

Statement of the Development Partners to the Mekong River Commission

**At the occasion of the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Mekong River Commission**

5 April 2023, Vientiane, Lao PDR

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

- 1) Development Partners (DPs) highly appreciate the invitation to this 4<sup>th</sup> Mekong Summit and are pleased to take the opportunity to exchange views with the leaders of the MRC Member Countries. DPs congratulate the MRC and the Government of Lao PDR on the successful organization of this event, together with the international conference, in Vientiane Capital.
- 2) DPs recognize the **invaluable importance of the Mekong River Basin** as a globally unique ecosystem and a hotspot of freshwater biodiversity, which contributes to the lives and livelihoods of more than 70 million people. We see the Mekong River Basin as a source of natural and cultural heritage and, in the context of post-**COVID-19 recovery**, as a source of inclusive socioeconomic development that can contribute to poverty eradication for the entire region.
- 3) A meeting at this **high political level** demonstrates MRC Member Countries' commitment to cooperation over their shared water and related resources. DPs acknowledge this in times of a changing climate and rapid infrastructure development when multiple challenges lie ahead. That can only be addressed through dialogue and cooperation.
- 4) DPs note the timely organization of the Summit not only for the Mekong River Basin but also for the international community. DPs welcome this platform as a means to **follow up on the commitments** made at UNFCCC COP27 on Climate Change, and CBD COP15 on the Global Biodiversity Framework.
- 5) At the mid-point of the International Decade for Action for "Water for Sustainable Development (2018-2028)", the recently concluded **2023 UN Water Conference** in New York highlighted the need for strengthened cooperation over shared water resources so that stakeholders have equitable access to provided benefits. The Interactive Dialogue "Water for Cooperation", co-chaired by Switzerland and Senegal, pointed out that water cooperation across borders and sectors generates benefits that accelerate progress across Sustainable Development Goals. Various commitments of states and basin organisations during the conference confirmed the importance of transboundary cooperation and integrated basin management.
- 6) In this context, DPs welcome the focus of the MRC **International Conference** on "Innovation and Cooperation for a water secure and sustainable Mekong". Cooperation in times of multiple crises – from climate change to declining biodiversity and food insecurity – requires innovative approaches to ensure that shared water and related resources are managed in a sustainable, cooperative and inclusive manner.
- 7) We saw exciting and innovative **approaches to water cooperation** which could enhance MRC's work in the future, such as artificial intelligence tools that can now be used to improve flood forecasting; online systems and networks can foster citizen science for

collecting local data of transboundary relevance; and earth observation tools can give countries a better understanding of the impacts of different water uses.

8) In the context of global climate commitments and energy transition and noting advances in solar, floating solar, wind, pumped storage hydropower and grid integration technologies, DPs call upon the MRC Member countries to consider **all sources of renewable energies for the most inclusive and sustainable energy mix**. This should support national and regional energy planning and investment processes to maximise sustainable energy opportunities, and minimize risks to the Mekong's health and productivity.

Excellencies,

9) Mekong cooperation and the MRC have been an inspiration **for transboundary water cooperation** in other parts of the world. The multiple visits of delegates from other basins and basin organizations during the past years and during the International Conference, underline this as much as the presence of the MRC in international events and discourses.

10) DPs congratulate the MRC on its **achievements since the last Summit**, such as the MRC's Basin Development Strategy 2021-2030 and the MRC Strategic Plan 2021-2025, which provide a comprehensive framework for the sustainable management of the basin for the benefit of people, economies and ecosystems.

11) DPs in particular welcome the finalisation and publication of the **Transboundary Environmental Impact Assessment (TbEIA) guidelines** and their first application to the Sekong A Dam; and the **updated Preliminary Design Guidance for Mainstream Dams**, which should guide all projects on the Mekong mainstream. DPs encourage MRC Members Countries to continue improving the implementation of the MRC Procedures overall.

12) We welcome MRC's strengthened **engagement with other regional mechanisms**, including ASEAN, ACMECS and international basin organizations to improve water resources management throughout the entire Mekong River Basin.

13) As we have heard during the excellent MRC International Conference, **challenges remain** for the basin and new ones are emerging. DPs would like to share some thoughts on the future of Mekong cooperation under the MRC and the urgent need to redouble our efforts:

a. The objectives of the **2030 Sustainable Development Agenda**, including poverty eradication, the promotion of gender equality, social inclusion and the protection of the most vulnerable groups are central to Mekong cooperation and should be mainstreamed in all MRC plans and activities.

b. This depends upon the effective implementation of the **1995 Mekong Agreement** and its respective Procedures and guidelines which provides the framework for an economically prosperous, socially just, environmentally sound and climate resilient Mekong River Basin.

c. In this context, DPs encourage meaningful **civil society engagement** and access to quality and timely information to support inclusive and sustainable development.

d. DPs acknowledge the work done on **pro-active regional planning** to enhance integrated and sustainable basin planning and management. DPs note the importance of maintaining the ecological integrity of the Mekong and its tributaries to protect and maintain the region's agricultural and fisheries productivity and resilience to climate change.

e. Pro-active regional planning will depend upon the systematic application of **jointly decided principles and guidelines** that ensure the equitable and reasonable utilisation of shared resources and the prevention of harm from infrastructure development. DPs encourage their implementation and application at all levels and in all MRC Member Countries.

f. Current and future **flood and drought** risks will continue to be a challenge. Effective preparedness and management of flood and drought risks by the MRC and its Member Countries will be important to protect communities. Innovative technologies can help with flood and drought projections, forecasting and early warning, and should be implemented.

g. Data and information is crucial for the sustainable management of shared water resources. As such, it is important to continually strengthen **the exchange of data and information among MRC Member Countries, with upstream riparian states and with stakeholders** from the private sector, academia and civil society. This includes enhancing the collaboration between the MRC and China, especially through the MRC-LMC Water Centre Joint Study, aimed at better understanding the river's flow regime and enabling people in riparian states to adapt.

14) In light of these issues, DPs remain steadfast in our commitment to work alongside the MRC and the Member Countries to help the region deliver on the shared vision for the Mekong River Basin.

15) DPs acknowledge the progress towards **MRC's self-financing by 2030** thanks to MRC Members Countries commitments. DPs remain **committed to supporting Mekong cooperation**, such as through the different mechanisms of the MRC and considering innovative funding and financing mechanisms, including the proposed Mekong Fund.

16) Once again, DPs thank the MRC and Member Countries for this opportunity to share our views. DPs congratulate the MRC and the Government of Lao PDR for the successful organization of the International Conference and the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of the MRC.

I have to react to the reference made by one delegate to policies of certain countries:

- *DPs remain concerned that the worsening political, economic, and humanitarian crisis in Myanmar has negatively impacted efforts to advance Mekong cooperation. The Myanmar military's ongoing violence has exacerbated the conflict within the country and fuelled greater instability in the Mekong region. Consistent with UNSC Res 2669, DPs call for the immediate end to violence throughout the country and urge the Myanmar military to respect human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law.*

- *DPs urge the Myanmar military to immediately release all those arbitrarily detained, to engage with all stakeholders in pursuit of a resolution to the crisis, and to fully and swiftly implement the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus. DPs reiterate their support for ASEAN's resolute efforts to support a peaceful resolution in the interests of the people of Myanmar.*

This statement is endorsed by the following MRC Development Partners

- Australia
- The European Union
- Flanders/Belgium
- France
- Germany
- Japan
- Luxembourg
- New Zealand
- Switzerland
- Sweden
- The United States of America
- IUCN