

REMARKS BY PRIME MINISTER PHAM MINH CHINH
at the 4th Mekong River Commission Summit
(Vientiane, Laos, April 5, 2023)

Excellency Sonexay Siphandone, Prime Minister of Lao People's Democratic Republic,

Excellency Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia,

Excellency Surasri Kittimonthon, Secretary General, Office of the National Water Resources,

the Kingdom of Thailand,

Distinguished Heads of Delegation from China, Myanmar and Representatives of Development Partners,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, in this beautiful Capital City of Vientiane, I am delighted to attend ***the Fourth Summit of the Mekong River Commission*** – an organization that plays a crucial role in promoting, assisting, collaborating and coordinating development activities for the sustainable interests of riparian countries.

It is also an organization that endeavors to prevent unsustainable water use in the Mekong River basin.

At the outset, I wish to extend to the Leaders, delegates my warmest greetings and best wishes.

I also wish to express my deepest appreciation to Mr. Sonexay Siphandone and the Government and people of Laos for the warm reception and excellent arrangement for the Summit.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Looking back on the journey of nearly 30 years since its formation and development and 13 years since the first Summit, we are delighted to observe that the Mekong River Commission has truly reaffirmed its indispensable role, performed its mandates as an international river basin organization, and recorded important achievements to reinforce the enduring value of the 1995 Mekong Agreement.

The Commission has adopted and implemented strategies and plans for basin development based on integrated water resource management. It has also finalized Procedures on water use, an important legal framework of the Commission.

The Study on the management and sustainable development of the Mekong River Basin, including on impacts of mainstream hydropower projects conducted by the Commission, provides an important scientific basis for decision-making related to basin development by riparian countries.

Along with that, the Commission's cooperation with Dialogue Partners, Development Partners and regional cooperation mechanisms, especially in data and information sharing, has been constantly strengthened.

The above achievements have significantly contributed to fostering socio-economic development, environmental protection, improving livelihoods for about 70 million people in the Basin, and strengthening the close friendship, solidarity and cooperation among riparian countries.

These are also attributable to the close coordination and linkage among member countries of the Commission, the valuable support of the international community, efforts of the Commission Secretariat and contributions of other stakeholders.

On this occasion, on behalf of the Government of Viet Nam, I sincerely appreciate the cooperation and support from Dialogue Partners, Development Partners and other international and regional partners.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Mekong River Basin is facing **unprecedented challenges** due to the combined impacts of climate change, the pressure of economic development and rapid increase in water use. As a result, the Mekong water resources are being degraded in both quantity and quality, directly affecting efforts to ensure water security and food security for all countries in the Basin.

Those adverse impacts are becoming increasingly severe in the lower Mekong regions, especially in **the Mekong Delta in Viet Nam**. Between 2010 and 2020, the total flow in the basin decreased by 4-8%, while countries in the basin increased their water use in the Mekong by 5-12%.

The flow from the upper Mekong to the downstream areas and the Mekong Delta has therefore been severely reduced. The delta often faces severe droughts, while saline intrusion tends to occur 1-1.5 months earlier with a greater scope and intensity.

In addition, the reduction of Mekong River flow due to the combined effects of climate change and human activities, including unsustainable development projects upstream, has also been changing the flood regime in the Mekong Delta, reduced the amount of sediment coming to the delta and increased the erosion of riverbanks and seacoasts.

The aforementioned phenomena are projected to aggravate in the time to come, seriously affecting the sustainable development in the Mekong Delta and the livelihoods of over 20 million people.

It is estimated by experts that by 2040 the Mekong Delta will have **less than 5 million tons** of sediment per year, more than 9 times lower compared to the current level and nearly 30 times lower compared to 15 years ago.

This alarming reality requires us to have an innovation mindset and take breakthrough steps to meet today's urgent requirements. I concur with the vision and priority areas of action set forth in the draft Vientiane Declaration and would like to emphasize the following points:

First, we need to reiterate our strongest commitment to, strictly abide by and implement **the 1995 Mekong Agreement**, as well as the established **Procedures on Water Use**. We should also make every effort to implement effectively the plans and strategies as they truly serve as a firm foundation for all actions of the Commission and of each member country.

Second, all policies and actions of the Commission and its member countries need to be **people-centered**. Additionally, a population-wide, comprehensive and basin-wide approach should be taken to ensure sustainable livelihoods of the people, strengthen the adaptability and resilience of each person and each community to the ongoing rapid changes.

Lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and recent natural disasters and epidemics show the necessity for our countries to early build and implement more effective cooperation arrangements in order to safeguard the rights and legitimate interests of people living along the river basin in times of natural disasters and epidemics.

Third, the Mekong River Commission should enhance its active role in other sub-regional cooperation frameworks, especially as **a knowledge hub** for information, data and knowledge pertaining to the Basin.

The MRC also needs to provide advisory services for other sub-regional cooperation mechanisms so as to enable them to effectively implement their respective activities.

To assist the Commission in carrying out this mission, I suggest that the Commission work with Dialogue Partners, China and Myanmar, to develop a real-time monitoring system of activities pertaining to the exploitation and use of water resources. This will enable timely notifications to riparian countries in order to more proactively respond to irregular events, or issues relating to water quality, floods and droughts, as well as other water-related emergencies.

Fourth, we should work to promote **green economy, circular economy** and support regional planning for study and development of renewable energies such as wind and solar power.

We also need to step up connectivity and upgrade the regional power grid in order to foster sustainable development, ensure energy security and respond to climate change.

Fifth, we call upon all partners to work more closely with and support the Commission in terms of financial resources, knowledge, expertise and modern technologies.

The operation of the Commission should be linked more closely with the implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, international climate commitments, as well as the International Decade of Action “Water for Sustainable Development” for 2018-2028 and commitments made at the recent UN Water Conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Mekong River is meandering and full of turns. However, our attitude towards the river should be clear, transparent, for the sake of its ecological environment, the common interests of communities living along the basin, and our accountability to the future generations.

In that spirit, Viet Nam has been engaging and will continue to do so in the work of the Commission in an active and constructive manner, and in ways that promote the full implementation of the 1995 Mekong Agreement and the "**Mekong spirit.**" We also endeavor to ensure the legal and legitimate interests of all countries and peoples living in and along the river basin.

Our engagement also aims to ensure the harmony between people and nature, between the present and future generations.

We also endeavor to realize the common goal of “Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin,” and ensure that no one is left behind.

I wish the Summit a great success!

Thank you for your attention.