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Dear Excellencies, Pak Rachmat and Pak Zulkifli
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very pleased to be here today on this happy occasion to witness the official taking over of the air quality and weather monitoring stations by our Indonesian friends and colleagues. Today's event marks an important milestone in the Indonesia-Singapore Collaboration in Jambi Province. This collaboration would not be possible without the commitment from Pak Zulkifli and his officials in the Jambi provincial government to work together with Singapore. I also want to express deep appreciation to my dear colleague, Pak Rachmat, who has strongly supported this project together with his dedicated team from the Indonesian State Ministry of Environment.

Background of Collaboration

I recall that in 2006 after a haze episode, Indonesia had invited ASEAN countries to collaborate with the fire-prone provinces/regencies to prevent and mitigate land and forest fires under the Indonesian Plan of Action (PoA). Singapore had responded immediately to that invitation and offered to collaborate with the Jambi Provincial Government and Indonesia's State Ministry of Environment to develop a Master Plan to deal with land and forest fires in Muaro Jambi Regency.

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Following this in Jan 2007, a team of officers from the Singapore Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources (MEWR) and the National Environment Agency (NEA) established contact with our friends in Jambi. Together, they worked on deeper understanding of the local ground conditions in tackling land and forest fires. A fact-finding mission was conducted and subsequently followed by several other similar visits to Jambi over several months. With the strong leadership of Pak Zulkifli, commitment by

his provincial officials as well as support from our KLH colleagues, both our countries worked closely together to develop the Jambi Master Plan to implement measures to address the land and forest fires.

The Letter of Intent (LOI) signed in Nov 2007 formalised our collaboration and the Jambi Master Plan. The LOI provided both Indonesia and Singapore the opportunity to jointly develop and implement action programmes and measures to effectively prevent and manage the fires on the ground.

Action Programmes Under the Collaboration

A total of 7 action programmes were developed. It is with great pleasure today that I announce that we have already completed 6 of these 7 action programmes. I was told that the Jambi officials appointed by Pak Zulkifli to implement the various action programmes had been very cooperative and helpful in ensuring the smooth implementation of the action programmes. All these would also not have been possible without the hard work of the Jambi Provincial Government under Pak Zulkifli. They are committed because they recognise that the smoke haze affected the health and economic well-being of the people of Jambi more than anyone else in the region.

Amongst the 6 programmes completed is the installation and setting up of the air quality and weather monitoring stations in Muaro Jambi Regency. These stations have been operational since Dec 2008 and I have been informed by Pak Zulkifli that data collected from these stations have given his people access to valuable information such as the state of the air quality and alerts on the fire danger situation. I hope that these stations would continue to support Jambi's efforts in the prevention and mitigation of the fires.

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I understand that the last remaining action programme, namely "Training on Fire Prevention and Suppression Capabilities", will also commence soon. With the completion of that programme, Singapore and Indonesia would have then completed all the programmes identified under the LOI.

These action programmes have benefitted the local authorities and communities by enhancing their capacities and knowledge in preventing fires. In this regard, we hope to continue collaborating with Jambi beyond the agreed programmes under the LOI. I am therefore pleased to note that two new action programmes have already been developed. One of them is the Jambi Peatland Management project, which is jointly implemented with our partners from the Singapore Delft Water Alliance (SDWA) and the Jambi University. The other project, which involves the "Enhancement of Aquaculture Expertise in Jambi", would commence by this year, and it will be carried out in conjunction with our partner, the Singapore Food Industries (SFI)

Transboundary Haze Pollution

While our collaboration has progressed well, we must all be aware that our programmes in Jambi represent only a small part of a much larger challenge that we face, as land and forest fires are not just an environment issue, but also an economic and social one. We therefore have to rely on a coordinated multi-sectoral approach and long term commitment by not only all of us here today, but also by our colleagues in other agencies, partners in the private sector and also the local population. Only when every village and plantation in every province is committed to efforts to prevent smoke haze will the region be free from it every dry season.

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The region is now in the dry season and therefore must remain vigilant to ensure that smoke haze does not affect us. The main message that we want to convey from today is the need to step up efforts to prevent and mitigate land and forest fires. I believe that all of us are aware of the economic, health and social repercussions, not to mention the financial effects such as loss of tourism receipts, increase in health costs, and environmental pollution costs, if a severe haze episode were to strike us again. Hence, I would like to urge all of us to continue cooperating closely with one another, so that all of our hard work done so far would not go to waste. We must work towards a haze-free ASEAN.

Concluding Remarks

Based on the feedback from my officers, one worthy takeaway from the Indonesia-Singapore collaboration in Jambi is the genuine friendship and close relationship built up over the years between officials from both countries. Singapore and Indonesia are committed to maintain this close relationship so that we may continue to work together effectively to jointly tackle the challenges associated with land and forest fires.

In closing, I wish to express my special thanks to Pak Zulkifli for giving his support and leadership selflessly. The collaboration would not have been successful without Pak Zulifli's pivotal role in guiding our officials and giving his full support to the implementation of the action programmes.

I would also like to thank Pak Rachmat for taking precious time off your busy schedule to grace this important event and your commitment to preventing haze in the region.

Last but not least, I would like to express our gratitude to the Government of Indonesia and the Provincial Government of Jambi for all the excellent arrangements and hospitality extended to me and my delegation. I look forward to further opportunities to develop and strengthen the collaboration and commitment with our Indonesian friends and colleagues.

Thank you.

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