

Speech to be delivered by the Union Minister for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, The Republic of the Union of Myanmar at the “2nd ASEAN–Mekong River Commission (MRC) Water Security Dialogue: Sustainable Investment for a Connected, Resilient, and Water-secure Southeast Asia”

(18th September 2024, Vientiane Lao PDR)

Excellency. Mr. Saleumxay Kommasith (ဆလမ်းဆေး ကိုမတ်ဆိသ်), Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lao PDR,

Excellency Dr Bounkham Vorachit (ကွမ်ခမ်း ဘိုရာချစ်), Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Lao PDR,

Honorable Excellencies from the ASEAN Member States,

Esteemed delegates from the ASEAN Secretariat and MRC

Distinguished guests, Ladies, and Gentlemen...

Sabaï dii (မင်္ဂလာနံနက်ခင်းပါ - လာအို), good morning to you all!

1. First and foremost, it is indeed my great honor to attend this 2nd ASEAN–MRC Water Security Dialogue. On behalf of the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, please allow me to express my sincere appreciation to the government of Lao People’s Democratic Republic for its excellent efforts to organize this dialogue meeting and warm hospitality.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

2. In this auspicious moment, I would like to highlight the importance of water for our lives because it is crucial for our life supporting system

and fundamental resource for the national development and social well-being of the global people. It is also essential for national economy, social development, energy production, climate stability and healthy ecosystems.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

3. Even though the global demand for freshwater is rapidly increasing, the global fresh water supply is declining due to climate change and anthropogenic activities such as global deforestation and forest degradation. Access to clean water is one of our most basic human needs. However, one in four people in the world does not have access to safe drinking water, which is a major health risk. Thus, water resources are fundamental to human existence, and they need to be conserved sustainably.

4. International experts agree that reduced access to freshwater may lead to unforeseen chain of consequences such as economic instability, food insecurity and migration. Therefore, securing water resources is of great importance to achieve sustainable development goals; promote local and regional economies; and the security of millions of people's lives.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

5. Myanmar is endowed with abundant water resources and possesses 12 % of the whole Asian's freshwater resources and 16 % of the freshwater resources of the ASEAN region. Myanmar has Glaciers and

Ice Caps in the north, the freshwater lakes in the central, and coasts and islands in the south of the country. Myanmar possesses 4 major rivers, 59 tributaries, 581 dams and 208 river water plants for agriculture, 36 small to large dams for hydropower, 69 large springs, and 38 freshwater lakes.

6. Watersheds are important landscape features that control the amount and quality of water resources. For effective watershed conservation, Myanmar is implementing strategic watershed conservation activities through protection of existing forests, establishment of forest plantations and implementation of soil and water conservation activities, conducting scientific research, capacity building and education programs.

7. In accordance with the guidance of the Myanmar National Water Policy, Myanmar is implementing sustainable water resources management led by the National Water Resources Committee in collaboration with National Environmental Conservation Committee and National Disaster Management Committee.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

8. As we all know, the Mekong River is the world's 12th longest river, and its delta region shares the watershed areas with Myanmar, China, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. In the heart of Southeast Asia, the Mekong River represents a regional and global significance because of its ample water resources, rich biodiversity, and unique ecosystems

that support the basic needs for regional economic development and sustainable livelihoods of the local communities.

9. For your information, the free water flow of Myanmar to the Mekong River is not still being controlled and this free-water-flow is serving as the year-round ecosystem water flows for the Mekong River. The eastern part of Myanmar constitutes 3% of the whole basin area of the Mekong River covering 28,600 km² and contributing 1,763 km³ of annual runoff.

10. According to the Forest Resource Assessments of 2015 and 2020, forest cover of the basin areas of the Mekong River in Myanmar has significantly increased about 30 % since 2015.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

11. According to the Mekong Basin Development Strategy, Myanmar is coordinating with local and international non-governmental organizations. Myanmar is also actively participating in the ASEAN cooperation, Mekong River Commission, ASEAN Working Group on Water Resources Management (AWGWRM) and Lancang-Mekong Water Resources Cooperation.

12. I do expect that this meeting will discuss the policies that can best address the requirements for a resilient and water-secure system in our ASEAN countries and can keep the profile of water high on the region's development agenda.

13. I do believe that we need to adopt comprehensive water management approaches that integrates active participation of local communities, implementing sustainable policies, strengthening water infrastructure, promoting water conservation, and efficient water use technologies.

14. In addition, we should also promote regional cooperation and strengthen linkages among ASEAN countries to tackle emerging water issues such as equitable access to safe and affordable water supply, sufficient water to ensure food security and sustained solutions that mitigate water-related hazards.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

15. Enhancing water security is central to the achievement of climate change adaptation and stable food production. Thus, we must apply **Nature-Based Solutions (NBS)** in our integrated water resource management since they can enhance water availability, improve water quality and reduce risks associated with water-related disasters and climate change. In addition, we should strengthen our cooperation to implement collective water governance and develop sustainable financing mechanisms that support water security in the ASEAN Region.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

16. In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that we all have responsibility for sustainable water resource management. Myanmar is committed to work closely with all regional and international

development partners to overcome the regional challenges associated with water security and sustainable investment. I sincerely believe that the collective cooperation among the Mekong countries will bring the prosperity of the basin and fulfil the gaps.

17. By saying that, I also wish this 2nd ASEAN–Mekong River Commission Water Security Dialogue every success.

Thank you very much!