

**Statement delivered by H.E. Deena Joy D. Amatong, Ambassador of the Republic of the Philippines to the Lao PDR**

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Honorable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen:

First of all, I wish to convey the regrets of Philippine Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga for not being able to join you in person today. Let me also express her appreciation for this opportunity to contribute to this important dialogue.

Allow me also to convey our condolences for the loss of life and our sympathies to those displaced and affected by the recent flooding in the Lao PDR, and the greater Mekong region.

This gathering serves as a significant reminder of the shared responsibility we bear in safeguarding our vital river basins for the benefit of present and future generations.

The issue of water security in the Mekong and ASEAN region transcends borders and necessitates collective action, innovative approaches, and sustained investments.

The Philippines, like many others represented here, faces significant challenges related to water security. With over 18 major river basins driving economic activity, we have witnessed first-hand the far-reaching consequences of environmental degradation and climate change through the increased incidence of flooding, landslides and other natural hazards, posing threats to our communities and destabilizing critical ecosystems.

With our country's archipelagic nature and decentralized government structure, we firmly believe that sustainable river basin management must be at the heart of our strategies. Embracing the principles of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), the Philippines is resolutely committed to addressing these challenges through the integration of policies, investments, and stakeholder engagements, thereby establishing a framework that supports the sustainable utilization of our water resources while balancing economic growth and ecological preservation.

Our engagement in projects such as the Ecosystem-based Management in the ILOG-HILABANGAN and TAGUM-LIBUGANON river basins, conducted in collaboration with international partners, has imparted valuable insights. Through ecosystem-based approaches, we are diligently working to bolster biodiversity, build resilience against climate impacts, and empower communities to actively participate in water management. The efforts converge and align closely with nature-based solutions, which are pivotal in our response to both climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

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In strengthening the capacity of our country's River Basin Management Councils, we focused on knowledge-sharing and the application of science-based strategies like the River Styles Framework. Under this framework, we have developed tools and approaches that integrate the principles of geomorphology, hydrology, and ecology into flood and river management practices. This holistic approach promotes interventions that work with, rather than against, natural processes. By combining green infrastructure with traditional measures, we are developing more resilient and cost-effective solutions to flood risks and hazards.

Our collective objective within the ASEAN and Mekong region should be to augment investment and collaboration in pursuit of a connected, resilient, and water-secure future. It is imperative that our investments are not only financially sound but also socially and environmentally sustainable. To realize this, fostering regional cooperation, promoting multi-stakeholder engagement, and aligning our efforts with global best practices are essential.

As we look forward, the Philippines remains steadfast in its commitment to actively contribute to this shared undertaking. We perceive immense potential in regional partnerships that facilitate the exchange of knowledge, technologies, and strategies tailored to our diverse ecosystems and socio-economic realities.

Let us seize this opportunity to forge more robust and resilient communities by prioritizing water security, sustainable development, and environmental stewardship. By working together, we can usher in a future where our river basins are not merely safeguarded but are inevitably flourishing, and in turn, will reinforce both our economies and the well-being of our people.

Thank you, and I wish to express my eager anticipation for the continued collaboration among our countries as we work towards our shared objective of a more water-secure ASEAN and Mekong region.