

Mekong River Commission (MRC)

MRC Hua Hin Declaration

“Meeting the Needs, Keeping the Balance: Towards Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin”

5 April 2010

Preamble

We, the Heads of the Governments of the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, meet in Hua Hin, Thailand for the First Summit of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) on the occasion of its 15th Anniversary.

We recall the signing on 5 April 1995 of the *Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin* (herein referred to as the Mekong Agreement) and the establishment of the MRC by the representatives of the Lower Mekong Basin Governments, and reaffirmed our political commitment to its implementation;

We recognise that the sustainable management of water resources in the Mekong River Basin is crucial to the economic and social well-being of the riparian population and to the poverty alleviation efforts of Basin governments;

We note that accelerating the development of water and related resources will make a significant contribution to the socio-economic development of the region, but may also have negative impacts on the Basin environment that need to be fully addressed; and

We affirm our strong and continued commitment to cooperate and promote the sustainable development, utilisation, conservation and management of the water and related resources of the Mekong River Basin and agree to the following statements.

Recognition of achievements

We, the Heads of Government, recognise that the institutional development of the MRC has advanced from its inception as the United Nations based *Mekong Committee* and *Interim Mekong Committee* to the independent knowledge-based inter-governmental River Basin Organisation of today. An increasing level of ownership of the organisation by Member Countries has led to a strengthening of cooperative governance and increased effectiveness over time.

We applaud the significant achievements of cooperation among Member Countries in the 15 years since the signing of the Mekong Agreement.

We are encouraged by the achievements of the MRC and its Member Countries through our joint efforts in implementation of the Mekong Agreement that include strengthening dialogue on regional water resources development; facilitating a Basin-wide, consultative planning process through an Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) approach; reducing the risks of regular flooding and promoting the beneficial effects of the annual flood pulse; increasing international trade opportunities through safer and more effective river transport and legal frameworks for cross-border navigation; defining a balance between the opportunities and risks of proposed hydropower projects; an enhanced understanding of the Basin's aquatic biodiversity and fisheries; providing environmental decision support; and initiating a process to help the people of the Basin adapt to the consequences of climate change.

Over the past fifteen years, the water and related resources of the Basin have been protected through the effective environmental governance of MRC and its Member Countries. Mekong partners and stakeholders now know and understand more about this complex and productive river system. We note with appreciation these positive outcomes that have come about through a strong sense of regional cooperation and continued national capacity building among the Member Countries.

We acknowledge the progress made to extend cooperation between the MRC and international, regional and local partners including MRC's Dialogue Partners, namely the People's Republic of China and the Union of Myanmar, and its Development Partners. The sharing of hydro-meteorological data by People's Republic of China in the current drought situation is highly appreciated and we hope the cooperation will be continued. We appreciate the efforts of MRC to further strengthen and expand its relationships with People's Republic of China, Myanmar and all MRC partners in pursuing the organisations' development goals.

We note that the MRC has forged new alliances and working relationships with a range of international organisations including ASEAN, the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank to further promote the sustainable development and management of the Mekong Basin's water resources.

We welcome and appreciate the continued and extensive strategic, financial and technical support from MRC's Development Partners over the years which has allowed the MRC to successfully implement the Mekong Agreement and become a more effective organisation.

We acknowledge with appreciation the outcome of the *International Conference on Transboundary Water Resources Management in a Changing World* held prior to the First MRC Summit as reflected in the Conference Summary.

Regional opportunities and challenges

We, the Heads of Government, acknowledge that there are both opportunities and challenges to be faced by the MRC over the next decade as a result of development pressures including expanding populations and rapid economic growth. We commit to cooperate further to tackle critical emerging challenges in the Mekong Basin that include: reducing the loss of life and assets at risk from flooding and loss of livelihoods from drought conditions; better integrating sustainability considerations into the development of the Basin's significant hydropower potential; ensuring effective management of water for agricultural production, particularly as part of drought management strategies; preparing for climate change adaptation measures to minimise poverty and food insecurity among vulnerable communities; minimising any deterioration of water quality, loss of wetlands and deforestation, which present risks to biodiversity and peoples' livelihoods; better managing the Basin's unique natural fisheries; and reducing the risks associated with expansion of river transport.

Building on the solid foundation of 15 years of capacity building, we encourage MRC to address these challenges through the preparation and implementation of the IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy and the forthcoming MRC Strategic Plan for 2011-2015. We note that significant opportunities exist through intensifying partnerships and relationships with an increasing range of Partners, including ASEAN, the ADB, the GMS, the World Bank and other transboundary river basin organisations. We confirm that the continued focus of MRC on active stakeholder participation with a range of civil society organizations and the private sector will strengthen its ability to meet its development goals.

Vision of the MRC

We, the Heads of Government, note:

- The existing Vision of the Mekong River Basin as “An economically prosperous, socially just and environmentally sound Mekong River Basin”;
- The Vision for the MRC as “A world class, financially secure, International River Basin Organisation serving the Mekong countries to achieve the Basin Vision”; and
- The Mission of the Mekong River Commission, “To promote and coordinate sustainable management and development of water and related resources for the countries' mutual benefit and the people's well-being.”

We resolve to enhance efforts to realize these goals through a broad consultative approach that feeds into and influences MRC's strategic directions and ensures continued relevance of the MRC for future generations.

Priority Areas of Action

We, the Heads of Government, pronounce that building on the achievements of fifteen years of implementation of the Mekong Agreement, further cooperation over the coming years between the governments of Member Countries will be required to optimise multiple-use of water resources and mutual benefits for all riparians, to avoid any harmful effect that might result from natural occurrences and man-made activities and to protect the immense value of natural ecosystems and ecological balance.

We expect the MRC to focus on and prioritise:

- Adopting and implementing the IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy;
- Intensifying efforts to effectively manage the risk from flood, drought and sea level rise including establishment of forecasting and warning systems across the whole basin;
- Facilitating an international legal framework that encourages river navigation and trade;
- Researching and addressing the threat to livelihoods posed by climate change and cooperating with other regional partners in addressing haze pollution;
- Monitoring and taking measures to improve water quality in priority areas of the Basin;
- Sustaining the existing and future uses of water and related resources, and aquatic biodiversity, wetlands and forests in the Basin;
- Identifying and advising on the opportunities and challenges of hydropower and other infrastructure development in the Basin, especially risks as they pertain to the protection of food security and livelihoods;
- Continuing to improve the implementation of the Procedures for Data and Information Exchange and Sharing, the Procedures for Water Use Monitoring, the Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement and the Procedures for Maintenance of Flows on the Mainstream and finalise the Procedures for Water Quality;
- Exploring and identifying opportunities for expansion of cooperation between the organisation's current Dialogue Partners and Development Partners, in particular to address common water resources and climate change challenges, as well as identifying new Development Partners and other stakeholders.

Way ahead

We, the Heads of Government, reaffirm our solidarity and the highest level of political commitment to the implementation of the Mekong Agreement.

We commit to working together to achieve sustainable integrated water resources management for sustainable development, economic growth and the alleviation of poverty and improvement of livelihoods in the Mekong River Basin. In parallel, we recognise that efforts need to be expanded to protect the natural resources of

the Mekong Basin for the sustainable management and use of the Basin's resources.

We reiterate our support for the MRC's role in promoting and facilitating coordinated and sustainable development; enhancing and strengthening the working relationships with Dialogue Partners, ASEAN, the GMS, the ADB, the World Bank, other Development Partners, civil society, the private sector and others. In this connection, we welcome and call other Riparian States to join the MRC at an early stage for the sustainable development in the Mekong River Basin.

Consistent with the Initiative for ASEAN Integration, we emphasise the need to prioritise resources, funding and capacity building for those Member Countries where poverty is highest and economic need is most urgent.

Recognising that economic development is progressing in the Mekong Region, we commit to a vision for the MRC to be financially sustained by Member Countries by 2030. We refer to institutional models adopted by other international river basin organisations and encourage the MRC to increasingly explore de-centralised implementation modalities for its core river basin management functions.

We agree that progress made in implementing the resolutions of this Declaration will be monitored through the MRC Council. We decide that a MRC Summit will be convened every four years. The host country will rotate among the MRC Member Countries in alphabetical order.

We express our sincere appreciation to the host country, Thailand, for hosting the First MRC Summit.

ADOPTED at Hua Hin, Thailand on 5 April 2010 in the English Language.