

SINGAPORE STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR SUDESH MANIAR

2ND ASEAN-MEKONG RIVER COMMISSION

WATER SECURITY DIALOGUE

18 SEPTEMBER 2024, VIENTIANE, LAO PDR

Your Excellency Madam Bounkham Vorachit, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Lao PDR

Dr Anoulak Kittikhoun, Chief Executive Officer of the Mekong River Commission Secretariat

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. *Sabaidee*, good morning. Thank you for giving me the floor to deliver this statement on behalf of Singapore's Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Grace Fu, who is unable to attend this meeting and sends her regrets. Allow me at the outset to congratulate the Mekong River Commission (MRC) for convening the 2nd ASEAN-Mekong Water Security Dialogue. I would also like to thank both Lao PDR and the MRC for the excellent arrangements.

2. Singapore is not a riparian state, but we are a city-state that is bereft of natural resources, including water. As such, water security is a critical issue for us. Singapore has had to innovate and develop various solutions to ensure water sustainability and resilience. That said, water challenges are not unique to Singapore. They also manifest to varying degrees throughout ASEAN.

3. It was therefore very apt that ASEAN and the MRC signed a cooperation framework in 2018. This Second Edition of the Dialogue builds on the first one held in 2021, and provides an opportunity for stakeholders in MRC and ASEAN to exchange views and share experiences.

4. In this context, please allow me to make **three** points that underscore our common water challenges and Singapore's perspective of how ASEAN and the Mekong region can achieve water security for the well-being and prosperity of our peoples.

5. **First, climate change and rising sea levels are a real and existential threat.** There is ample evidence about the devastating impacts of climate change, including the recent floods due to massive rain in the Mekong region which have been the most severe for some time. Most ASEAN countries have experienced similar events and destruction. Our region must be better prepared as flooding due to rainfall and rising sea levels will become more frequent and intense. Conversely, our region will be equally prone to drought caused by prolonged dry weather. Whether we suffer too much or too little rain, our economies and peoples will be adversely affected.

6. As a small, low-lying island state, Singapore shares the vulnerabilities of other coastal cities in ASEAN, including those in the Mekong Delta. Rising sea levels affect coastal communities in many ways, including increased salinity upstream which affects water resources and food security. Higher sea levels also heighten the risks of inland floods during instances of extreme weather events due to the compounding effects of high tides, storm surges and land subsidence.

7. Singapore completed our 3rd National Climate Change Study earlier this year. The Study covers localised projections of key climate variables for Singapore and the Southeast Asia region up to the year 2100. For Southeast Asia, sea levels are projected to rise across the region at different rates, with varying rainfall trends across the region. We would be happy to share the Study with ASEAN Member States, so that ASEAN can collectively develop better-informed climate adaptation and mitigation plans.

8. **Second, tackling these challenges require a mix of technological, infrastructural and policy interventions, supported by adequate investments.** Singapore has sought to address its water scarcity by embracing the use of technological solutions, particularly through NEWater, which is Singapore's own brand of recycled water. This breakthrough, which was achieved about twenty years ago, was a game-changer. Together with the introduction of desalination a

few years later, we have moved towards developing more climate-resilient water resources.

9. But water resilience is not borne solely from the deployment of technologies. Pricing water appropriately encourages water conservation, and reduces wastage. An integrated systems approach of investing in sewerage infrastructure and water reclamation plants to capture and treat used water is equally vital. The latter has helped to ensure that used water does not cause environmental pollution, while at the same time increasing the total water stock. In the context of the Mekong, investments in used water infrastructure, coupled with enactment and enforcement of anti-pollution legislation to tackle illegal trade effluent discharge and improper use of fertilisers, can help to address water quality challenges.

10. The private sector is part of the solution. By promoting Public-Private-Partnerships, ASEAN can leverage private sector expertise and funding for water infrastructural projects. Global water companies like Suez and Veolia have invested in regional water supply, water treatment and wastewater management projects. The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank are also active in the region, supporting numerous water projects across ASEAN through financial support, technical assistance and policy advice. Singapore and the World Bank partnered each other to establish the Singapore Water Centre in June. It will serve as a knowledge hub in water management, ranging from water policies to technological and innovative practices for the water sector. ASEAN is welcome to leverage this valuable resource to enhance our water security.

11. **Third, developing human capital is essential for our common prosperity.** We established the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) in 1992, where Singapore offers technical assistance to other developing countries, as a way for us to pay it forward for the assistance Singapore had received from the international community and multilateral organisations. Over the past three decades, we have welcomed more than 150,000 government officials from around the world.

12. Singapore also launched the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) during its ASEAN Chairmanship in 2000 in order to coordinate ASEAN's efforts to narrow the development gap within the region and to accelerate regional

integration. Under the IAI, Singapore has established training centres here in Vientiane, Phnom Penh, Yangon and Hanoi. We welcome ASEAN countries to leverage these training centres to build capacity in water management, policy development and technology use.

13. In conclusion, I would like to commend the MRC for its efforts in coordinating sustainable water management initiatives in the Mekong Basin. In this regard, ASEAN has an interest in the stability of the Mekong Basin and to support the MRC through regional cooperation to address transboundary water issues, the sharing of experiences, and finding common ground on water management strategies.

14. As MRC CEO Anoulak Kittikhoun had said in a recent interview, the Mekong “must remain a symbol of peace, prosperity and friendship among its riparian nations”.

15. Singapore looks forward to working with fellow ASEAN Member States to develop a resilient and water-secure Mekong and ASEAN. Thank you very much, *khop chai lai lai*.