



**Opening Remark By
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**International Dialogue on Water, Happiness and Conscious Cooperation for the
Peaceful and Prosperous Mekong River Basin
Monday, 21 March 2022, 14h00 – 16h00, Bangkok time**

Good afternoon
Distinguished delegates and colleagues

On behalf of the Mekong River Commission, it gives me the great pleasure to deliver an opening address for this International Dialogue on “Water, Happiness and Conscious Cooperation for the Peaceful and Prosperous Mekong River Basin.” We gather to celebrate two important days: the International Day of Happiness '20 Mar 2022' and the World Water Day '22 Mar 2022'. I congratulate the organizers for choosing today to bridge the happiness of yesterday for a water secured world of tomorrow.

I would like to highlight three points:

First, there is a clear link between water, river and happiness.

The Mekong River is a heart and soul of communities living along it. The river is not only a source of food, income, and livelihood, but also an origin of culture, history and way of life. Looking at a larger picture, the Mekong is a hub of trade, and economic activities. These are essential to national development which link to better living standards and people’s wellbeing.

It goes without saying that the Mekong is lifeline river which has both economic and sentimental value bringing happiness and enhancing wellbeing for the people, communities and riparian countries. When we see the river in good health, we are happy. When we see it in a dire state, we are certainly not.

Second, responsible development and collective efforts are urgently needed to ensure that the Mekong River can continue to support economies, livelihoods and continue bringing happiness to the people.

The MRC has worked hard over the past decades to keep a balance between development and protection. We do this through our Strategies, Plans, Procedures and Guidelines. The MRC 10-year Basin Development Strategy 2021-2030 recognizes that pressure on the environment is increasing, the basin's climate is changing, and despite rapid economic growth, significant inequalities between different groups in the society continue to exist.

The BDS – as a collective vision for the entire Basin – focuses on five strategic priorities. They span across **environment, social, economic, climate change and cooperation** dimensions. Each of these areas reinforces and supports the other strategic priorities.

The Strategy also encourages a move from **reactive regional planning** to **more proactive regional planning**, which aims to identify new, positive solutions that basin countries have not previously considered.

It also shifting a focus from **uncoordinated** to **coordinated basin operation management**. This is to ensure that decisions on flow releases and restrictions are supported by transparent data and information sharing between countries, and that operational decisions are made to help achieve multiple benefits for multiple countries, and for multiple purposes – including for energy, food and environmental security and to mitigate the effects of severe floods and droughts.

For the new strategy to succeed, it calls for bolder leadership and far-reaching collective action, based on trust, good faith and enhanced cooperation among all the Basin countries and all relevant stakeholders.

My third and final point is that water diplomacy and regional cooperation are key solutions for a peaceful and prosperous Mekong.

As the international treaty-based river basin organization, the MRC will further enhance its role as water diplomacy platform and find innovative mechanisms to ensure that Member Countries and relevant stakeholders are able to find common understanding and common solutions on their concerned issues in a peaceful and effective manner, despite conflicting views and different interests.

Addressing transboundary pressures, particularly hydropower and other large-scale developments have always been challenging. But I believe that through water diplomacy platform and open and constructive dialogue with all relevant stakeholders whether it is government representatives, private sector actors, development partners, researchers, NGOs and civil society organizations, common grounds can be found.

Colleagues and friends,

The Mekong is a great river on every scale. It is not only important for its basin citizens but it is also important for the world as a great river. Protecting the whole River System is our joint responsibility, in order to ensure that the Mekong River can continue to support livelihoods and remain a beacon of peace and responsible development, in the region and an inspiration for all.

Thank you very much for your attention!