

THE FIRST MEKONG RIVER COMMISSION SUMMIT

Hua Hin, Thailand

(Translation)

Work Together for Common Development

Remarks by H.E. Song Tao
Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China
At the 1st Summit of the Mekong River Commission
Hua Hin, Thailand, 5 April 2010

Your Excellency Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva,

Your Excellency Prime Minister Samdach Hun Sen,

Your Excellency Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh, Your Excellency Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to come to the beautiful Hua Hin for the 1st Summit of the Mekong River Commission (MRC). I would like to express thanks to the Thai Government for its thoughtful arrangements for the Summit. Let me begin by extending, on behalf of the Chinese Government, congratulations on the 15th anniversary of the MRC.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, China and ASEAN enjoy stronger political trust, expanding business cooperation, increased social and cultural exchanges, and closer communication and coordination in regional and global affairs. China was the first country outside the region to join the *Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia* and the first country to establish the strategic partnership for peace and prosperity with ASEAN, and China has become ASEAN's third largest trading partner. It is particularly worth mentioning that the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area, the largest among developing countries, was established last January. The China-ASEAN relationship has come a long way and faces important opportunities for further development.

The countries in the Mekong Sub-region are important ASEAN members and China's close neighbors and partners. China assigns high importance to and is actively involved in the sub-regional cooperation. In recent years, the sub-regional cooperation led by the GMS has been moving forward at a fast pace. Our extensive and in-depth cooperation with countries in the sub-region in infrastructure, agriculture, health, environmental protection, human resources

development, transport, trade facilitation and other areas has contributed to the economic and social development in the sub-region and improvement of its people's well-being. This cooperation is a major component of the good-neighborly and cooperative relations between China and ASEAN, and has served as a spearhead and model for the broader China-ASEAN cooperation. I am confident that, with further social and economic development of and closer integration among the countries in the sub-region, China included, our cooperation will have an even brighter future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Lancang-Mekong River is a valuable asset for the countries in the sub-region. The Chinese Government has been developing and making use of the water resources of the Lancang River in a scientific and reasonable manner. This is not only what's needed to help people in the region emerge from poverty, build a better life and promote social and economic development, but also an important step taken by the Chinese Government to vigorously develop renewable and clean energy and contribute to the global endeavor to counter climate change.

The Chinese Government is committed to achieving sustainable development and use of the Lancang River water resources. We lay equal emphasis on development and conservation and seek to serve the common interests of China and downstream countries. It is our belief that the sustainable development and use of the Lancang-Mekong River water resources and the ecological protection of the river basin not only meets the shared aspiration of the downstream countries, but also serves the fundamental interests of China.

The Chinese Government, in its reasonable, orderly and sustainable development and use of the Lancang River water resources, has fully accommodated the interests of downstream countries. As a matter of fact, throughout its hydropower development of the Lancang River, the Chinese Government has formulated scientific and thorough plans and acted in strict compliance with internationally prevailing environmental standards. Particularly, in response to the concerns of some downstream countries, we took many steps on our own initiative to protect the environment. Some actions even came at the expense of hydropower development. The initiatives we took in this regard include the following.

To avoid impact on fish migration, we cancelled the Mengsong hydropower plant project on the Lancang River; to prevent abnormal downstream water level fluctuations caused by power plant operation, we plan to build the Ganlanba counter-regulation reservoir; and in order not to affect the water temperature of the Lancang River, we set aside RMB200 million yuan for the stratified water intake project in the Nuozhadu hydropower plant construction plan. Substantial scientific survey and research has suggested that China's ongoing hydropower development of the Lancang River has little impact on the water amount and environment of the Lancang River and the lower reaches. Quite the contrary, by way of the regulating effect of the water dams, hydropower development of the Lancang River can improve navigation conditions and help with flood prevention, drought relief and farmland irrigation of the lower reaches.

Recently, as a result of extremely dry weather conditions rarely seen in history, the Lancang-

Mekong River Basin has seen its water inflow drop to an extraordinarily low level, and the water level of the mainstream has declined sharply. Statistics show that the recent drought that hit the whole river basin is attributable to the extreme dry weather, and the water level decline of the Mekong River has nothing to do with the hydropower development of the Lancang River. China itself is also a victim of the present severe drought. The MRC Secretariat has given an objective explanation of the situation. As we speak, southwest China and the rest of the river basin are faced with daunting challenges in drought relief. We feel the same way as the downstream countries. To help them more effectively battle the drought and mitigate disaster, the Chinese Government has decided to provide the MRC with the dry season hydrological data of the Yunjinghong and Man'an hydrometric stations during extremely dry periods this year. We have started this work and hope that it can help the downstream countries overcome the difficulties brought by the drought at an early date.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The MRC is an important mechanism of sub-regional cooperation. It is also the most important international river basin organization in this region. Since its establishment 15 years ago, the MRC has played a significant role in coordinating the efforts of its members for integrated development, utilization and conservation of the Mekong River Basin water resources and promoting exchanges and cooperation between the member countries, dialogue partners and development partners. China places importance on its relations with the MRC. We established the dialogue partnership with the commission in the following year of its inauguration, and have held 14 rounds of dialogue with the commission on a continuous basis. The past 14 years has seen stronger mutual understanding and trust, and deepened practical cooperation between the two sides. Since 2003, China has provided the MRC with the flood season hydrological data of the Lancang River for seven straight years, contributing its share to the flood control and disaster mitigation and to the protection of life and property in the downstream countries. Bilateral cooperation in navigation has enjoyed steady progress. China and the MRC jointly hosted a seminar on waterway safety and navigation improvement in 2008, which produced good results. China has conducted extensive technical and personnel exchanges with the MRC and lower Mekong countries to improve the capacity for water resources management. China has also actively participated in the Mekong Flood Forum and the Basin Development Plan Regional Stakeholder Forum organized by the MRC, which helped enhance mutual understanding and trust with people from various sectors in the sub-region. It is fair to say that the cooperation between China and the MRC has set a fine example for the management of cross-border rivers in the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Countries in the Mekong sub-region all face the pressing task of accelerating development and improving people's well-being. To make scientific and reasonable use of the water resources of the Lancang-Mekong River is essential to better livelihood of the people along the river and poverty alleviation in countries in the Mekong River Basin. With vast experience in coordinating the management and utilization of water resources, the MRC has a big role to play in promoting sustainable development of the sub-region. The Chinese side will strengthen dialogue and cooperation with the MRC and jointly contribute to the economic and social development of this

region, guided by the principle of “equal consultation, stronger cooperation, mutual benefit and common development”. In this connection, I wish to propose the following:

First, increase communication and strengthen mutual trust to create a favorable environment for common development. Trust is the basis of cooperation and an environment of mutual trust is conducive to deeper cooperation. The dialogue between China and the MRC has become an important channel of communication between China and the downstream countries, and has played an important role in deepening mutual trust and practical cooperation between the two sides. We should cherish the hard-won achievements and consolidate and develop the sound momentum in the bilateral cooperation. We need to provide to the public and media an objective and truthful picture of the development and utilization of water resources of the Lancang-Mekong River and the results of our cooperation so as to create a more objective and amicable atmosphere for sub-regional cooperation and gain more popular support.

Second, expand the cooperation platform and strengthen cooperation in development. Water resources are closely associated with many fields of economic and social development of human society. China-MRC cooperation thus enjoys broad prospects. We will continue to strengthen cooperation with the MRC in navigation to make full use of the historical opportunity presented by the fully established China-ASEAN FTA for navigation on the Lancang-Mekong River. We need to improve the navigation capacity of waterways, enhance waterway freight trade, and promote the development of the Lancang-Mekong golden tourist routes. The Chinese side is also ready to discuss with the MRC cooperation in agriculture, fishery and environmental protection, such as projects related to irrigation, forestry management and environmental assessment. We believe that our cooperation in these areas will further enrich cooperation between China and the MRC and do greater service to the sub-regional economic and social development.

Third, advance cooperation in disaster reduction and preserve development achievements. The flood-reporting information provided by the Chinese side has played a positive role for flood prevention and disaster reduction in downstream countries and has been well received by those countries and the commission. We will enhance such cooperation with the commission. In addition, the Chinese Government has launched work concerning the provision of dry season hydrological data of the Lancang River during extremely dry periods to the commission this year. We will host an international training program on the management of flood control and disaster mitigation this year to train technical staff for the commission and downstream countries. We look forward to the active participation of all parties concerned. China will do all it can to help the downstream countries prevent flood and drought and reduce the adverse impact of these disasters on people in the sub-region.

Fourth, actively carry out cooperation in hydropower development and promote sustainable development. Hydropower is an important renewable and clean energy. The development and utilization of hydropower is one of the important ways for the international community to address and mitigate climate change. The Lancang-Mekong Riverboasts rich hydropower resources, and the sustainable development of such important resources is highly important for the economic and social development of all countries in the sub-region. China has advanced technology and experience in hydropower development and management, and we are ready to enhance

exchanges and cooperation with other sub-regional countries in a joint effort to promote sustainable development of the sub-region.

Fifth, strengthen technical exchanges and personnel interflow to jointly improve development capacity. The technical exchanges and personnel interflow between China and the downstream countries and the MRC have played an important role in the information sharing and capacity building of the two sides. We welcome the MRC and experts from the downstream countries to China for technical exchanges, and we are ready to share with them our successful experience in water resources management. The Chinese side is also willing to send delegations to visit the MRC Secretariat at an appropriate time and experts for short-term work experience at the MRC to carry out technical exchanges.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

More than fifty years ago, a famous Chinese poet wrote with deep emotions, “Upstream I live, and downstream you dwell. Never-ending are the feelings we cherish toward each other, just like the river we share”. The river has bound us, countries at the upper stream and downstream, closely together, tying our interest and destiny into one. China values its traditional friendship with other sub-regional countries. We will continue to follow the policy of “building good-neighborly relationships and partnerships with neighboring countries”, strengthen the good-neighborly friendship and practical cooperation with other sub-regional countries and vigorously promote the economic and social development of the sub-region. We will make unremitting efforts in jointly building a better and more harmonious home.

Thank you.