

**REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR IN VIENTIANE ONG SIEW GAY  
AT MOU SIGNING CEREMONY  
WITH MEKONG RIVER COMMISSION (MRC)  
29 APRIL 2026,  
MRC SECRETARIAT, VIENTIANE, LAOS**

Her Excellency Busadee Santipitaks,  
CEO, Mekong River Commission Secretariat

Distinguished guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

1 Singapore is honoured to become a Partner Organisation of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) today.

2 We are not part of the Mekong region, neither are we a riparian state. But we do have an interest in developments in the region. In an increasingly inter-connected world fraught with uncertainties, what happens in one part of the world, much less one part of our region, can easily affect another in so many profound and complex ways. One needs only to look at the headlines over the past two months to understand the implications of the volatile, unpredictable, complex and ambiguous world we live in.

3 To paraphrase, what happens in the Mekong does not necessarily stay in the Mekong. From shifting weather patterns, changes in crop yields, to environmental challenges and transnational crime, developments in the Mekong River Basin can easily affect other parts of the region and the world. Fortunately, this also means opportunities for win-win collaboration with partners.

4 From this perspective, it should not be surprising that Singapore is embarking on this partnership with the MRC. Among river basins, the Mekong is widely recognised as one of the most biologically diverse regions globally, second only to the Amazon. In Southeast Asia, the Mekong is the longest river. More than 65 million people live in the Lower Mekong River basin. The MRC estimates that 80 per cent of them rely on the river for food and for their livelihood. The river supports agriculture and fisheries, provides access to hydropower and trade, and fosters economic development. Countries from outside the region also benefit from these economic activities, too. Some 30 percent of global rice exports come from this region. For Singapore, the Mekong accounts for more than half of our rice imports and a substantial part of our seafood supply.

5 Sound and sustainable governance among riparian states is therefore critical for all stakeholders. In this regard, the MRC has played a crucial role in promoting and coordinating the sustainable management and development of water and related resources of the Mekong. Singapore is therefore proud today to embark on this journey of partnership.

6 But while we are the newest Partner Organisation, our collaborative ties with MRC members are not starting from a clean slate. As a fellow ASEAN Member State, we have been involved in development partnerships under our flagship Singapore Cooperation Programme for a long time.<sup>1</sup> Cumulatively we have trained more than 57,000 officials from Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. More than 34,000 of these officials have attended courses at various in-country training

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<sup>1</sup> The SCP, established in 1992 by the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is Singapore's primary framework for technical cooperation and development partnership with other developing countries. It shares Singapore's development experience through training courses, workshops and study visits.

centres in Phnom Penh, Vientiane and Hanoi, which Singapore established under the Initiative for ASEAN Integration in 2001.

7 We also have ongoing collaborations with various MRC member countries on the sustainability agenda. First, Singapore is importing hydropower from Laos through the Laos-Thailand-Malaysia-Singapore Power Integration Project. This project demonstrates the technical feasibility of trading electricity across multiple national grids in the region, and is a pathfinder to an ASEAN Power Grid, or APG. The region has significant renewable energy potential, which is crucial for realising our green transition. But this can materialise only if there is stronger regional energy connectivity. The APG works towards this goal by reducing costs at the system level, mitigating the inherent intermittency and seasonality of renewable electricity. The current global disruption to energy supply chains triggered by the war in the Middle East has made regional energy cooperation even more crucial than before.

8 Second, Singapore has carbon credit cooperation with all four MRC members. We have existing Implementation Agreements with Thailand and Vietnam, and are working towards concluding these agreements with Cambodia and Laos. These agreements unlock carbon mitigation options by authorising projects that generate carbon credits under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement.

9 As a Partner Organisation, Singapore can work with MRC on a few programmes to advance our common interest, including in the following:

- (a) **First, on space technology**, specifically on capacity building and exchanges on the use of satellite and related technologies

for climate monitoring, disaster risk management, agriculture, and water resources management.

(i) In February 2025, our Office for Space Technology and Industry, or **OSTIn**, signed a Letter of Intent with the MRC Secretariat to cooperate through its Earth Observation Initiative, to co-develop solutions for flood monitoring. OSTIn has since been redesignated as the National Space Agency of Singapore, under the aegis of the Ministry of Trade and Industry.<sup>2</sup> The **Meteorological Service Singapore (MSS)** can support with training in the use of satellite data for weather and environment monitoring and modelling.

(b) **Second, on economic and trade engagement**, to strengthen management capacity to increase crop productivity, including joint research and knowledge exchange on drought-resistant crops with MRC Member Countries. **Temasek Life Sciences Laboratory (TLL)** has an ongoing “Decarbonising Rice” project with Laos.

(c) **Third, water governance and management**, specifically on knowledge sharing and capacity building in urban water resource governance and management, including water recycling, water quality, and wastewater management technologies, and in collaboration with Singapore’s training institutions. Afterall, it is well known that Singapore is bereft of natural resources, particularly water. We believe that every drop of water is precious and have had to develop solutions

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<sup>2</sup> OSTIn has since been renamed as the National Space Agency of Singapore, as a separate department under the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

to ensure water sustainability and resilience. Over the years, Singapore has cleaned up our rivers, expanded our water catchments, recycled water, and worked to mitigate the effects of climate change. There is therefore resonance between our work and regions that are addressing the challenge of water security, including in the Mekong River Basin.

10           As a small country facing severe resource constraints, Singapore recognises that our public sector experiences and solutions are not entirely replicable to other parts of the world, who face vastly complex and different circumstances. But having benefited from other development partners since our early days, we believe in paying it forward and in knowledge-sharing, in the spirit of mutual learning.

11           In sum, while Singapore is not a riparian state, we have an interest in developments in the Mekong and hope to be able to make a modest – but hopefully meaningful – contribution to the regional agenda. After all, as the wider world goes through disruptive change, and fragmentation and geopolitical contestation accelerates, regional countries and our external partners will have no choice but to double down on greater international cooperation. Amidst the risks and challenges to the multilateral order are greater opportunities for us to collaborate to secure our future.

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