

Opening Remarks by
H.E. Sonexay SIPHANDONE, Prime Minister of the Lao People's Democratic Republic
at the 4th Mekong River Commission Summit
5th April 2023

- *Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia,*
- *Excellency, Pham Minh Chinh, Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam,*
- *Dr. Surasi KITTIMONTON, Secretary-General of the Office of the National Water Resources of the Kingdom of Thailand,*
- *Mr. Li Guoying, Minister of Water Resources of the People's Republic of China,*
- *Mr. Hla Maung Thein (Director General for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, Republic of the Union of Myanmar,*
- *Representative of Development Partners,*
- *Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,*

At the outset, on behalf of the Government and people of the Lao PDR, I would like to extend my warmest welcome to all Head of Governments, Representatives from member countries of the Mekong River Commission, as well as Dialogue Partners, Development Partners, and other partners to Vientiane Capital City and to our 4th MRC Summit. I am very proud that the Lao PDR has the honor to host this Mekong River Commission Summit for the first time.

This MRC Summit being held today under the theme 'Innovation and Cooperation for a Water Secure and Sustainable Mekong' coincides with the 28th Anniversary of the establishment of the Mekong River Commission. It marks an important milestone and provides an excellent platform for the leaders of MRC member countries, as well as representatives of dialogue partners, development partners, and other partners to jointly discuss the development issues, including challenges and opportunities in the Mekong River Basin. It is also an opportunity for us to share ideas and knowledge on enhancing innovation and cooperation so as to actively contribute to sustainable management and development of the Mekong River Basin.

For its part, the Lao PDR has been actively implementing the Mekong Agreement, particularly in line with the role and mandate of the Mekong River Commission whose headquarter is located here in the Lao PDR. We highly value the progress and achievements made by the MRC Secretariat, under the MRC's CEO leadership over the past years. On this note, the Lao PDR is very proud of having its citizen Dr. Anoulak KITTIKHOUN to serve as the CEO of the Mekong River Commission for the first time. I hope that all member countries will continue to provide necessary support to the MRC Secretariat for implementing the Basin Development Strategy 2021-2030, as well as the procedures, relevant guidelines and the Vientiane Declaration, which will be adopted later today.

Excellencies, Ladies, and gentlemen,

As we are all well aware, the Mekong River is one of the largest rivers in the world with rich ecosystem and biodiversity which have been closely linked with the livelihoods of more than 60 million people who live within and utilize natural resources of this great river basin. The Mekong has long been the river of friendship, facilitating people-to-people contact, especially in terms of economic, social, and cultural exchanges among countries in the region. Therefore, we call upon all Mekong basin states to join hands in managing the Mekong River Basin based on the principle of mutual respect for sovereignty and shared benefit with the slogan **'One Mekong One Spirit'**.

In recent years, we have witnessed increasing impact of climate change, leading to more frequent and severe floods, drought, and extreme weather patterns. These have caused damage to the lives and properties of the people, as well as infrastructure.

To address the above mentioned challenges, the Lao PDR has actively worked with the MRC and other relevant partners to expand the hydro-meteorological stations network, and enhance flood and drought forecasting systems for minimizing disaster risks throughout the country.

The Lao PDR is of the view that it is essential to find innovative ways and means in line with the needs of our region in order to optimize the benefits from development while minimizing impacts on environment and vulnerable communities, particularly by promoting the use of innovation and effective cooperation mechanism for a water secure and sustainable Mekong.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the government of the Lao PDR and MRC member countries, to express my appreciation to the dialogue partners and development partners, and other relevant partners for your participation, and I look forward to a constructive deliberation and successful outcome of our Summit.

Now I officially declare open the 4th Mekong River Commission Summit from this moment onward.

Thank you.