



**Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program**

**First Anniversary of the Environment Operations Center  
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**Remarks by**

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Khun Chartree Chueyprasit, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Kingdom of Thailand, Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, a very good evening to all of you.

I have the honor to address you this evening on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Greater Mekong Subregion Environment Operations Center (EOC). A year ago today, we inaugurated the EOC and formally launched the GMS Core Environment Program. This marked a new chapter in the long-standing partnership among the Asian Development Bank, Thailand, the rest of the GMS countries, and development partners. Today's first anniversary of the EOC further serves as a testament to our fruitful partnership as well as to our commitment to ensuring environmental sustainability in the fast-growing Mekong subregion.

Please allow me to reflect briefly of the achievements of the EOC during its first year of operation.

The implementation of flagship component under the Core Environment Program (CEP), namely the pilot projects under the Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative (or BCI) has begun in

earnest in the GMS countries, and is being spearheaded by our partners from the civil society.

Plans for conducting strategic environmental assessments (or SEAs) of the North-South Economic Corridor, the GMS energy sector strategy, Viet Nam's Hydropower Sector Plan, and Cambodia's Tourism Sector Plan are well underway, and are being supported by detailed consultations with and endorsements from the relevant sector ministries. As a result, we are forging stronger links with other GMS Working Groups of Energy, Transport and Tourism, thereby helping us to mainstream environmental concerns in these sectors.

As part of capacity building and institutional development in the GMS, the EOC has facilitated two meetings of Working Group on Environment (WGE), conducted an International Symposium on Biodiversity Conservation, and held Workshops on SEAs and Biodiversity and Socioeconomic Assessments. Moreover, the EOC has carried out training on remote sensing, Geographic Information Systems, and Participatory Mapping.

The EOC team also conducted various orientation meetings about the Program for the different countries as well as for the CEP Technical Advisory Panel and for the participants of the Phnom Penh Plan for Development Management.

In addition, National Support Units in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam have been established as well as project teams for the planned SEAs in Cambodia and Viet Nam.

Furthermore, as part of the program's outreach efforts, a Children's Art Competition with the theme "My World, My Home" has been conducted in four GMS countries, while a Participatory Photography Training Course has been jointly co-organized with Conservation International among the youth in the Cardamom Mountains in Cambodia.

Both of these activities aimed at raising awareness about the environment among the young members of society. Results from both activities — the artworks and the photographs — will be publicly

exhibited in a couple of month's time and will also form part of some of the outreach materials being planned by EOC.

Please permit me now to say a few words about EOC's forthcoming activities and the challenges we must face in the future.

Notwithstanding the progress and achievements to date, there is no room for complacency. The range, magnitude and complexity of the challenges still to come are considerable.

Firstly, the Third GMS Summit of Leaders is about a year away. The EOC, the WGE, and all CEP partners have a joint responsibility in the months ahead. These responsibilities include ensuring that there is an excellent record of achievement to report to the Leaders, and articulating a clear message of our joint commitment to work towards the Leaders' ideals about the CEP and their vision for the GMS. This is a key challenge for all of us in the next several months.

To move forward on this, we need to build on the current momentum and further refine and enhance our plans and collaborative efforts into even more effective and cohesive outcomes, not just to show to the GMS Leaders but indeed to demonstrate that the benefits of our efforts for environmentally-sound development accrue to all in the GMS.

Secondly, there is a need to assess and plan how the Core Environment Program, the EOC, and the WGE can address in a timely and effective manner the critical environment issues facing the GMS such as climate change adaptation and mitigation, water and food security, and renewable energy. There is an urgent need to continue to build human capacities as well as to strengthen institutional linkages and regional cooperation to help address these important issues.

Thirdly, we need to mobilize additional resources for the Program. I am happy to report that other international donors have also taken an increasing interest in the CEP. This is very important and EOC should exert all efforts to ensure well targeted and efficient use of scarce resources.

Finally, to move forward, there is a need to further strengthen our spirit of partnership and collaboration. I firmly believe that nothing short of strong partnerships can make the Core Environment Program a truly successful program.

Moving from strength to strength, we—the ADB, WGE, and other development partners—hope to help further develop and enhance the Core Environment Program and the EOC operations to support our collective vision of a poverty-free and ecologically rich GMS.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.