

Background information of the Expert Group Consultation

In Jakarta, Indonesia about Bioethical Perspectives on Haze

Every year people suffer from the effects of haze pollution resulting from land, forest and plantation fires in various parts of Indonesia, mostly on the island of Sumatra and Borneo. At its worst – when such environmental conditions as El Niño delay the onset of rainy season – the neighboring countries of Singapore and Malaysia, and even Thailand and Philippines are effected by the intensified burning and smoke. Besides the grave threats to human health, the exposure to haze pollution harms living resources, the fragile ecosystems, as well as the material property, leading to the violation of the fundamental human rights to life and health, and considerable financial loss for the governments.

This anthropogenic environmental disaster and its detrimental effect on human health and the biosphere has a clear ethical dimension. It directly relates to the fundamental ethical principle of social responsibility and health, as captured by Article 14 of the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights, and further elaborated by the International Bioethics Committee (IBC) in its special report on Article 14. Haze pollution also evokes other principles from the Declaration, such as Article 13 – Solidarity and cooperation, and Article 17 – Protection of the environment, the biosphere and biodiversity.

The General Conference of UNESCO adopted the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights in 2005 with acclamation, marking the first time that the fundamental principles of bioethics had been set forth within a single text, and the Member States had committed themselves and the international community to respect and apply these principles. UNESCO assists Member States in the application of these universally accepted bioethical principles to the pressing challenges confronting by the people and the governments, as a systematic, normative, and multidisciplinary approach to protect and promote human rights.

A regional Forum of National Bioethics Committees (NBCs) on Haze Pollution will be held in Jakarta, Indonesia on the 6th and 7th of December 2017, in the framework of a Malaysian Funds-in-Trust project on addressing haze from bioethical and sustainability science perspectives. The Forum will use the Declaration to frame the debate on haze pollution, and to generate evidence-based, ethically derived recommendations for the relevant actors and stakeholders.

The expert group consultation on the 12th of October 2017 serves as a preparation for this Forum.