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Press Release

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WWF Indonesia Urges the Government to Ratify the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution

JAKARTA – A meeting of environment ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is held today, December 16th, in Myanmar. The Myanmar National Commission for Environmental Affairs informed that the implementation of **the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution** will be one of the top agenda to be discussed. WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) Indonesia warmly supports the meeting and urges the Government of Indonesia (Gol) to immediately ratify the agreement.

It is the first regional arrangement in the world that requires a group of states to work together on transboundary haze pollution resulting from land and forest fires. The Agreement contains provisions on monitoring, assessment and prevention, technical cooperation and scientific research, mechanisms for coordination, lines of communication, and simplified customs and immigration procedures for disaster response.

The Agreement will enter into force after 25th November, 2003, following the ratification of the agreement by six regional governments (Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore and Viet Nam). The Government of Indonesia (Gol) regrettably has yet to ratify this important Agreement. As the major source of massive forest and land fires in ASEAN, the Gol should take a leading role in the implementation of this strategic agreement.

Dr. Mubariq Ahmad, Executive Director of WWF Indonesia, calls upon the Indonesian government to ratify the agreement. "This is a good opportunity to show the Gol goodwill by ratifying the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution. Then Gol should follow up it with significant actions such as forest fire prevention & law enforcement programs", he said.

For the last 20 years, fire and haze have become a yearly catastrophe event in Indonesia. In 1997 – 1998 the fire catastrophe had cost approximately US \$3 billion to Indonesia and the Indonesians. The neighboring countries in Southeast Asian region also suffered from the disaster including air traffic disturbances and health problems.

WWF also urges the government, the private sector and other stakeholders to do actions together to prevent future problems that include:

- All development of peatlands should be stopped and all peatlands carefully managed and protected. In 1997-1998, approximately 80% of the haze was caused by fires on peatlands.
- The private sector should exert self-restraint and adopt best practices including none fire land clearing and protection of the most biodiversity areas within their concession.
- A single agency should oversee and co-ordinate fire management, laws, and regulations must be harmonized and clarified to and most importantly enforced.
- Local communities should be empowered by the government and the private sector to sustainably manage fire and land.

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