Congratulation Address for the Inauguration Ceremony of the Forest and Land Fire Management Conference of East Kalimantan, Samarinda, Indonesia, 11 May 2004

Honourable Mr. Governor,
Honourable members of IFFM Staff
Honourable representatives of Agencies and Institutions cooperating with the IFFM
Honourable conference participants

The Forest and Land Fire Management Conference of East Kalimantan which is opened today is held at a remarkable and important occasion – the transition of the GTZ-supported Integrated Forest Fire Management (IFFM) Project to a fully operational fire management system in the Province of East Kalimantan. The handing over of the project to the Indonesian authorities represents a milestone in the progress of the endeavours of the Indonesian people and their international partners to cope with the adverse effects of fires occurring in the forests and other lands of Indonesia.

Excessive application of fire in land use and land-use change, and uncontrolled wildfires that too often have destroyed large areas of natural forests, agricultural assets, forest plantations and the ecologically important peat-swamp biomes have caused great damages to Indonesia.

In the last 20 years numerous, almost daily occurring fires and a number of extremely large fire disasters have contributed to the depletion of Indonesia's rich forest resources. Biodiversity, land productivity, human health and human safety have been damaged severely. Most concerning is the fact that fires, together with inappropriate forest management practices have resulted in the destruction of the fundaments of the future generations, the children of Indonesia.
Furthermore, the destruction of Indonesia’s vegetation by fire has affected the global community. The loss of forest cover has affected the equilibrium and functioning of the geosphere and the atmosphere at large extent, with negative implications on regional and global atmosphere and climate.

The intent of the IFFM project was and continues to be to halt the destructive effects of fire on the environment and humanity.

For more than 10 years the partners working in the IFFM Project have demonstrated efficiently their willingness to involve all of those who are concerned with fire, especially those who are affected by fire long term – the people that are dependent on the sustainable productivity of Indonesia’s forests and agricultural systems.

Integrated Fire Management involves the integration of people and must consider their needs, their wellbeing and their future. Integration involves the active participation of people in the prevention of uncontrolled fire, in the sound application of fire in cultivating the land, and in preparedness and even combat if a critical situation occurs.

The IFFM Project has been observed by many institutions and organizations all over the world. Major achievements have been made by IFFM which have been exemplary for a number of countries and international processes, notably:

- Realization of a community-based fire management approach that has been considered exemplary and pioneering
- Establishment of a fire early warning (fire danger rating) system that can be handled easily under the conditions of limited infrastructural and technical resources
- Establishment of an institution with decentralized responsibilities, embedded in the administration of the Province
- A satellite-based fire monitoring system, coupled with a general fire information system which provides information needed for decision making
- Capacity building in fire management at technical and scientific levels
- Support of a large number of important fire research projects
- An international outreach through organization and participation in international conferences, notably the organization of the international conference "Communities in Flames" (Balikpapan, Indonesia, 25-28 July 2001), contribution to the 3rd International Wildland Fire Conference and the United Nations Early Warning Conference in 2003

The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR) in the year 2000 conducted a worldwide public information campaign “Disaster prevention, Education and Youth: The Specific Case of Wildfires”. The IFFM Project contributed significantly to this international campaign.

IFFM hosted many visitors from all over the world to demonstrate the efficient functioning of the project – many lessons learned have been applied in other parts of the world.

Finally, IFFM also participated in the UN-ISDR Working Group on Wildland Fire between 2001 and 2003 and contributed to a better understanding of global wildland fire problems and the
consequences for policy makers to respond to the underlying causes of those fires that are unwanted and detrimental to the global environment.

On behalf of the United Nations ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group I would like to take the opportunity of this conference to congratulate all those who have contributed to the achievements of the IFFM project. May I also encourage those who are taking over responsibility of the project to continue this work in a sustainable manner and further develop IFFM for the benefit of the people and the environment of East Kallimantan.

At the end, please allow me to say some personal words.

Back in 1985, almost two decades ago, I first visited East Kalimantan and started to explore the situation that had been created by the large fires of 1982-83. During the following years I have worked with many Indonesian colleagues and friends in forest fire research, but also in the creation of awareness, at national level in Indonesia, back home in Germany and at international level.

With the Bandung Conference on Long-Term Integrated Forest Fire Management in June 1992 it was possible to attract the interest of Indonesian, German and other international institutions to start a realistic, problem-oriented programme of technical and financial cooperation in IFFM.

When the IFFMM project became operational in the field in 1994 some of the GTZ staff was recruited from our institution. Since then we have collaborated closely over one decade.

These long-term partnerships that began in the mid-1980s have been fundamental and are unique. Where in the world would you find such long standing relationships in technical and scientific cooperation?

The long history of my relationships to IFFM are the reason why I feel sorry not being able to participate at this conference. My commitments to conduct a regional policy conference on cooperation in fire management in Northern Europe on 10 and 11 May 2004 make impossible to be with you in Samarinda.

I wish the conference all success. I wish also all the success for a bright future of Integrated Forest Fire Management in East Kalimantan.

Freiburg, the Sixth of May 2004

Prof. Dr. Johann G. Goldammer