

**SPEECH FROM MR. NGUYEN VAN DUC,
VICE MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT
At the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program
Second Environment Ministers' Meeting
29 January 2008, Vientiane, Lao PDR**

Honourable Environment Ministers of the Greater Mekong Subregion,

Mr. Vice President of the Asian Development Bank,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be here at the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program, the Second Environment Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane, Lao PDR and to convey my speech to you all at this important event.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the light of reform and open policy, Vietnam has recorded a number of great achievements in development. Economic growth has been maintained at a high rate. The poverty alleviation efforts have resulted in a range of successes that have been highly recognised by the United Nations and the international community. Living standards have continually improved. Vietnamese people now have more opportunities to access a number of high-quality services. The Government of Vietnam pays great attention to socio-economic development and poverty reduction as well as environmental protection through sustainable natural resource use and sound environmental management for sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Aside from these successes however, Vietnam is facing a number of severe and urgent environmental problems. We are aware of the short-term and long-term challenges, and are preparing in terms of comprehensive consciousness, policy mechanisms, man-power and resources to create a breakthrough in the environmental protection activity in coming years. The Communist Party of Vietnam has issued a Resolution to express its view of the importance of environment protection as an indispensable condition for sustainable development. The Prime Minister has approved the "Agenda 21" and the "National Strategy for Environmental Protection to 2010 and Vision toward 2020" that provide detailed and clear objectives, contents and solutions for environmental protection. The National Assembly approved the revised Law on Environmental Protection in 2005. Vietnam is also developing a Biodiversity Law. In addition, every year from 2007 onwards the Government of Vietnam will allocate 1% of its current

overall budget to environmental protection activities. The State management system for environmental protection from central to local levels has developed and grown.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With an open policy, Vietnam would like to cooperate in every aspect with all countries in the world and region, especially in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) since we share a common link through the Mekong River, the world's twelfth longest River, measuring just under 4,200 km. The GMS is an area of great social, cultural, political and biological diversity. About 266 million people, representing more than 70 different ethnic and linguistic groups, occupy the five countries and two provinces of the GMS: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and Yunnan and Guang Xi of China.

Vietnam is located downstream in the Mekong River, therefore Vietnam has great advantages and also lots of disadvantages in terms of socio-economic development and environmental protection. Vietnam is therefore significantly impacted by changes in the Mekong River, especially the Vietnamese population which lives in the Mekong basin itself.

With increasing risks from climate change to biodiversity, livelihoods and economic competitiveness of the subregion, Vietnam requires the support and assistance of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the international community on financial and technical resources, as well as the cooperation of GMS countries for undertaking assessment of risks and strengthening national and local capacity for integrating environment into economic development planning and investments.

Within the GMS cooperation framework, nine prioritized aspects were identified. These are agriculture, energy, transportation, tourism, trade, investment, telecommunications, human resource development and environmental protection. These are the core and most important aspects, not only for Vietnam, but for all GMS countries. We must work in collaboration with each other in these nine aspects to create an integrated, harmonious and prosperous sub-region and a GMS characterized by steady economic growth, social progress and environmental sustainability.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Vietnam highly appreciates the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program, the Core Environmental Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative (CEP/BCI) and others, and is especially grateful for the ideas, roles and support of ADB, the Governments of the Netherlands and Sweden, and the contribution by development partners to the GMS-CEP/BCI for creating an economic cooperation program to share information and exchange experience in the nine mentioned aspects in the GMS countries.

Vietnam expresses a desire to further discuss the possibilities relating to institutional frameworks, executing mechanisms and the role of the ADB, the Environment Operation Center (EOC) in future Working Group on Environment discussions. The aim is to continue strengthening the role and assistance of the EOC and the National Support Units for accelerated CEP/BCI implementation in coordination with the overall GMS Economic Cooperation Program.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Regretfully, the Minister is busy with Governmental missions, therefore on behalf of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Vietnam, it's a pleasure for me to express my sincere thanks for the cooperation and great assistance from ADB, Governments of Netherlands and Sweden as well as others.

Taking this opportunity, I also would like to extend our deep appreciation to the Water Resources and Environment Administration, the local Government of Vientiane and the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic for hosting our Meeting and for the warm hospitality accorded to all participants. I would like to extend sincere greetings to all guests present at the Meeting today.

We warmly welcome the next Environment Minister's Meeting and all honourable guests to be in Vietnam.

Lastly, may the Meeting be a great success and I wish all guests good health, a successful career and all the best.

Thank you for your attention.