

Siem Reap Declaration

Enhancing Joint Efforts and Partnerships towards Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Mekong River Basin

5th April 2018

Preamble

We, the Heads of Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, meeting in Siem Reap, Cambodia, for the 3rd Summit of the Mekong River Commission (MRC),

1. Considering the vital importance of sustainable development and management of water and related resources of the Mekong River Basin, and reaffirming the highest political commitment to the more effective implementation of the Agreement on Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin signed on 5 April 1995 (Mekong Agreement);
2. Confirming the MRC's importance as a primary regional cooperation framework and its unique role as regional knowledge hub in enhancing the implementation of a set of Basin-wide strategies, procedures, guidelines, and data and information that fosters peaceful and mutually beneficial cooperation towards the optimal and sustainable development of the Mekong River Basin;
3. Acknowledging that climate change, natural disasters, over-population, unsustainable industrialisation, intensive agriculture, irrigation, hydropower, and other development activities in the basin all constitute major challenges to the Mekong River Basin;
4. Noting that while Mekong River Basin development has been essential for economic growth of riparian countries, it has also yielded adverse environmental and socio-economic impacts including transboundary impacts that need to be jointly addressed;
5. Reiterating the importance of integrated water resources management (IWRM), the need for water-food-energy nexus and gender-sensitive perspective as well as the mainstreaming of climate change and alignment of regional and national efforts in development planning and implementation, the protection against extreme floods and droughts and the preservation of key environmental assets and livelihood of vulnerable communities;
6. Recognising the importance of enhanced joint efforts and partnerships to address Mekong challenges and opportunities to contribute to achieving the relevant Sustainable Development Goals committed by the MRC Member Countries, especially Goal 6 - "Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all";

Hereby agree to the following:

Achievements since the 2nd Summit in 2014

7. The preparation and approval of the IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy (BDS) 2016-2020, the Strategic Plan 2016-2020 to implement the BDS by the MRC, and the National Indicative Plans 2016-2020, including the agreement to cooperate on five Joint Projects to implement the BDS by the Member Countries are notable successes.
8. The MRC's institutional reform, and the approval and implementation of a new MRC Secretariat structure forms a sound platform for continued cooperation. The appointment of a riparian Chief Executive Officer and the consolidation of the Secretariat Headquarters into one location in Vientiane, continued operation of the Regional Flood Management and Mitigation Centre in Phnom Penh, and the operationalisation of the new basket funding mechanism are noteworthy. The efforts and perseverance of the MRC Secretariat and the National Mekong Committees to successfully undertaking this comprehensive reform is worthy of praise.
9. The completion of the Council Study and its findings, knowledge base and tools produced are of value for the Member Countries, the MRC and relevant stakeholders.
10. The continued implementation of the 5 MRC Procedural Rules for Water Utilisation for Data and Information Exchange and Sharing, Water Use Monitoring, Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement, Maintenance of Flows on the Mainstream, and Water Quality, has uniquely contributed to the sound and cooperative management of the Mekong River Basin. The learned experiences of the Prior Consultation processes for three proposed mainstream hydropower projects are vital for the management of the Mekong river basin, and the agreed Joint Committee's Statement on the Pak Beng hydropower project has shown strong commitment of the member countries. The approval of Technical Guidelines for the Procedures for Water Quality and the updated knowledge in preparing the Technical Guidelines for the Procedures for Maintenance of Flows on the Mainstream meant that all technical guidelines following implementation experience will contribute to a more coordinated and effective implementation of the Mekong Agreement.
11. The approval of the Mekong Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan and the Basin-wide Fisheries Management and Development Strategy are commendable. The substantial progress in finalising the Guidelines for Transboundary Environmental Impacts Assessment, the development of the Joint Environmental Monitoring activity for mainstream dams and Regional Drought Management and Mitigation Strategy, and the updating of the Preliminary Design Guidance for Mainstream Dams and Sustainable Hydropower Development Strategy are acknowledged.
12. The recent approval by the Member Countries on the financial contribution formula towards equal sharing by 2030 demonstrates the high commitment by the four governments to the MRC and its future financial sustainability.
13. The cooperation with the Dialogue Partners, China and Myanmar, continues to be strengthened with data and information sharing, joint technical symposiums and

exchange of visits, joint observation, and research being conducted on key issues, and the emergency water supplement to the Mekong River during dry season 2016 is highly appreciated.

14. The historical and continuing financial and technical support from Development Partners including but not limited to Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, Asian Development Bank, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Food and Agriculture Organisation, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, World Bank and Global Environment Facility, as well as other partners to the MRC is highly appreciated. Recent exchange visits between the MRC with the Mississippi River Commission, Murray Darling Basin Authority, Morocco and others are valuable in terms of world-wide collaboration.
15. Cooperation with ASEAN continues, including participation in each other's meetings, implementation and development of joint activities.
16. The MRC's communication, interaction and engagement with stakeholders have seen major improvement, resulting in a significant positive impact on the public's understanding and perceptions of the organisation.
17. The outcomes resulted from the International Conference held on 2-3 April 2018 prior to the 3rd Summit are acknowledged with appreciation. We express our thanks to all stakeholders for their input and contribution.

Regional opportunities and challenges

Through its studies and assessment work during the last four years, the MRC has obtained better understanding and a clearer focus of the crucial development and management opportunities and challenges that the Mekong River Basin has faced:

18. The Mekong River Basin offers development opportunities and cooperation for mainstream and tributary water resources development, fisheries, navigation, flood and drought management, tourism and environment including ecosystem management.
19. At the same time, there remain significant challenges such as rapid economic and population growth, increased demand for water, food and energy, urbanization, industrialization, the loss of environmental assets, wetlands and natural fisheries, deforestation, floods and droughts and risks to biodiversity and people's livelihoods and assets. All these are compounded by the effects of climate change, as well as past and ongoing developments in all water and related sectors. The increasing development in the mainstream and tributaries highlight the increasing need for the sustainability and coordinated operational management of tributary and mainstream water resources development projects.

Priority areas of action

Building on 23 years of achievements and experience, and considering opportunities and challenges, we expect the MRC to foster joint efforts and partnerships, focusing on:

20. Optimising the development opportunities and addressing challenges through a basin-wide, integrated and inclusive multi-disciplinary process, notably the implementation of the BDS within the broader context of regional integration, cooperation and socio-economic development.
21. Considering the key findings from the Council Study, including at both policy and technical levels in order to capture development opportunities and address trade-offs, benefit sharing, risks as a reference for planning and implementation of national plans and projects, and in relevant MRC work.
22. Continuing the recent momentum in implementing all the MRC Procedures for Water Utilisation to support the sustainable, reasonable and equitable use of the Mekong water and related resources.
23. Strengthening the MRC basin-wide monitoring networks and forecasting systems for floods and droughts, and the data and information management systems underpinning them.
24. Implementing the MRC Basin Development Strategy, Strategic Plan and the National Indicative Plans with greater efforts focusing on joint projects. Further effort on the implementation of the Decentralization Roadmap including the strengthening of decentralised monitoring activities with secured budget.
25. Continuing to improve the dissemination, uptake and use of the MRC products by relevant line agencies and organizations.
26. Identifying and implementing opportunities for further cooperation with Dialogue Partners, Development Partners, and other partners. Concrete cooperation should be further pursued with ASEAN, Mekong-Lancang Cooperation, and Greater Mekong Sub-region towards a shared future. Regular engagement with relevant stakeholders in the work of the MRC should be continued.

Ways ahead

27. We reaffirm our solidarity and the Mekong Spirit, and our highest political commitment and support to the effective implementation of the Mekong Agreement, we encourage the strengthening of the implementation of the MRC including the roles of the Council, Joint Committee, the MRC Secretariat, the National Mekong Committees and relevant national agencies in the work of the MRC in order for it to become a world class inter-governmental organisation as stated in its vision. Reiterating our support to the MRC's institutional reform in line with the decisions of the 1st and 2nd Summits, and the recently agreed new contribution formula, we task the MRC to explore opportunities for securing other means of financing through private-public partnerships or other sources including from Development Partners.

28. We task the MRC to ensure and monitor the implementation of this Declaration.

29. We express our sincere gratitude to the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia for hosting the 3rd MRC Summit, and we look forward to the 4th Summit to be held in April 2022 in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Adopted in Siem Reap, Kingdom of Cambodia, on 5th April 2018 in the English language.