

Opening remarks

Ampan Pintukanok

Director, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE)

Thailand

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ADB Thailand Resident Mission

Honored WGE Colleagues,

1. Good morning to all of you and a heartfelt welcome to Thailand. It is our pleasure to host the Working Group on Environment's 4th Semi-annual meeting and I look forward to constructive discussions today.
2. Next month, leaders, negotiators and climate experts from almost all countries will meet in Copenhagen to discuss and hopefully agree on a future, ambitious agenda for reducing carbon emissions and reducing the effects of climate change that governments, communities and people from across the world are already now feeling the impact of. In setting the scene for action at COP-15, a number of high level meetings have taken place. Allow me to share with you some of the milestones from these events, milestones that also give input to the strategic direction that the GMS Core Environment Program takes.
3. During the ASEAN meeting in Thailand, in October this year, the parties signed a Joint statement on Climate Change to bring to the COP-15. The statement reiterates the importance that we place on stabilizing atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations while urging developed countries to take deeper and early cuts on greenhouse gas emissions. REDD Plus mechanisms is also to be further strengthened in order to enhance biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in support of local community livelihoods. Within the Core Environment Program, we have already begun our response to this, and we look forward to deepening the GMS utilization of the REDD mechanism.
4. At the 21st Ministerial Meeting during APEC in Singapore, last week, all participating parties released a statement that included the global challenge of climate change. As APEC's key response to addressing this challenge, the sustainable growth agenda will include among others enhancing energy efficiency and sustainable forest management and rehabilitation. The Core Environment Program addresses these priorities in the supplemental through the work in Cluster 3 on Carbon Sequestration along the East-West Economic Corridor. ADB is currently planning to scale up the BCI in the PPTA that is proposed for Viet Nam, Lao PDR and Cambodia.

5. After the high expectations prior to COP-15, in the past week there has been several international statements cautioning that although negotiators are making progress, practical commitment and a concrete architecture on how to kick-start action might not be reached at the negotiations in Copenhagen – the notion of the ‘one agreement, two steps’-approach. As Climate Change has large and serious implications for any environment related development, we in the WGE have an obligation to ensure that the policies that we endorse support a strong and coordinated response to the climate threat.

6. The importance of ensuring that work in the GMS on strengthening subregional policies for environment is more present than ever. The high level meetings will be nothing but empty promises if they are not firmly embedded in working with local governments and communities, and ensuring that the top-down push is supplemented by a bottom-up pull is crucial. During our meeting today and tomorrow, I strongly encourage each of you to contribute openly with your unique national experience to ensure that we, the Working Group on Environment, continue to coordinate our efforts to keep our region green and strong as development continues to bring more opportunities for communities, individuals and people across the GMS.

Thank you.