



Opening Remarks by

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Chairperson of the Lao National Mekong Committee

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2nd ASEAN-MRC Water Security Dialogue:

*Sustainable Investment for a Connected, Resilient, and
Water-secure*

Southeast Asia

18 September 2024, Vientiane, Lao PDR

- **His Excellency Mr. Saleumxay Kommasith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR**
- **Your Excellencies Ministers, Vice Ministers**
- **Distinguished Delegates, Ladies, and Gentlemen,**

ສະບາຍດີ, Good morning

It is my great pleasure and honor, on behalf of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Lao PDR and the Council of the Mekong River Commission, to welcome you all to the 2nd ASEAN-MRC Water Security Dialogue here in Vientiane, the heart of the Mekong.

This dialogue provides a platform for policymakers and stakeholders to exchange innovative ideas, identify possible areas for enhancing cooperation toward sustainability, and reaffirm our dedication to tackling water security challenges in the Mekong and ASEAN regions.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

ASEAN and MRC have a common goal and share commitment to achieving the objectives of the 1995 Mekong Agreement and ASEAN's vision for water security by 2025 through strengthened cooperation and coordination.

The 1995 Mekong Agreement laid the foundation for cooperation in the sustainable development, management, and conservation of the Mekong River and its related resources. It underscores the shared responsibility we hold in ensuring that the Mekong River continues to nourish our people, support our economies and trade, provide tourism, and preserve the ecological balance of our region.

The Mekong River is a source of immense opportunities for our nations. It is a critical source of energy—primarily hydropower and more recently solar, wind and pumped storage—that sustains our countries’ development. Beyond its role in energy production, the river and its basin support millions of livelihoods through agriculture, fisheries, and transportation. This great potential is an irreplaceable value to our region.

This Dialogue, under the theme **“Sustainable Investment for a Connected, Resilient, and Water-secure Southeast Asia,”** resonates deeply with the strategic priorities outlined in the Mekong Basin Development Strategy. Especially, Strategic Priority #4—Strengthening resilience against climate risks, extreme floods, and droughts—is central to our discussions today, as it directly affects the livelihoods and security of millions in the region.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Mekong River Commission has been at the forefront of this cooperation, working tirelessly to safeguard the health of the Mekong, monitor and forecast river conditions, support climate adaptation through the Mekong Climate Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan, and engage with our youth—the future stewards of our resources. Both the Mekong and ASEAN regions are highly vulnerable to climate-related disasters, with increasingly frequent typhoons and extreme weather events due to climate change. The resulting disasters—from floods to droughts—pose significant risks to our region.

At present, many countries in the Mekong and ASEAN regions are already experiencing flood-related disasters.

Initiatives such as the ASEAN-MRC Technology Competition and the development of the One Mekong Mobile App exemplify how we are engaging youth and communities. These initiatives also showcase how technology and innovation can help address our region's growing challenges, from water management to climate adaptation.

Moreover, our efforts in river monitoring and forecasting have become increasingly critical in these times of unpredictable climate patterns.

In 2023 alone, our advanced monitoring systems, which are also used by the ASEAN Humanitarian Action Centre, issued early warning notifications to protect more than 3 million people from floods and droughts, safeguarding lives and livelihoods.

As we move into 2024, the Mekong region is once again facing a devastating flood, which highlights the urgency of our ongoing efforts to enhance disaster preparedness and resilience across the region

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

ASEAN and MRC have great potential for cooperation. To fully unlock the potential of the Mekong River and ASEAN, we must also enhance the region's connectivity. Whether in terms of infrastructure, data sharing, or cross-border collaboration, strengthening connectivity within the Mekong region and between the Mekong and the rest of ASEAN is critical for fostering economic integration, resilience, and sustainable development. A more connected Mekong means more opportunities for trade, energy sharing, disaster response, and environmental protection—all of which are key to achieving long-term water security.

It is essential to emphasize that our achievement would not be possible without the unwavering support of our Member Countries and various partners. Their cooperation has solidified the MRC's role as the primary water diplomacy platform for the Mekong and a regional knowledge hub. While external support has been crucial, we must also recognize the value of homegrown solutions. This is where ASEAN cooperation and South-South Cooperation—which is basically the sharing of resources, technology, and knowledge between developing countries—play an essential role, providing us with avenues to strengthen partnerships, leverage regional expertise, and develop solutions tailored to our specific challenges.

In this context, I am confident that if all ASEAN Member States invest more—not just in infrastructure, but also in knowledge, technology, and human resources. we can create a more connected and resilient Mekong region, capable of navigating the complex challenges of climate change, water security, and sustainable development.

Enhancing connectivity will allow us to harness the full benefits of the Mekong River, ensuring that its resources are shared equitably and responsibly across the region.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Thank you for honoring us with your participation. I very much look forward to hearing your statements and views on how the Mekong region can become more water secure and what the MRC and ASEAN can do together to make that happen.

May I now declare the 2nd ASEAN-MRC Water Security Dialogue officially opened.

Thank you very much.