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**Keynote**

***“International cooperation in water resources management in the Mekong river basin”***

**First Lancang Mekong Water Resources Cooperation Forum**

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**Kunming, China**

*Mr. Vice Governor of Yunnan Province,*

*Mr. Vice Minister of Water Resources of the People’s Republic of China,*

*Distinguished senior representatives from the Mekong countries and international organizations,*

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

Thank you very much for the invitation. It is my honor to be here today on behalf of the Mekong River Commission, an inter-governmental river basin organization founded by treaty – the 1995 Mekong Agreement - of four member countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam), two dialogue partners (China and Myanmar) and numerous development and other partners, mandated to promote and coordinate the sustainable development of the Mekong river basin.

This mandate and role of the MRC were regularly reaffirmed by the Mekong Prime Ministers at their Summits in 2010, 2014 and earlier this year.

The countries of the Mekong river basin have different interests, possess different capacities, are at different stages of development, therefore making cooperation often challenging in an international river. Nevertheless, the past 23 years have proven that with common goals, goodwill, and united spirit, and a strong and unique institution such as the Mekong River Commission, international cooperation in transboundary water resources is not only possible but also rewarding for the countries and the Mekong river basin.

In this address, I will highlight the international cooperation and achievements in the Mekong by the MRC member countries and partners in the areas of data and information sharing, flood management, hydropower development, and environmental management.

***Ladies and gentlemen***

Data and information are critical for cooperation because without them, we only work with perceptions and assumptions which are often wrong. At the MRC, with cooperation from our

member countries and support from our partners, we have built up an impressive monitoring network with extensive data base in water flow, water level, water quality, fisheries, sediment, ecological health and social vulnerability. We also have agreement with China, who shares hydrological data during the flood season.

In addition, member countries also share infrastructure project information including hydropower, irrigation, land use, and other types of water use. This information is stored in our central MRC Information System for our internal use and for external access.

With data and information, we can provide objective scientific and technical advice using state-of-the art modelling and assessment tools.

Known as the regional knowledge hub in the Mekong river basin, the MRC has produced numerous assessments and studies about Mekong state of the basin, past, present conditions and future trends, and projected impacts, positive and negative, of development plans. This knowledge base has enabled us to inform better decision makings, whether it is flood forecasting and flood management, to hydropower development, navigation and environmental management.

Unique in the MRC work in flood forecasting is to monitor and provide warning on flooding on the Mekong mainstream. During the flood season, from June-November, the MRC Regional Flood Management and Mitigation Centre issues daily flood forecasts for five days. Member countries share data from 138 hydro-meteorological stations for the MRC to use for predicting water levels at 22 forecast points on the Mekong River system. We then share these daily bulletins by fax, e-mail, and on the MRC home page and dedicated Flood Forecasting Website to National Mekong Committees, Non-Governmental Organizations, the media and the public in five languages.

In addition, the MRC provides Flash Flood Guidance for critical weather situations. We have piloted with member countries in producing flood risk and flood hazard maps with future flood scenarios. We have strengthened capacities at provincial and district levels. All this helped reduce vulnerability of people living in the Mekong Basin to the negative impacts of floods.

### *Ladies and gentlemen*

Over the past decade, the Mekong has arrived at a crossroads – whereas hydropower presents great economic and energy gains, at the same time, concerns have intensified over the potential cumulative impacts that proposed schemes have on the environment, fisheries, and people's livelihoods. To support member countries cooperation on the issue, the MRC has done numerous studies, produced guidelines, developed strategies and facilitated consultation processes involving multiple actors and stakeholders.

The 2001 MRC hydropower development strategy promotes socio-economically and environmentally appropriate generation and distribution of hydropower in the riparian countries, in a cooperative and well-coordinated way. The implementation was then led to the formulation of the MRC Initiative on Sustainable Hydropower (ISH) by the four member countries, which produced key works such as the Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) of mainstream dams, Preliminary Design Guidance (PDG) for mainstream dams, national to local

benefit sharing mechanisms for hydropower projects, the Rapid Hydropower Sustainability Assessment Tool and hydropower mitigation guidelines, to name a few. The Design Guidance for mainstream dams has been used by countries and private developers when planning and designing dams on the Mekong, including Chinese companies Datang and Power China.

Especially on the issue of hydropower development, beyond producing scientific studies and guidelines, the MRC has more and more served as a “water diplomacy” platform with relatively mature procedural, facilitation and adaptive capacity. As mandated by international treaty, the 1995 Mekong Agreement, the MRC is in fact the only Mekong cooperation framework that deals with issues and differences among the countries to find a way to manage and resolve those issues.

From 2010 until this day, the MRC has facilitated four prior consultation processes for mainstream dams (Xayaburi, Don Sahong, Pak Beng, and the current Pak Lay hydropower projects). Although the process has been contentious, it has proven its worth and has shown its gradual improvements and strengthening, for example:

- ✓ Design improvement of Xayaburi Hydropower Project after prior consultation process. The developer has made significant efforts and investments toward addressing the concerns raised in the MRC Technical Review Report
- ✓ Agreement by member countries on way forward for the Pak Beng Hydropower Project with a joint action plan for follow up activities facilitated by the MRC
- ✓ More engagement of stakeholders and developers in the process. For example, they have been involved and provided practical comments since the beginning of the process of review and update on Preliminary Design Guidance
- ✓ Increased awareness from wider stakeholders about the overall effectiveness of projects from a basin-wide perspective.

*Ladies and gentlemen*

In the field of environmental cooperation, the MRC has traditionally been strong in the monitoring and reporting environmental conditions. In recent years, in accordance with our Strategic Plan, and in response to rapid development of the basin, the MRC has gradually moved to not only monitoring and reporting, such as in the State of Basin Report, the latest edition of which would come out this year, but also to environmental management from a basin-wide perspective. Our work in this area includes the recently finalized Transboundary Environmental Impact Assessment Guidelines, the starting up of the Joint Environmental Monitoring for mainstream dams, and the ongoing preparation of the Basin-wide Environmental Strategy for prioritized assets. All these works are the first of their kind in the Mekong. And they show the progressive nature of cooperation in the Mekong.

In all of this, a unique aspect of MRC cooperation has been the number of partners and stakeholders involved as we are a very open and transparent organization. We hold regional stakeholder forums about once or twice every year. We are very active in communication and media, including TV, newspapers, and digital and social media.

*Ladies and gentlemen*

As we are in China, at this first Lancang Mekong Water Resources Cooperation Forum, let me now turn, finally, to the longstanding cooperation between the MRC and China.

As a dialogue partner of MRC, China cooperates with us by:

- Holding annual Dialogue Meeting – the next one is at the end of November 2018
- Holding regular exchange of visits
- Holding regular joint technical symposiums
- China participating in MRC technical activities such as basin development planning and sustainable hydropower
- China sharing data and information during the flood season (June – Oct)
- China sending junior officers to work at MRC in the past
- China releasing “water supplement” during drought and conducting joint observation and preparing a joint report with MRC
- China conducting “joint assessment” of impact of dam cascade on extreme events (together with IWMI and Lancang Mekong Water Resources Cooperation Center) with MRC

At the 3<sup>rd</sup> MRC Summit and International Conference in April this year, China participated actively and at high levels. At the Summit, the Chinese Minister of Water Resources emphasized the important role of MRC, the cooperation given by China, the fact that Lancang Mekong Cooperation is complementary to MRC, and welcomed the engagement of the MRC and its Secretariat in the Lancang Mekong Cooperation.

On that note, let me end by reiterating that:

the MRC is a well-established inter-governmental River Basin Organization in the Mekong with the knowledge base, basin-wide strategies, procedures, and water diplomacy platform – the ONLY one that is mandated by treaty. There is both political commitment from Mekong leaders and financial commitment.

There is a need for ongoing and potentially stronger cooperation between MRC and China, including for:

- ✓ *China to consider providing flood forecasts for five days at Jing Hong station*
- ✓ *China to consider sharing data during the dry season – this would benefit development planning and drought management in the Mekong*
- ✓ *China is invited to provide comments and input to the MRC’s updating of the Sustainable Hydropower Strategy*
- ✓ *China is invited to provide comments and input to the MRC’s State of Basin Report*
- ✓ *China is invited to participate in the upcoming update of the MRC’s Basin Development Strategy for the Mekong, including a new Basin Development Plan*

Thank you very much.