

Welcome Remarks by

Mr. Pavit Ramachandran

Environment Specialist, (Regional Cooperation) ADB

At the GMS Working Group of Environment 15th Annual Meeting

July 2 – 3, 2009, Amari Watergate Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand

Khun Amphan, Distinguished WGE Members, friends and colleagues,

Good morning. On behalf of the Asian Development Bank, I would like to welcome you all to this 15th Annual Greater Mekong Subregion Working Group on Environment Meeting.

This year, we have planned the annual meeting carefully to bring together all of you in a forum of open discussion and constructive dialogue. Our hope is that this will give each of us a common foundation so we can collectively bring the Working Group on Environment and Core Environment Program's agenda even further, gaining from the opportunity to learn from each of the members of the working group and using it for our common purpose of strengthening the environment for sustainable development of the Mekong subregion.

Khun Amphan, in her opening remarks just now, talked about the GMS Ministerial Meeting held here in Thailand, which carried forward the Vientiane Plan of Action, an important strategic document that has guided the GMS Economic Cooperation Program as well as activities under the Core Environment Program. ADB is encouraged that the development of the program and the cluster approach of the CEP is included in the Ministerial statement, testimony that environment is increasingly manifesting itself as an integrated part of economic development at the

highest governmental levels. This is a strong indication that the GMS governments will continue to address natural resources management issues as a core component of sustainability imperatives in the region.

At the meeting, priority was given to accelerating the implementation of the Cross Border Trade Agreement and other Transport and Trade Facilitation initiatives to enhance intra-regional trade in driving the continued expansion of GMS economies. Similarly, the GMS ministers agreed to accelerate action on cross-border power trade. The development of renewable energy resources will boost energy security and improved efficiency of energy use, while contributing to reduced greenhouse emissions in a subregion which is especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. In agriculture, efforts to tap bio fuels and rural renewable energy have been accelerated while taking into account the need to balance these with concerns over food security. All these developments within the broad framework of area based planning are helping to graduate GMS transport corridors into full fledged economic and development corridors and provide the impetus and opportunity to optimize both economic and environmental performance efficiencies. I am also confident that with the valuable experience gained from the implementation of CEP for over three years, both WGE and GMS EOC have positioned themselves very well to engage with sub regional and national sectoral contexts.

Finally, the statement also elucidates the need for continued strengthened capacity development. ADB will continue its support for improving the capacity of mid and senior-level civil service officials through the Phnom Penh Plan for Development Management, and for strengthening subregional research institutions, both of which are critical to the GMS development agenda.

Many of you participated in the Payment for Ecosystem Services Workshop which concluded just yesterday, and I feel that we reached our objective of sharing early experiences of the approach here in the region as well as provided a common ground for further developing

innovative sustainable financing and market mechanisms attuned to the national context of each of the participating countries.

I join Khun Amphan in the belief that the 15th annual meeting which we are about to open will strengthen the outcomes of the GMS Core Environment Program for the benefit of each of the nations in the Greater Mekong Subregion.

Thank you.