

**Statement by
Mr. Sisavath Vithaxay
Deputy Head of Water Resources and Environment Administration
at the Second GMS Environment Minister's Meeting**

Vientiane, Lao PDR, 29 January 2008

**Excellencies Ministers, Vice Ministers of the GMS Countries, ADB Vice
President
UNEP Regional Director
Distinguished Delegates
Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen**

It gives me great pleasure on behalf of the Water Resources and Environment Administration to be attending this Second GMS Environment Minister's Meeting in Vientiane today. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the ADB for its support in organizing this important meeting. Also my sincere thanks to the staff of the Environment Operation Center (EOC), the National GMS Secretariat and the officials from relevant ministries for their hard and tireless work to make this meeting successful.

Distinguished Delegates

Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good environment is essential for sustainable economic development. It requires that economic growth must go hand in hand with sustainable natural resources use and sound environmental management.

In the GMS countries, as the natural resource base is declining and development activities bring about dramatic changes in the landscape, risks to rural livelihoods, health and welfare are gradually increasing; It is important to carry out a comprehensive assessment to address these risks and particularly address the need for securing local livelihoods base in remote and mountainous parts of the

GMS;

Lao PDR is a landlocked country with a multi-ethnic population, of which the majority are living in remote rural areas in very poor conditions. However, they are located in areas of high biodiversity and provide valuable ecosystem services to the country. The challenge is to impact on poverty alleviation efforts by combining actions into a package of measures tailored to reduce risks. National, provincial and local capacity building is significant and directly related to our concerns, but in addition to securing rural livelihoods, the emerging challenge of climate change and its impacts also need to be studied carefully and preparations undertaken to mitigate such effects such as "out of season" rainfall, flooding, storms, droughts, water supply shortages and others which will cause immense damage both to human life and property.

Distinguished Delegates

Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

Regional cooperation is critical for better economic and development planning, particularly for improving coordination on cross-border environmental issues, we believe that strong support for this will be received from donors and development partners thereby strengthening our capacity to respond to issues such as land degradation and forest fragmentation and taking additional works in renewable energy such as biofuels.

I appreciate the work carried out by the Working Group on Environment (WGE) and urge the ADB and WGE to continue strengthening the role of the EOC for accelerated Core Environment Program, including BCI as the flagship, Strategic Environment Assessment, Environment Performance Assessment in GMS.

The strengthening of institutional and human capacity for the economic development sectors in integrating environment issues into the economic development plans and programs is an important task before us. Importantly the implementation of the Core Environment Program will help create employment for people in remote areas that will contribute to the conservation of the environment and rehabilitation of natural resources. This is the characteristic of the project with broad

participation of the people and private sector in the sustainable natural resource management focused on generating income by payment for environmental services. This will also provide valuable lessons for our people in technical knowledge in using and harvesting non-timber forest products, promoting the utilization of sound environmental technologies and biological products, which will generate sustainable incomes.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Therefore the cooperation and combination between the environmental and economic sectors from local to national levels as well as regional and international levels are a necessity and consistent attention must be paid in order to secure the sustainability of the natural resource for further generations.

For the Lao PDR the sub-regional cooperation in the environmental area under the GMS Economic Cooperation Program is inseparable from the concept of sustainable agriculture due to its close nexus with the environment as for example in the areas of contract farming for food production or in the field of bio-fuels and renewable energy to meet the growing energy demand. Both will play vital roles in the development of the country.

However it is clear that increasing risks from climate change will have a direct impact on biodiversity and livelihoods. I am confident that the concerted joint efforts by environment and agriculture sectors are basic needs for the adaptation to climate change. Failing this, we face major negative impacts on food security, energy and natural resources. These are also primary needs for local livelihoods and are also critical factors for the economic development aiming at freeing the country from the LDC status by 2020.

In anticipation of these trends, recently, a decree by the government of the Lao PDR has been issued to the Water Resources and Environment Administration in close

cooperation with the energy sector and agriculture to draft a strategy on climate change.

In conclusion, I am confident that the supportive cooperation from all member countries, donors and development partners will help the GMS attaining its goals of prosperous sub-region with clean environment.

I wish all of you a successful and fruitful meeting.

Thank you!