Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. As both a civil society, organization and development partner, WWF is pleased to see continuing GMS program attention to the environment. The 3 strategic priorities respond well to the region’s needs, but they will be very hard to achieve in the face of rapid development and especially infrastructure investment.

Challenges can be seen in each of the 3 areas:

1) **Green technology and sustainable infrastructure.** While there have been advances in project-level EIA/EIS, much better planning to consider environmental dimensions is needed at the landscape level, not just in biodiversity corridors but in the development corridors recognizing multiple uses of land, water, and forests.

2) **Investment in ecosystems management and protection.** The GMS CEP and especially the biodiversity corridors projects have had a positive effect on management of protected forests and other ecosystems. To sustain and expand their impact, greater attention is needed to the sustainable financing of protected areas, by developing innovative funding sources like tourism fees & hydropower tariffs. To achieve expanded private sector investment in sustainable natural capital management, major adjustments are needed to open dialogue and talk directly about “deals” if real investment increases are to be realized.

3) **Climate resilience and disaster risk reduction.** Obviously, climate change is a global challenge that requires the attention of and action by all countries to reduce GHG emissions and shift rapidly to low carbon economies. But with climate change impacts already happening, and the GMS being a vulnerable region, we need attention to climate adaptation and climate-related disaster management and preparedness. We all can intuitively understand that healthy ecosystems support climate resiliency. But we are under-investing in the natural buffers, providing cost-effective resiliency, and allowing watersheds, wetlands, river ecosystems, mangroves, and coral reefs to be degraded or lost. We encourage environmental authorities in the region to emphasize the need to protect these ecosystems to reduce the impacts of floods, droughts, extreme weather events, sea level rise, and other adverse impacts of climate change.

In conclusion, WWF and other CSOs look forward to seeing strong environmental progress in the region, and we stand ready to work with all GMS countries to help achieve this, even in the face of heavy development pressures and threats to natural systems. The people of this region seek improved economic opportunity, but they also expect better environmental quality and climate resiliency. As the GMS program advances, we encourage strong commitment to transparency and public participation in defining how the HAP will be implemented, to ensure good responsiveness to community interests and public support for the GMS program. We look forward to continued close cooperation in helping to realize the vision of a GMS region which is developing on a low-carbon, climate-resilient, and environment-friendly pathway, with a commitment to maintaining healthy ecosystems and constantly improving environmental quality.