

**Statement**  
by  
Dr. An Pich Hatda  
Chief Executive Officer  
Mekong River Commission Secretariat

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Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**Good afternoon!**

I am honored to be here today on behalf of the Mekong River Commission, the only cooperation framework founded by international treaty in the Mekong basin. The 1995 Mekong Agreement was signed by the four sovereign member countries of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam in 1995. In close cooperation with two Dialogue Partners (China and Myanmar) and a number of Development and other Partners. The MRC is working to promote the sustainable development and management of water and related resources of the Mekong River Basin. However, while the MRC is relatively young, only 23 years old, our cooperation between the member countries on the Mekong river basin dates back much further to 1957. We are proud to note that we have over 60 years of cooperation, shared learning and planning on the Lower Mekong Basin.

**Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,**

The Mekong River Basin has significant water resources, especially in the wet season, and is home to the world’s second largest freshwater fisheries. These resources must support growing needs for economic development and sustain livelihoods for a growing population. The Mother Mekong is the *sine qua non* – the absolute necessity – for the development of the region’s people and economies.

According to our latest Mekong State of the Basin Report, the overall economic conditions in the basin are positive with solid economic growth – some of the most rapid in the world, declining poverty and increasing productivity.

However, population growth and the associated demographic changes, together with other major drivers such as environmental degradation, industrialization, the effects of dams and other water infrastructure on fisheries and sediment, and climate change, are putting the river's system under increasing pressure. Since the causes of degradation and the associate impacts do not respect national and political boundaries in both the upstream and downstream direction, a new vision for cooperation among the Mekong countries and concerned stakeholders needs to emerge from the implementation of the key objectives and principles agreed in 1995. We need, as the vision for the basin proposes to work towards "An economically prosperous, environmentally sound and socially just Mekong River basin. This requires inter-connected, sustainable, harmonious and development of the Mekong River Basin for its 70 million plus people.

Realizing this vision requires the MRC's member countries, our dialogue partners – Myanmar and China, and all other relevant regional cooperation mechanisms such as the GMS that adhere to a win-win cooperation approach. This is the only way we can achieve and maintain economic growth while avoiding, minimizing or mitigating the potential adverse impacts of that development. We need to both maximize the benefits of the use of our shared water resources, while ensuring that these benefits accrue fairly to all the riparian countries, and while protecting the ecosystem goods and services on which the poorest of our people depend.

Today's meeting marks a significant opportunity for promoting joint initiatives and enhancing synergies. Not only between governments and authorities at all levels, but also among Development Partners in order to create substantive connections and cooperation for prosperity in the Mekong basin.

Over the past two decades, the MRC has been playing a catalyst role, coordinating and supporting the member countries to make informed decisions and actions, whether it is flood forecasting and management, hydropower development, navigation or environmental management. We have proven that with common goals, goodwill, united spirit and the backing of our Agreement and its associated Procedures, international cooperation in transboundary water resources is not only possible but also mutually rewarding.

The ADB is one of the MRC's longstanding partners supporting us in these goals. In 2010, we signed a partnership agreement to strengthen our cooperation and

use our complementary strengths to make real and sustainable differences to the people living in the Mekong region.

The ADB co-founded the former MRC flood management and mitigation program to help minimize the risks and maximize the benefits of annual flooding, and to support the development of flood-proofing measures with involvement from local communities. The MRC worked with the ADB's GMS environment operations center on studies and guidelines to mitigate adverse environmental impacts due to increased water demands and industrial development. In addition, the MRC and ADB, along with the WWF, co-developed the Rapid Hydropower Sustainability Assessment Tool (RSAT). This special relationship is recognized by the fact that ADB is granted observer status at the MRC Joint Committee and Council Meetings. Our important dialogues and relations continue, including the participation of senior ADB staff at the last MRC Summit, the attendance of our former CEO at the last GMS Summit, both in 2018, and of course my attendance here today.

Despite our achievements, there is a need for ongoing and potentially stronger cooperation between the MRC Secretariat and ADB. We look forward to having cooperation from ADB-GMS in the MRC's basin development planning, an update of the Basin Development Strategy and the implementation of the Sustainable Hydropower Development Strategy and Strategy for Basin-wide Environment Management. We should also pay attention to incorporating the transboundary environmental impact assessment guidelines into the ADB-supported country safeguard systems.

We have a standing mechanism in the MRC Expert Group on Strategy and Partnership to serve as a platform for information sharing and coordination of water and related work on the Mekong river basin. The ADB and other partners have participated in the Expert Group on Strategy and Partnership in the past and we are planning to invite an ADB representative to join the upcoming meeting of the Expert Group on Basin Planning on 6 December 2019.

We look forward to other such opportunities for dialogue and partnership to seek synergy between the GMS strategic framework, and how the GMS strategy and programme related to the Mekong can contribute to the Basin Development Strategy for the next ten years.

Thank you very much.