

**GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION ECONOMIC COOPERATION PROGRAM**  
**SECOND Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS' MEETING (EMM)**  
**29 January 2008**  
**Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic**

**Highlights of Discussions**

**I. Introduction**

1. The Second GMS Environment Ministers Meeting (EMM-2) was held in Don Chan Palace Hotel in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 29 January 2008. The overall theme of the meeting was “**Sustainable Natural Resource Use for Economic Competitiveness**”. The meeting took stock of achievements of the GMS Core Environment Program (CEP) since its inception last April 2006 and discussed emerging environment, conservation and poverty reduction issues such as climate change, global warming and their effects on socio-economic growth and development. Also part of the event was the Environment Forum and Eco-Exhibition where private and non-government organizations were invited to exhibit technologies, products or services that were environmentally sound, benign and suitable for utilization in the GMS. The program and agenda of the EMM-2 are attached as **Appendix 1**.

**II. Meeting Participants**

2. The meeting participants included the GMS delegations from the Kingdom of Cambodia, the People's Republic of China (the PRC), Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), the Union of Myanmar, Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. Also in attendance as observers were program donors and implementing partners, multilateral and bilateral agencies, NGOs and representatives of the private sector. The meeting was co-chaired by H.E. Madame Khempheng Pholsena, Minister to the Prime Ministers' Office, Head of Water Resource and Environment Administration, Lao PDR and Mr. C. Lawrence Greenwood, Jr., Vice President of the Asian Development Bank. The list of participants is attached as **Appendix 2**.

**III. Inaugural Session**

3. The meeting started with the introductory remarks by H.E. Madame Khempheng Pholsena. She expressed appreciation to the Deputy Prime Minister of Lao PDR for his presence at the inaugural session of EMM-2 and welcomed the meeting participants. She provided a synopsis on how the CEP was initiated in response to the challenges facing the GMS and the need for a regional program to promote sustainable socio-economic development at the local levels while environmental considerations into the development planning process at the national and regional levels. She also mentioned that the CEP has a distinctive feature of being able to address critical environmental concerns in GMS through the introduction of new and innovative mechanisms, and those that especially address the emerging issues of climate change and global warming. She called on the GMS countries together with donor and implementing partners to pursue the common goal of sustainable development in the GMS.

4. The meeting was inaugurated by H.E. Mr. Asang Laoly, Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the National Environment Committee of Lao PDR. In his statement, he warmly welcomed the GMS country delegations and expressed profound appreciation to the ADB for playing a vital role in promoting the GMS Economic Cooperation Program and in formulating a unique CEP/ BCI program that promotes environmental conservation, sustainable livelihood and natural resources management. He stressed that although development in the transport and

energy sector has been the focus in the last 15 years of the GMS Economic Cooperation Program, the CEP/BCI must ensure that infrastructure development will not take place at the expense of the natural environment and social development. The holistic approach of the CEP/BCI will enhance the sustainable growth of the GMS. He stated the Government of Lao's commitment to sustainable development as reflected in the National Socio-Economic Strategy until 2020, the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy and the Five Years Socio-Economic Plan. Since 85% of the multi-ethnic Lao population rely on natural resources for their livelihood, the government has recognized that environmental protection is a crucial factor for poverty alleviation in the country. Initiatives such as the National Adaptation Plan to Climate Change and the planting of one millions trees are therefore being undertaken. He concluded his speech by declaring the EMM-2 officially open and wishing for its successful deliberations.

#### **IV. Opening Session**

5. Mr. C. Lawrence Greenwood, Jr. Vice-President of ADB in his opening speech noted the relevance of the theme and timing of the meeting. As part of the Asian region which is currently experiencing explosive economic growth, the GMS is witnessing an increase in the consumption of basic needs leading to increased prices of products, as well as degradation of the environment. He noted that the fast phase of growth in the region has been accompanied by declining natural resources endowments, land degradation, loss of biodiversity and deterioration in water quality. Increase in population has also added pressure to agriculture and land use and contributing to environmental degradation, soil loss and nutrient depletion. He warned that the current pattern of resource use in the GMS cannot sustain growth, will not maintain GMS economic competitiveness or improve human welfare over time. Another emerging challenge, which will leave GMS economies vulnerable, is climate change. Recent data shows that the economic cost of the potential impact of climate change in developing countries is estimated at 5-9 percent of GDP, which is considerably higher than in industrial nations. He mentioned that the CEP/BCI is evolving to provide the necessary capacity for addressing the challenges of low natural resources productivity and climate change and suggested that the GMS countries also look into the following key areas: i) adoption of innovative technologies and sound policies that will improve economic competitiveness and environmental management; ii) mainstreaming environment to core economic sectors investments such as transport, energy, tourism and trade sectors; iii) strengthen partnerships with civil society and private sector to provide effective mechanisms for implementation, technical and knowledge resources to leverage sound policies and institutional reform in support for integrated development; and iv) fostering private-public partnership to mobilize the needed human, technological and financial resources, as private sector is already playing an increasingly constructive role in preserving the environment. He encouraged the GMS Ministers' leadership and guidance to effectively respond to the challenges in improving the economic and environmental performance in the GMS and gave assurance of the ADB as a responsive and active partner to this endeavor.

6. Mr. Surendra Shrestha, Regional Director and Representative, United Nations Environment Programme for Asia and the Pacific (UNEP ROAP) expressed his appreciation to the meeting organizers and the host country for holding the EMM-2. He shared that emerging issues on the environment has posted new trends and opportunities in the international and national settings. International caucuses such as the recently concluded World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, G-8 meetings, Security Council meeting, etc. are focusing on reaching agreements for inclusive developments - with environment on the top of the governments' economic growth agenda . At the national level, environment agencies are being increasingly strengthened, with scientific research and political will more focused on climate change issues. This is becoming more evident with billions of dollars being committed to climate

change focusing on the recommendations of the recently published IPCC and Stern reports. He also emphasized collective partnership among the governments, civil society, and private sector with inclusive and transparent implementation as an important factor to address environmental issues. He acknowledged the progress of CEP/BCI in this area, and encouraged this unique program to continue addressing the emerging challenges as it moves forward in its implementation.

## V. Adoption of Agenda

7. The Minister from Lao PDR as Co-Chair, called for the adoption of the agenda of the 2<sup>nd</sup> GMS Environment Ministers' Meeting. The meeting approved its adoption.

## VI. Ministers' Statements

8. **Cambodia.** H.E. Mr. Mok Mareth, Senior Minister and Minister, Ministry of Environment, expressed sincere thanks to WREA, Lao PDR for hosting the meeting, the excellent arrangement and warm hospitality; to the ADB for co-organizing and making the event possible in such a timely manner. He also acknowledged UNEP's efforts in helping Cambodia with human skills development and capacity building initiatives. He expressed Cambodia's concerns regarding the environmental and socio-economic challenges it is facing, highlighting the fact that Cambodia is predominantly dependent on natural resources such as forests, fertile, soil fisheries water and mineral resources for socio-economic development. With population growth and increasing demand for food, the main source of livelihood such as the Tonle Sap River will be greatly affected. With these emerging challenges, the government of Cambodia has developed relevant laws, policies, strategies and plans for the protection and management of its natural resources, e.g. the "Rectangular Strategy for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency in Cambodia" led by the Prime Minister Hun Sen. Recognizing the importance of the CEP/BCI, the Ministry of Environment in Cambodia has played an active role in the implementation of the program components such as: rapid strategic environmental assessment in the tourism sector in close collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism; implementation of BCI pilot sites in the Cardamom Mountains and Eastern Plains of Cambodia in close collaboration with NGO partners and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries; implementation of the environmental performance assessment with support from UNEP; and holding of capacity building workshops and human resource development activities at all government levels through the CEP/BCI. He noted the CEP will continue to be recognized as a systematic and integrated approach in shaping the development direction of the region and re-affirmed the Cambodian government's commitment to the program. Furthermore, the program has become a key building block in attaining the shared vision of an integrated, harmonious and prosperous GMS. He recommended the WGE to be more proactive in relevant GMS sector working groups. He expressed continued support to the EOC's role in coordinating and building on existing harmonized mechanisms of subregional cooperation within the context of the ADB supported GMS Economic Cooperation Program. He also proposed to enhance national mitigation and adaptation measures under the principles of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

9. **People's Republic of China.** H.E. Mr. Wu Xiaoqing, Vice Minister, State Environmental Protection Administration, expressed heartfelt thanks to WREA, Lao PDR and ADB for the excellent meeting arrangements. He mentioned that the PRC government has always given great importance to the cooperation with GMS countries. Until the end of 2006, the forest coverage in Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region has registered stable environmental quality and a certain degree of improvement in environmental management

capacity. This development is achieved through the combined efforts of central and local governments. He emphasized China's efforts in addressing the challenges of fast economic growth and pressure on resources and the environment by adjusting the environment protection policy to prioritize environmental protection with economic growth. These efforts include shifting single economic focus to equal focus on economy and environmental protection; reducing lag between economic growth and environmental protection; inclusion of use of legal, economic, technical and administrative means to protect the environment. For instance, PRC government has set indicators on energy conservation and emission reduction (i.e. 10% cut on major pollutants) with target period by 2010. He also shared that at the recently concluded 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress of Communist Party of China, priority was placed on environmental protection in the industrialization and modernization development strategy. China will also enhance the capacity to respond to climate change and make contribution in protecting the global climate. He also stressed China's commitment to participate in the CEP/BCI and its future activities and gave the following suggestions/insights on the program: i) The role of GMS countries is the basis of the program's success, thus continued active role of member countries on planning and implementation should achieve common benefits; ii) the implementation method of BCI is beneficial given the limited resources; iii) the guidance of ADB and financial assistance from development partners has guaranteed smooth implementation of the program and PRC expects ADB to exert more coordination and guiding role for the program. PRC is committed to environmental cooperation and will continue its efforts to help other countries through dialogue and communication to materialize the principles of a tranquil and prosperous neighborhood. It also hopes that the depth and width of cooperation will be further expanded through the GMS environmental cooperation to promote countries in the subregion to jointly realize sustainable development goals.

10. **Myanmar.** H.E. U Nyunt Hlaing, Ambassador of the Union of Myanmar to the Lao PDR, expressed appreciation to the Government of Lao PDR, ADB and EOC for generously hosting and organizing the meeting. He re-affirmed Myanmar's support to the CEP/BCI and its objectives, noting the success of GMS projects in facilitating effort in pursuit of economic, social and environment progress in the subregion. He noted the need to enhance collaboration among the GMS countries to effectively protect, conserve physical and biological resources such as wetlands, water resources, forest and biodiversity, and as such, BCI is an important component of the CEP/BCI. He presented Myanmar's efforts in protecting and conserving natural resources through implementing laws and policies that provide the framework for sustainable management of forest and biodiversity. For instance, the Environmental Conservation Committee was formed in 2004 to oversee the effective implementation of the activities and enforcement of existing laws and regulations and is responsible for the implementation of environmental programs and activities. He mentioned that given the GMS countries' similarities in culture and natural resource endowments, common environmental concerns such as land degradation, deforestation, threat to biodiversity, air pollution from mobile source, solid waste management and climate change could be taken into account for future Environment Performance Assessment activities in Myanmar with the assistance from UNEP. He also stated that Myanmar gives great importance to the forthcoming GMS Summit and hopes that the Summit will lay down guidance in achieving fruitful outcomes for future environmental endeavors in the subregion.

11. **Thailand.** Dr. Saksit Tridech, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment expressed his appreciation to the Government of Lao PDR and ADB for the effort in organizing the meeting and the warm hospitality. He noted the eminent linkage of climate change, global warming and its impact to the quality of life, livelihood and safety of the GMS, giving reference to the statements made by the IPCC report. He shared Thailand's initiatives to

help reduce greenhouse gas emissions through the deployment of clean coal technologies, the development of the Thai Government's National Policy and Strategy on Climate Change, the establishment of the Thailand Greenhouse Gases Management Organization (TGO), as well as Thailand's compliance with the Bali roadmap for sustainable forest management to help reduce forest destruction. He proposed the establishment of a Research and Training Center on Nature Conservation in the GMS or "Knowledge Hub" to develop and facilitate the dissemination of information and techniques for management of protected area and biodiversity conservation. The Thai Cabinet has acknowledged the efforts for forest connectivity in the Western Corridor and expects a successful linkage with the Tenasserim Mountain Range, giving appreciation for the cooperation of key stakeholders involved in the initiative. He also mentioned that environmental issues haze pollution and forest fire was a common concern in the subregion and urged GMS countries to develop measures to mitigate the problems. Moreover, he cited critical issues on integrated water management, natural disasters, environmental pollution, avian flu and other communicable disease that need attention, and emphasized that Thailand hopes to work closely together with the other GMS countries to create a "Region of Hope" elevate the quality of human life for the future generations.

12. **Viet Nam.** H.E. Mr. Nguyen Van Duc, Vice Minister, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, mentioned Viet Nam's achievements in various areas, e.g. maintaining high rate of economic growth, success in poverty alleviation, continued improvement in living standards, and access to high-quality services. While providing great attention to socio-economic development, poverty reduction and environmental protection, Viet Nam is still faced with severe and urgent environmental challenges. The Government is thus taking action to address these challenges by approving Agenda 21 and passing the National Strategy for Environmental Protection to 2010 and Vision toward 2020. The latter would provide detailed objectives, content and solutions for environmental protection. In addition, Viet Nam is developing a Biodiversity Law and will allocate 1% of its overall budget to environmental protection activities. The Vice Minister emphasized that great need for support and assistance from the ADB and other international community in financing and technical resources, as well as cooperation with other GMS countries for undertaking assessment of risk of climate change to biodiversity, livelihood and economic competitiveness. In addition, strengthening national and local capacity for integrating environment into the economic development planning and investments is needed, while close collaboration among the nine sectors of the GMS program is important. He expressed appreciation to CEP/BCI, and the support provided by ADB and the Governments of Netherlands and Sweden and other contributing partners. He emphasized the need to continue strengthening the role of and assistance to the EOC and the National Support Unit to accelerate CEP/BCI implementation in the GMS. In closing, he wished everyone success in the deliberations and mentioned regret that the Minister is unable to join the meeting due to his busy schedule. He also proposed the idea of holding the next Environment Ministers' Meeting in Viet Nam.

13. **Lao PDR.** Mr. Sisavath Vithaxay, Deputy Head of Water Resources and Environment Administration, expressed deep appreciation to the ADB and EOC for its support in organizing the meeting and thanked the National GMS Secretariat and officials from the relevant ministries. He stated that good environment is essential for sustainable economic development and that the GMS countries' natural resource base is declining brought about by development activities that bring dramatic changes in the landscape, risks to rural livelihood, health and welfare. There is a need to carry out comprehensive assessment to address these risks and secure the local livelihood base especially in the remote areas in the GMS. He mentioned the fact that in Laos, the majority lives in remote rural areas with high biodiversity and valuable ecosystem services to the country. The challenge is to render poverty alleviation efforts by combining actions

into a package of measures tailored to reduce risks while securing rural livelihoods. There is also a need to carefully study the emerging challenges of climate change and its impacts such as "out of season" rainfall, flooding, storms, droughts, water supply shortages and others which will cause immense damage both to human life and property, and the preparations that need to be undertaken to mitigate its effects. He appreciated the efforts of the WGE, and urged ADB and the WGE to strengthen the role of the EOC to accelerate implementation of the CEP/BCI and its components. He concluded his statement by expressing confidence in the support and cooperation of all the GMS countries, donors and implementing partners to help GMS attaining its goals of prosperous sub-region with clean environment.

## **VII. Report on CEP/BCI Updates**

14. The report commenced with a video presentation, highlighting the overview of the program and progress to date since its inception in April 2006. The WGE members then made presentations on the progress of each CEP/BCI component.

15. Mrs. Keobang A. Keola, Acting Permanent Secretary, GMS-National Coordinator, Water Resources and Environment Administration, from Lao PDR made a presentation on *Strengthening Regional Cooperation for Improving Environmental Management*. She presented the aim of WGE to build capacity for Environment Management in the GMS through regional collaboration under the CEP/BCI. In order to achieve these goals, activities such as deputation of GMS officials, internship, study visits, training programs and workshops have been and are being organized; national support units have been set up with national staff to implement field programs; the Technical Advisory Panel was established to provide advice on developing the regional program; a discussion paper for the institutionalization of the EOC in the region was drafted and is being discussed with WGE, etc. Of the latter, further discussion will be organized to consider the possible structure and funding of the institution.

16. Mr. Wang Xin, Deputy Division Director, Foreign Economic Cooperation Office, China State Environmental Protection Administration made a presentation on the progress of the *Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative*. He presented the objectives of the BCI to establish at least five pilot sites in the GMS and undertake poverty reduction measures and ecosystem restoration. To date at least five biodiversity corridors sites are established and the 6<sup>th</sup> pilot site is underway. Poverty reduction measures and ecosystem restoration has been undertaken in the pilot sites and ecosystem service payment mechanism developed. The presenter noted that although much progress has been achieved, issues and challenges need to be urgently addressed, e.g. the negative impacts of climate change to biodiversity and food security; the conflict between the goals of economic development and biodiversity protection; and securing the financial resources for up-scaling investment activities in BCI. The GMS countries also requested the ADB's support for research on the issues mentioned through CEP/BCI.

17. Mr. Chuon Chanrithy, Director, Department of Natural Resources Assessment and Environmental Data Management, Ministry of Environment, Cambodia presented the *Environmental Performance Assessments (EPA)* component of CEP, its objectives of institutionalizing the EPA system and building capacity for sustainable development planning in the GMS countries. To-date, the challenges faced in the implementation of the project are: its effective institutionalization - the integration of EPA and the National Sustainable Development Strategy into the national socio-economic development and environment plan; and undertaking

EPA at the subnational and subregional levels and the availability and quality of data. Possible solutions to these challenges are: adoption of driver-pressure-state-impact-response (DPSIR) framework, which will enable countries to examine drivers behind pressures and social impacts; embedding EPA into the Subregional Development Plan and sector planning; and analyzing gaps on current states and responses to determine if there is a need for institutional strengthening and capacity development.

18. Ms. Huynh Thai Mai, Senior Expert, Department of Environment, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Viet Nam made a presentation on *Strategic Environmental Assessments*. To-date, the project has successfully kicked off with pilot SEAs in Viet Nam for the hydropower sector, tourism in Cambodia, and the transport sector of the North-South Economic Corridor (PRC, Lao PDR and Thailand). The challenges in the use of the SEA especially as a tool in the pilot projects include: the development planner's pro-active integration of SEA into the sectoral planning process; developing technical capacities for spatial planning/GIS, valuation and multi-criteria assessments; promoting SEA to facilitate cross-sectoral dialogue; promoting greater coordination across regional sectoral fora and engagement of the private sector.

19. Ms. Hla Kyi, Director, Planning Department, Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development Myanmar, made a presentation on *Capacity Building and Human Resources Development*. A review of the key activities undertaken by the CEP/BCI in this area included identifying options for institutionalizing subregional cooperation on environment management; building capacity for science-based environmental planning and management; and development of multi-stakeholder platforms for environment management. However, environmental management in the GMS is faced with the issue of empowering the environment ministries as institutions and programs promoting regional cooperation on environment sustainability have limited human resources. The key challenges for consideration in this area include: i) strengthening and supporting research-based initiatives especially focusing on the emerging issue of climate change, effects of global environmental change on health, human contribution and response systems to changes in climate and related systems; and ii) practical and operational application of the science-based information in the countries in the GMS in a multi-stakeholder platform.

20. Dr. Songtam Suksawang, Director, National Park Research Division, Department of National Park and Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department of Thailand made a presentation on *Future Challenges and Opportunities*. He presented the key environmental challenges in the GMS: i) continued decline on ecosystem goods & services, and biodiversity; ii) climate change posing multiple threats to ecosystems and human wellbeing; iii) rapid urbanization - strains on small and medium sized cities; infrastructure development and management of wastes; iv) water quality; v) human and financial resources; vi) enforcement of existing environment legislation; vii) improved harmonization on environment legislation among GMS countries; and viii) external environmental costs not being included in some development plans. Opportunities in the environment sector were also presented: i) rapid development of technologies in the field of energy; ii) emerging technologies and fuels in the transport sector; iii) biotechnology for the agricultural sector; iv) rapidly expanding economies and increased economic opportunities in the private and public sectors; v) investment opportunities from infrastructure to new technologies; vi) expanding research improved education levels in the field of environment, especially the younger generation; and vii) opportunities for partnerships with bilateral and multilateral agencies, private companies, academic institutions other economic regions, etc. Identified responses to these challenges and opportunities are: i) enhanced regional cooperation including partnerships (deeper cooperation among GMS countries; with ASEAN;

bilateral donors; other economic regions; etc); ii) capacity building for government institutions in the GMS countries / environmental education; iii) Promoting technology transfer into the GMS countries (from the outside) as well as transfer between GMS countries / capture investment opportunities that may arise from the CEP-BCI program; iv) expanded CEP/BCI program to respond to the above-mentioned challenges; v) exchange visits; vi) establishment of Regional Research & Training Center and vii) training and capacity building to develop BCI guidance materials for the subregion.

### **VIII. Partners' Remarks**

21. Dr. Huguette Labelle, Chairman of the Technical Advisory Panel mentioned the importance of protecting biodiversity and the challenges behind it due to competing demands from developers. Climate change and biodiversity, water and sustainable forestry is a global, as well as a regional issue. She noted the strong ownership of GMS countries in the CEP/BCI and the strong partnership among the key stakeholders is a vital formula of the program. She also shared the opportunity of reporting at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland the great "experiment" GMS countries have undertaken by launching CEP/BCI which holds great promise not only for the GMS but globally.

22. Ms. Helena Ahola, First Secretary (Development Cooperation) Embassy of Finland in Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar confirmed the contribution of the Government of Finland of four million Euro commitment to CEP/BCI for 2008 - 2011. CEP/BCI is inline with the new Development Policy Programme of Finland focusing on sustainable use of natural resources and social and economic sustainability. Special attention is given to environment, climate change and renewable energy, not to forget good governance, transparency, capacity building and poverty alleviation. She mentioned Mekong Region, Cambodia and Lao PDR as priority areas in South-East Asia, and noted that Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland looks forward to the mid-term review mission with EOC and other program partners. Madam Khempheng welcomed the new co-financing partner to the program.

23. Ms. Annelies Donners, First Secretary (Development Cooperation) Royal Netherlands Embassy in Viet Nam, thanked the Lao PDR government for hosting the meeting and inviting the development partners. She noted that as a co-finance partner, her Government is keen to receive from other partners, feedback on the development of the environmental management in the countries, and the CEP/BCI implementation in the region. She also expressed that Netherlands is very much encouraged to witness today the high level commitment of the GMS governments in the linkages between environment and socio-economic development. She stated that poverty reduction, climate change related activities in the regional and national levels, and the CEP/BCI, will continue to receive the support and attention of the Netherlands.

24. Mr. Christer Holsberg, Director of Swedish Environmental Secretariat for Asia, Sida Regional Office in Thailand acknowledged the vision of the CEP/BCI materializing as reflected in the various presentations witnessed by the stakeholders on the ground as the program developed in the last three years.

25. Mr. Thomas Dillon, Senior Vice President, World Wide Fund for Development-USA (WWF-USA) made a statement on behalf of the implementing partners. He reaffirmed the strong support to CEP/BCI expressed by all the partners and restated WWF's continued commitment as an active partner in the program's implementation.

## IX. Comments and Suggestions by Ministers

26. The Co-chair opened the floor for comments and suggestions from the Ministers based on the partners' remarks. The GMS countries made the following comments:

27. **Cambodia.** H.E. Dr. Mok Mareth expressed appreciation with the WGE and EOC on the implementation progress of the CEP/BCI. He also thanked the donor partners for their support to the program especially on capacity building and financing.

28. **PRC.** H.E. Mr. Wu Xiaoqing encouraged the implementation of studies on climate change impact on biodiversity under the framework of BCI and strengthening capacity building initiatives. He also called for the increased development of the national support units and requested the development partners' continued support to the program.

29. **Myanmar.** H.E. U Nyunt Hlaing highlighted the need for strengthening environment management capacity in Myanmar. He expressed appreciation to the ADB and the development partners for their contribution to the program and he looked forward to future activities in Myanmar, specifically on activities under the Environment Performance Assessment component being implemented by UNEP.

30. **Thailand.** Mr. Saksit Tridech commends the progress of the program as shown in the presentations. He suggested creating a venue for sharing of information and learning experiences with other countries especially on climate change, which is now a priority concern to the GMS. He also stressed the increased need for awareness building and education on the links between environment and social.

31. **Viet Nam.** H.E. Mr. Nguyen Van Duc, commended the progress on the implementation of the CEP/BCI and acknowledged the work and support of key partners.

## X. Other Matters

32. Thailand Minister raised the issue on the scheduling of the Environment Ministers Meeting, and highlighted Thailand's proposal for an annual GMS Summit instead of the tri-annual event as it is currently.

33. Lao PDR Minister reiterated the GMS' emerging concern of sustainable environment management for the region especially with the new dimension of climate change impacts. There is a need to ensure that environmental ministries are able to handle climate change by working with other line ministries (i.e. planning), and strengthening the national support units capacity to work with the EOC. With regards to Thailand's proposal on the timing of the Environment Ministers' Meeting, as the host country, she will consult with other stakeholders and will give feedback after the matter procedures for the Summit are discussed and a decision taken up by the Summit leaders in March.

34. Mr. Javed Hussain Mir, ADB Project Officer of CEP/BCI mentioned that all the issues highlighted in the discussions (e.g. capacity building, etc) are within the scope and mandate of the program. As to Thailand's proposal, he explained that with the current governance structure, the Ministerial meeting is scheduled within the 3 year cycle of the GMS Summit of Leaders. A change in the Summit schedule will impact on the cycle of the EMM as it currently dovetails with the GMS Summit.

## **XI. Discussion and Adoption of the Joint Ministerial Statement**

35. The draft of the Joint Ministerial Statement was circulated to the meeting, and was read by Co-Chair Madame Khempheng. Comments and suggestions were requested by the Co-Chair. The GMS Environment Ministers finally approved and adopted the Joint Ministerial Statement - attached as **Appendix 3**.

## **XII. Closing Session**

36. H.E. Madam Khempheng stated in her closing remarks that the key elements to further the process of effective environment management through CEP/BCI are: mobilization of resources by GMS countries and development partners for future activities; forging reliable partnerships by strengthening collaboration among stakeholders and through sharing of experiences; mainstreaming and integration of environment to the planning process of GMS priority sectors and programs. She emphasized that the GMS countries play important roles in the success of the program through their timely manner of implementing the activities and closely coordinating with development partners on funding flow schedules. She expressed appreciation to the ADB and the development partners for their continued support to the GMS. Noting the GMS countries' commitment to implement the program at the national levels, she requested for higher investments into the program as well as strengthening the capacity of EOC to coordinate its implementation.

37. In his closing remarks, Mr. Greenwood noted that a clear direction has been given by the countries with regards to the urgency in addressing the climate change issue and its effects on biodiversity sites. There is an increased need for capacity building at the local (provincial) level through sharing of human and institutional experiences, through creation of a regional environmental institution, as well as bringing environment education to the youth.