

***Twenty-fourth Meeting of the MRC Council
Session 2: Joint Meeting with the Twenty-second Development Partner Consultative Group
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Pattaya, Thailand***

STATEMENT

by

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Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Viet Nam
Vice Chairperson of the Viet Nam National Mekong Committee
Alternate Member of the MRC Council for Viet Nam
Head of Delegation of Viet Nam

***His Excellency General Surasak Karnjanarat,
Minister of Natural Resources and Environment
Chairman of Thai National Mekong Committee
Chairperson of the MRC Council for 2017***

***His Excellency Mr. Bun Hean,
Secretary of State Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology of Cambodia
Permanent Vice Chairman of Cambodia National Mekong Committee
Head of Delegation for Cambodia***

***H.E. Madame Bounkham Vorachit
Vice Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Lao PDR
Vice Chairperson of the Lao National Mekong Committee
Head of Delegation for Lao PDR***

***Mr. Suphot Tovichakchaikul
Deputy Permanent Secretary
Head of Delegation for Thailand***

***Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,***

It is my great pleasure to be here today participating in the 24th MRC Council Meeting and the 22nd Joint Meeting with the Development Partner Consultative Group held in this beautiful Pattaya City of Thailand.

First of all, let me join other Heads of Delegations of the MRC Member Countries to warmly welcome distinguished Representatives of the Dialogue Partners and Development Partners, guests from regional and international organizations attending this important event.

Your presence once again affirms the deep interest and strong support from international and regional communities accorded to the Mekong cooperation amid its endeavour toward the sustainable development of the Mekong Basin.

Taking this opportunity, on behalf of His Excellency Dr. Tran Hong Ha, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Viet Nam, Chairman of the Viet Nam National Mekong

Committee, Member of the MRC Council for Viet Nam, I wish at the outset of this important meeting, to express our sincerest thanks and highest appreciation to His Excellency General Surasak Karnjanarat, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Thailand, Chairperson of the MRC Council for 2017 for his great contributions in effectively leading the Mekong River Commission during the very challenging year of 2017.

My profound thankfulness also goes to the host country for their warm welcome and excellent hospitality accorded to myself and our Delegation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you may already be well aware of, this year the Mekong cooperation continued facing great challenges from climate change, increasing pressure from rapid development and consequently the impacts from escalating use of water in the Mekong Basin.

However, against those challenges we have demonstrated a strong solidarity and utmost determination in our joint efforts in materializing the commitments of our Government's Leaders and had many important achievements as highlighted in the Opening Statement of Mr. Chairman.

I highly appreciate the reported completion of the restructuring process at the MRC Secretariat, including the successful relocation to the only MRC Headquarters' office located permanently in Vientiane, Lao PDR, as decided by the MRC Council.

It is my firm belief that these achievements are very essential and enable us now to focus on our endeavor to bring the MRC to a new height of a more compact and efficient organization, and more importantly, a world-class international river basin organization as envisioned by all Member Countries.

We are delighted with report that the MRC has made giant steps forward in implementing the Water Use Procedures, especially the most well-known PNPCA recently for Pak Beng Mainstream Hydropower Project of Lao PDR, notably by endorsing a Joint Statement for Prior Consultation process with numerous suggestions on improvement of Project design, necessary impact assessments including transboundary ones and facilitation of a broader regional consultation process.

It was also my great pleasure and relief being reported that after having overcome many constraints, the Study on Sustainable Management and Development of the Mekong River including Impacts by Mainstream Hydropower Projects, widely known as the Council Study and unanimously agreed to be conducted by MRC Council on 2011, is about to dock in its long-expected completion.

Proud of being a very constructive and supportive participant to the Study with our rich data and information sources, accumulated knowledge and experiences from our Mekong Delta Study, it is my confidence that the Council Study would help strengthen our scientific knowledge base necessary in consideration of basin-wide and national socio-economic development strategies in general and mainstream hydropower development plans in particular.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to inform you all that a Conference on Sustainable and Climate-Resilient Development of the Mekong Delta of Viet Nam, chaired by the Prime Minister, was held in late September 2017 in Can Tho City.

The Conference took place in the context that the Mekong Delta, in the lower reaches of the Mekong Basin, is enduring radical and unpredictable climate change with increasing ferocity

and frequency, which caused damage to the socio economic development of this important region, estimated at almost 700 millions USD in 2016 alone.

At this conference, opinions voiced by local, regional as well as international communities agreed that the current detrimental impacts on lower reaches of the Mekong Basin are accounted for partly by climate change related factors, but mainly by man made economic development activities.

Basing upon the Conference results, the Government of Viet Nam has recently adopted a Resolution on Sustainable and Climate-Resilient Development of the Mekong Delta of Viet Nam, which determines that Viet Nam is set on maintaining its determination to broaden regional integration, international cooperation with all riparian countries on the basis of mutual interests, through regional and bilateral initiatives and efforts toward effective, equitable and sustainable utilization of water and related resources in the Mekong River Basin..."

The resolution also set forth that Viet Nam is to enhance the close cooperation with the International Mekong River Committee regarding the monitoring network, data collection and exchange of data and information with the MRC's database, as well as promoting close cooperation in developing strategies and regional masterplanning and joint researches.

At this forum, we wish to reiterate Viet Nam's continued commitment to be an active and responsible member of the Committee and I am calling on the members of the Committee to continue our close cooperation to make responsible decisions based on the comprehensive consideration of the interests of all riparian countries, the principles of equitable and reasonable utilization and no harm as set forth in the Mekong Agreement of 1995 toward sustainable management and development of water and related resources in the Mekong River Basin. All members of the Committee continue to form an unified block for solidarity, friendship and development.

It is worth highlighting at this Meeting that, apart from great determination and efforts made by us, these achievements would not be possible without the excellent and timely assistance and supports from our Development Partners and other international and regional partners in the year 2017.

I would wish to join other Council Members in recording our most profound gratefulness and highest appreciation for their invaluable assistance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Whilst highlighting the encouraging achievements, allow me to remind our Meeting, nevertheless, that the road ahead is full of challenges, notably of climate change and improper management of water utilization in the basin that will jeopardize our efforts toward a basin of sustainable development.

On behalf of Viet Nam National Mekong Committee, I would request the Joint Committee and the MRC Secretariat to mobilize all available resources for the following immediate targets:

First, successful organization of the 3rd Summit of the Mekong River Commission, which will be organized in April 2018 in the Kingdom of Cambodia;

Second, completion of implementation of the MRC IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy and Strategic Plan 2016-2020, and proper preparation for updated Basin Development Strategy and the Strategic Plan for the period 2021-2025;

Third, better coordination of water utilization through intensified monitoring and implementation of Rules for Water Utilization, notably the PNPCA for proposed uses on the mainstream of Mekong River.

Especially, special attention should be paid to the effective implementation of the Joint Statement of Prior Consultation for Pakbeng Mainstream Hydropower Project.

Fourth, prepare a sound plan on dissemination, utilization and incorporation of Council Study outcomes into regional and national development plans.

Fifth, strengthening national implementation of the MRC Roadmap for decentralization process; and

Finally, expansion of current dialogues and possible opportunities for new linkages to relevant international and regional partners which aim at mobilizing all available resources for the successful implementation of the MRC Strategic Plan for 2016-2020.

Viet Nam firmly believes that the MRC, together with its Strategic Partners in implementing relevant regional cooperation initiatives, continues to be a key driving force in helping riparian countries to achieve further successes in efficient sustainable utilization of water resources in the Mekong River Basin for the mutual benefits of all countries in the basin.

Last but not least, I would like to express my appreciation of and praise the untiring organization efforts made by the staff of Thai National Mekong Committee and the MRC Secretariat for the ultimate success of this Meeting.

As the year 2018 is approaching, on this occasion, I would like to wish all MRC Council Members, distinguished Delegates, Representatives, Participants, and your families, a new year full of happiness, prosperity and success.

I also wish our Meeting every success and look forward to welcoming you all to the 25th Meeting of the MRC Council to be held in Viet Nam in 2018.

Thank you for your attention./.