

**Welcome Remarks by
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Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
At the GMS Working Group of Environment 15th Annual Meeting
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**Distinguished guests,
ladies and gentlemen,
friends and colleagues,
A very good morning to you all.**

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to Thailand for the 15th annual Greater Mekong Subregion Working Group on Environment Meeting. We will be spending the next couple of days sharing country and organizational perspectives of current and future priorities for environment with the common goal of creating synergies that can make the Core Environment Program an even stronger one in the overall framework of the Economic Cooperation Program for the Greater Mekong Subregion. Therefore, please allow me to open this meeting with impressions from the GMS Ministerial Meeting that was held two weeks ago in Hua Hin, also here in Thailand where ministers from the six Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) nations endorsed a comprehensive plan of action to expand and strengthen cooperation in key areas, including environment.

In the joint statement delivered at the 15th Ministerial Meeting, the ministers from Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam noted that despite current economic turmoil the six countries are making significant progress on a wide range of initiatives to advance economic development in the sub-region.

In the energy sector, the ministers endorsed a road map for the expansion of the existing cross-border energy trade, and for broader integration in the power sector, beyond electricity. The plan seeks to extend modern energy access to all GMS communities, not just through rural electrification schemes and off-grid power systems, but by enhancing cross-border energy integration and allowing countries to tap the sub-region's diverse energy resource base that includes hydro, oil, gas and coal.

A more integrated energy system will help lower investment costs, reduce external dependence, improve energy security, diversify supply, and lower carbon emissions. The road map calls for supply side actions such as promoting energy efficiency and accelerating the development of renewable, environmentally friendly energy sources.

The ministers also endorsed a new human resources development plan that includes measures to promote safer labor migration; to strengthen communicable disease control; to bolster education and skills development across the subregion, and to combat human trafficking.

The relevance of the supplementary activities in Core Environment Program were acknowledged and the importance of the program's integrated focus on strengthening ecological infrastructure as well as the region's resilience to climate change was highlighted.

The agreement to accelerate action on cross-border power trade and the development of renewable energy resources will boost energy security, through improved efficiency of energy use, while contributing to reduced greenhouse emissions in a subregion which is especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Over the next three years, three main priorities were identified. It will be crucial to accelerate the implementation of the GMS cross-border transport agreement and other transport and trade initiatives, as well as transform the GMS transport corridors into economic corridors. Last but not least, it was iterated that reducing environmental risks to local communities and GMS development plans, including those posed by climate change and poor ecological infrastructure continues to be top of the agenda for the GMS ministers.

I believe that the exchanges we will be having over the next days will strengthen and add to this objective, making the outcomes of the GMS Core Environment Program strengthen effectively those of the GMS Economic Cooperation Program for the benefit of each of the nations we represent. I look forward to two days of presentations and constructive discussions for the benefit of our shared natural resources.

Thank you.