



Opening Statement
by
H.E. Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva
Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand
At the First MRC Summit
5 April 2010, Grand Ballroom, Hyatt Regency Hua Hin
Hua Hin, Thailand

**Prime Minister Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen of
the Kingdom of Cambodia,**

**Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh of the Lao People's
Democratic Republic,**

**Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung of the Socialist Republic of Viet
Nam,**

**Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Union of Myanmar, Mr. U Nyan
Win,**

**Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China,
Mr. Song Tao,**

**Distinguished representatives of Development Partners and MRC
Observers,**

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is a great honour for me to welcome you to the Kingdom of Thailand and to Hua Hin today for the First Mekong River Commission Summit. For some of you who have been here before, Hua Hin needs no further introduction. But to those of you who are here for the first time, I would like to confirm that Hua Hin is a quaint little seaside resort town

which has much to offer. It is well-known for its beautiful beaches and exceptionally warm hospitality. And for many years now, Hua Hin has been a town where Their Majesties the King and Queen of Thailand reside for most of the year. And with the success of the hosting of ASEAN Summits and related meetings last year, Hua Hin has also gained its popularity as a venue for international conferences. I am confident that Hua Hin would like to welcome many of you back for further conferences in the future.

2. As we know, the Mekong River is one of the largest rivers in the world. It has been a lifeline for more than 60 million people who live along this great river and live off its rich natural resources from time immemorial. But without good and careful management of the Mekong River as well as its natural resources, this great river will not survive; neither will its riparian dwellers or the marine inhabitants.

3. Ideas and initiatives for cooperation and joint management of the Mekong River and its natural resources go back at least more than half a century – to the establishment of the Mekong Committee under the United Nations in the late 1950's. And fifteen years ago today, a formal commitment to effective joint water management came about with four Mekong riparian states signing the Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin. The Agreement has emphasized the benefit sharing of the Mekong River, which seriously involves the four riparian states in shared responsibilities for the destiny of this international water. Now, along with countries outside the region, such as the United States and Japan, two other riparian states, namely the People's Republic of China and the Union of Myanmar, have also stepped in, sharing their interest in both the protection and joint management of the Mekong River.

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

4. The Summit today is in itself a historic occasion. It has drawn the Heads of Government of the four member countries of the MRC – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Viet Nam and Thailand – to officially meet under this particular framework for the first time. It has also brought two other riparian states – the People’s Republic of China and the Union of Myanmar – as well as our Development Partners and Observers into the picture. This Summit is sending a strong message that all countries in the Mekong River basin – in both its upper and lower parts – are stakeholders. And we all have to take joint responsibility for its long-term sustainability for the present as well as future generations.

5. Indeed, when I say “we all have to take joint responsibility”, it is not just limited to the government. The private sectors and civil society also need to play their role, for they are an integral part of our common quest to ensure the sustainable future of the Mekong River. In this regard, I commend the organisation of the Pre-Summit International Conference on “*Transboundary Water Resources Management in a Changing World*”, which has sent a strong message to all of us that our economic, social and environmental prosperity depends on how we protect and share the benefits of our common water resources through cooperative mechanisms.

6. The meeting at the Heads of Government level underscores the increased importance and urgency for joint and sustainable management of our water resources. It also serves as an important wake-up call that the problems and challenges being faced by the Mekong River and its riparian states need to be addressed at the highest level. And such high-level cooperation could not have come at a better time, because now the Mekong River is being threatened by serious problems arising from both the unsustainable use of water and the effects of climate change. What we see today is thus the decrease in the water level and shortage of water supply, pollution, and depletion of natural resources in the Mekong River itself. Beyond the river banks, the riparian countries are also facing other pressing effects of climate change such as unpredictable changes in the climatic patterns, flash floods, severe droughts and widespread of fires and the accumulation of the smoke-haze pollution. All these phenomena have adversely affected people’s health and livelihoods, damaged crops and property, and threatened the extinction of countless marine species. Surely no one country can deal with such problems alone; we need active

cooperation to overcome them and to prevent them from turning into a new regional crisis.

7. Transboundary cooperation is vital when a resource is shared by more than one country, as is the case in the Mekong Region. Sharing knowledge and data is among the crucial measures to mitigate problems such as those mentioned earlier in each country as well as helping alleviate poverty in the region as a whole. Responding to this concern, the Ministry of Water Resources of the People's Republic of China has decided to provide the MRC Secretariat with hydrological data of Jinghong (จังหวัด) and Manan (หม่านอัน) stations in Yunnan Province to facilitate drought disaster relief of the downstream countries during this year's drought. On behalf of the Member Countries, I would like to thank the Chinese Government for this valuable cooperation, which provides us with a good opportunity to engage in truly region-wide cooperative efforts. I also hope that such genuine effort of cooperation would become more regular and set an example for the others to follow in the future.

8. Thailand is ready to cooperate in every way possible to support the MRC. Indeed, with its importance growing with the increase in the challenges it has to address, the MRC should be further developed to become a world class international river organisation with professional riparian staff, so that it can fully realise its vision and mission. And in the long run, the management of the Mekong River could provide an example for other international waters.

9. Over the years, we have actually seen expanded cooperation in the wider regional as well as sub-regional frameworks. ASEAN, the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), and the wider community of MRC Development Partners, in particular, have played a key role in promoting dialogue and integration in the Mekong Region. It is imperative that these initiatives and cooperative networks complement each other and move in unison, just like the Mekong River that flows in one direction.

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

10. As I said earlier, Hua Hin was a venue for two most recent ASEAN Summits. It is befitting to remind us that the Mekong River is also the vein that runs through ASEAN, providing the essential link binding the ASEAN countries together by enhancing ASEAN's connectivity – not only physically but also with a growing collaborative spirit. The Mekong River, therefore, should not be seen as a river that divides ASEAN member countries. Rather, it should be seen as a river where traditions and cultures as well as the common strive for developmental progress and prosperity converge.

11. Of course, we recognise that it takes time and serious efforts of all of us to achieve our ultimate goal of prosperous and sustainable Mekong River basin. But if we work together, I am confident that we will be able to steer our course successfully through the meandering bends of the Mekong River and existing challenges and reach a common destination.

12. With conviction and determination to take up this future challenge and realize the full potential of the organization, I declare the First MRC Summit open.

13. Thank you. Sawasdee krub.
