the next few days. Visibility readings in the International Airport Berakas and Kuala Belait have improved to more than 10 km.
4. In Malaysia, stations throughout the country recorded good to moderate level air quality. Visibility readings in most areas were more than 10 km. Rainfall is very likely for the next few days.
5. No updates have been received on the situation in Thailand.
5. No fires in Singapore have been reported. Visibility readings in Changi and Seletar airports were 10 km and 8 km, respectively. Showers are expected in the next few days.
6. According to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), drier weather conditions with below average rainfall can be expected in parts of Sumatra and Borneo from now to October 2005.

National Response

7. The Vice President of Indonesia, as Head of Bakornas, issued a decree to establish a Forest Fire Disaster Management Team. The team will assume duty for coordination and emergency response of forest fires up to the end of 2005 and consists of Bakornas, the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry, the Technological Research and Development Agency (BPPT), the Indonesian Ministry of Environment, and the Indonesian Air Force. Within the team, the main tasks of Bakornas are to coordinate the emergency response to forest fires in the country, while the Ministry of Forestry is responsible for land fire suppression. The tasks of BPPT include cooperation with the Air Force and the Ministry of Environment is responsible for advocacy and law

enforcement. BPPT, together with Malaysia, will start to seed clouds to encourage rainfall on 22 August 2005.

International Response

8. As a follow up to a meeting between Bakornas and the Ambassador of Australia last week, the Emergency Management Agency of Australia (EMA) will assess the conditions of the forest fires between 19 and 22 August 2005. The purpose of the assessment is to observe whether or not Indonesia needs further international assistance.

9. Singapore has offered to Indonesia (which accepted) the assistance of an additional contingent of 54 fire-fighters (including transport and equipment).

10. According to the secretariat of ASEAN, Thailand is ready to provide any assistance that may be requested. Viet Nam has offered to send 15 fire fighters and equipment to assist Indonesia. Other Member Countries are considering providing assistance to mitigate the fires. The ASEAN has also set up a panel of experts to assist member countries tackle forest fires. The panel would undertake rapid assessment of the situation on the ground during critical periods of fires and haze, and provide recommendations to facilitate immediate response and effective mobilization of resources in the region.

11. The Government of Indonesia has not formally requested international assistance so far.

12. This report has been prepared on the basis of information provided by the OCHA Office in Indonesia, Bakornas PBP, Indonesian Ministry of Forestry, the Indonesian Ministry of Health, the Indonesian Red Cross Society (PMI), ASEAN Haze-online, Global Fire Monitoring Center, and media reports.

13. OCHA is in close contact with relevant Government Authorities, the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Jakarta and will provide further information as required. The Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit is the focal point for fires in OCHA-Geneva.

This situation report, together with further information on other ongoing emergencies is available on the OCHA Internet Website at <http://www.reliefweb.int>.

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