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ASEAN COOPERATION IN FORESTRY STRENGTHENED THROUGH THE FIFTH MEETING OF THE ASEAN REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE NETWORK ON FOREST LAW ENFORCEMENT GOVERNANCE

(For immediate release)

Vientiane, 21 October 2014: Illegal logging and its associated trade within and across the ASEAN region, and beyond, has been constantly tackled through various forms and levels; and currently this has been scaled up to another platform through the Fifth Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Knowledge Network on Forest Law Enforcement Governance (ARKN-FLEG), co-organised by the ASEAN Secretariat, the Government of Lao PDR, the EU-European Forest Institute (EFI) and the ASEAN – German Programme on Response to Climate Change (GAP-CC).

The meeting brings together about 30 key participants from the ASEAN Member States, the European Union (EU) and GAP-CC to share best practices and increase international cooperation, synergise market requirements, share lessons learnt and strengthen coordination in the forest governance within ASEAN region and global level.

Destruction of forests, particularly through illegal logging and associated trade, not only cause huge economic losses to the state, but also adverse environmental and social consequences to the unique biodiversity and the ecosystem they provide, including the livelihoods of the poorest groups of society depending on the intact forests. The risk loss of reputation and competitiveness in export markets are also consequences the timber producing countries need to bear if failed to manage and govern forest properly.

ASEAN has taken steps towards achieving sustainable forest management (SFM) in the region, which include the implementation of the ASEAN Strategic Alliance on SFM to partner with other regional processes working on the areas of forest law enforcement and governance such as the EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT), Asia Forest Partnership (AFP), and the East Asia Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) initiative.

The ARKN-FLEG is a concept to combat illegal logging and include broader issues of forest governance, climate change and sustainable forest management and development which lie at the heart of the current discussion on the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation.

“For Lao PDR, ARKN-FLEG process is regarded as a method to strengthen forest governance in the country. Good governance of the forest sector will allow us to further develop opportunities for wood processing in the country, add value to our products, protect environment, reduce social consequences and stop illegal logging”, said Mr. Thongphanh Ratanalangsy, Deputy Director
General, Department of Forest Inspection, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. “The enforcement of forest governance will contribute to the better implementation of sustainable forest management and ensure the availability of forest resources also for the next generation of the Lao nation”, Mr. Thongphanh added.

ASEAN cooperation on strengthening FLEG received further boost through the issuance of the ASEAN Declaration on Environmental Sustainability by the 13th ASEAN Summit, where ASEAN Member States are committed “to strengthening law enforcement, combating illegal logging and its associated illegal trade as necessary measures in addressing trans-boundary environmental pollution, including haze pollution”.

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The East Asia FLEG process was launched in 2001 (Bali Declaration 2001) as an umbrella coalition of governments, international institutions, civil society and the private sector. It aims at enhancing concerted and coordinated actions to combat illegal logging and its associated trade and improving forest governance in timber producing and consuming countries. The ASEAN Senior Officials on Forestry (ASOF) have been very supportive to East Asia FLEG process and expressed continuous and strengthened commitment. At their 9th annual meeting in Bali in July 2006, among others, the ASOF agreed to: (i) sustain their engagement in the East Asia FLEG process and support other regional FLEG processes under its Strategic Plan of Actions in Forestry 2005 – 2010, and (ii) facilitate, through the ASEC, implementation of their strategic thrust to strengthen ASEAN’s cooperation and joint approaches in establishing and institutionalising a regional process/mechanism involving governments, business and civil society and other ASEAN global partners.

ASEAN’s common position on Environmental Sustainability also received impetus as the leaders of ASEAN, Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand in their third East Asia Summit on 21 November 2007 signed the Singapore Declaration on Climate Change, Energy and the Environment, which called to “reduce deforestation, forest degradation and forest fires, including by promoting sustainable forest management, combating illegal logging, protecting biodiversity, and addressing the underlying economic and social issues.

ProFLEGT is a joint initiative of the Lao Government and the German Development Cooperation. It is working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (through the FLEGT Standing Office under the supervision of the Department of Forest Inspection, DOFI), Ministry of Industry and Commerce, and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, as well as other Government agencies, civil society organisations, academia and timber processing industry.

The FLEGt Standing Office under DOFI will organize a multi-stakeholder meeting in November this year to enhance the understanding among Lao stakeholders on the approach towards defining timber legality, including enhancing the understanding on what the timber legality definition will look like.

For further information on ASEAN Forest Policy:
http://www.asean.org/

For further information on the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade initiative:
http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/9interventionareas/environment/forest/forestry_intro_en.cfm
www.euflegt.efi.int

For further information on understanding timber flows and control in Lao PDR:
http://www.euflegt.efi.int/publications/-/document/25520