



**Welcome Remarks by
H.E. Saleumxay Kommasith
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR**

2nd ASEAN-MRC Water Security Dialogue:
*Sustainable Investment for a Connected, Resilient, and Water-secure Southeast
Asia*

18 September 2024, Vientiane, Lao PDR

- ***H.E. Bounkham Vorachit, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Lao PDR, Chairperson of the Lao National Mekong Committee, Chairperson of the MRC Council for 2024,***
- ***Ministers, Vice Ministers,***
- ***Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies, and Gentlemen,***

On behalf of the Government of Lao PDR and as Chair of ASEAN for 2024, I would like to extend my warmest welcome to Vientiane Capital and to the 2nd ASEAN-MRC Water Security Dialogue being held here today. It gives us an honor to host this important and timely dialogue as we are united by a shared commitment to the future of the Mekong and Southeast Asia as well as ASEAN as a whole.

This year, under Lao PDR's Chairmanship, ASEAN has embraced the theme of "ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience." This theme reflects our collective aspiration to build a region that is not only seamlessly connected, but also resilient to the challenges that we face because connectivity and resilience are the twin pillars upon which our future rests. As we can all agree that water is the bloodline of our people and the Mekong is our main artery. It is the foundation of our societies, cultures, histories and economies. In addition, it is a critical element in connecting our whole region together physically and institutionally.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Lao PDR is very fortunate to be located at the heart of the Southeast Asia. As a land-locked country, Lao PDR has an aspiration to become a bridge between the diverse and dynamic economies of the region. Our rivers, especially the Mekong, have great potentials to support food production, energy generation, tourism and trade. Currently, the Mekong River contributes significantly to the region's food security, providing over 2.6 million tons of fish annually and feeding millions across the basin.

Despite all the great benefit our region has been enjoying from the plentiful water resources, climate change, rapid development and population growth are putting increased pressure on our rivers and environment. In this context, we need to join forces in strengthen our coordination and collaboration to balance economic growth and environmental challenges. The Lao government is highly committed to the global climate agenda and ASEAN climate actions and stands ready to work closely with all partners in building resilience against climate change-induced natural disasters namely floods and droughts. We are of the view that cooperation and sustainable development within the Mekong and beyond is key to a sustainable utilization and management of water resources. Therefore, a prior consultation process on hydropower and other projects along the Mekong has been the core mechanism for MRC's members to openly share data, information and early notification among members.

As we are facing current high-level rise of water across the region caused by continuation of heavy rainfalls and Tropical Storm such as Typhoon Yagi has flooded many villages and cities damaging many of our people's lives, properties and agricultural produces. As we gather here today, thousands of people from countries across Mekong basin such as Vietnam, China, Myanmar, Thailand and Laos are battling with. These phenomena call for an urgent need for water security and better preventive actions in response to disasters risk management, early warning mechanisms as well as preparedness. Against this backdrop, the ASEAN-MRC partnership must play a central role in supporting disaster preparedness and sustainable water governance to protect our communities and economies from such threats.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

The ASEAN-MRC Water Security Dialogue has the potential to become a cornerstone of our regional efforts in fostering collaboration not only among the Mekong countries, but also across all ASEAN Member States. This dialogue will help build partnerships, forge new pathways for investment, and ensure that our shared resources are managed sustainably and equitably for the benefit of all. The presence of water and environment ministers or their senior representatives from all 10 ASEAN countries as well as dialogue partners and development partners here today not only underscore the importance of this dialogue but it also reflects the shared commitment for us to protect and preserve our rivers for future generations.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Once again, I extend my heartfelt thanks to all of you for your participation and allow me to take this opportunity to commend all members of the organizing committee for the preparation and organization of this important dialogue.

Let us continue to work together towards a more connected, resilient, and water-secure ASEAN.

Finally, I wish you all good health, happiness, enjoyable stay and successful deliberations.

Thank you.