



**5th GMS Environment Ministers' Meeting (EMM-5)
Chiang Mai
February 1**

**During 'Statements by Partners' Session 10.25-10.55am
UN Environment statement**

- Good morning General Surasak Karnjanarat, Minister, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand; Mr. Ramesh Subramaniam, Director General, Southeast Asia Department, Asian Development Bank; Excellencies; ladies and gentlemen.
- UN Environment very much welcomes this opportunity for development partners to actively engage in the GMS Environment Ministers' Meeting and would like to thank the Asian Development Bank and the hosts, the Royal Government of Thailand, for making this possible.
- At the Second Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific convened in Bangkok in September last year by UN Environment, Ministers and officials in the region, including some of you here today, specifically called for enhanced environmental cooperation at regional and national levels including through the Greater Mekong Sub-region and the Asian Development Bank's Core Environment Programme.
- UN Environment is therefore pleased to be playing a part in promoting environmental cooperation across GMS countries and the broader region. We support a number of regional environmental intergovernmental forums that enhance cooperation where GMS countries are actively engaged. This includes the Regional Ministerial Forum on Environment Health supported by UN Environment and WHO; Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia that supports the protection of the marine environment, and the Asia Pacific Clean Air Partnership. I would also like to take this opportunity to flag the Asia-Pacific Climate Change Adaptation Forum which will be held at ADB offices in Manila during the week of 15 October 2018, the largest such gathering of climate adaptation officials, scientists and practitioners in the region.

- The theme of today's meeting- GMS Environmental Cooperation Towards Inclusive and Sustainable Growth- provides significant opportunities for strengthening collaboration and developing new joint initiatives under the GMS. In addition to the areas of environment and health, air pollution and climate adaptation I would like to highlight a few areas where we are actively seeking partnerships in support of green growth in the GMS and where we would welcome the opportunity of partnering with the ADB Core Environment Programme and GMS member states.
- Firstly, the Belt and Road Initiative is expected to have significant impacts on the economies, societies and natural environments in the GMS and more broadly. To better anticipate and manage potential positive and negative impacts of the investments under the Belt Road Initiative, UN Environment and China are setting up an International Coalition for Green Development on the Belt and Road. As part of the work of the Coalition, UN Environment working with China ASEAN Environmental Cooperation Center to identify opportunities for greening belt and road investments in GMS countries as a means to support the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Secondly, on green finance which is also very much related to belt and road initiative. A transition towards an inclusive, green economy across the GMS region requires green finance to support investments that are environmentally-friendly, low carbon and climate resilient. Such investments will not only protect the environment, but underpin balanced and sustained growth. UN Environment places much emphasis on mobilizing green finance, most directly through our work under the Inquiry into the Design of a Sustainable Financial System, and our Finance Initiative of over 200 private financial institutions. This is very much in line with commitments made by governments in the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on sustainable finance which calls for the development of national integrated financing frameworks for sustainable development.
- In this context UN Environment stands ready to support the development of National Green Finance Roadmaps in GMS countries – such roadmaps can be developed through consultations led by governments to identify concrete measures such as strengthening foreign direct investment (FDI) guidelines to ensure social and environmental safeguards; supporting the integration of environment in private banks lending operations; emissions tagging in national budgets, establishing National Sustainable or Green Finance Forums that can help to better coordinate

sustainable finance programmes of development partners, strengthening environmental disclosures of companies, training financial regulatory staff on environmental issues

- Another area would like to highlight today is the role in valuing and managing ecosystems in the GMS, as a means to promote sustainable growth. We would welcome the opportunity to work with ADB and GMS member states in the integration of Natural Capital values in private sector investments and decisions, as well as the public sector's planning and budgeting processes. As you may appreciate, UN Environment has been working closely with GMS member states in the field of valuation and accounting of natural capital, which could assist countries in realigning economic development priorities and financing to address environmental degradation and loss of economic opportunities caused by declines in biodiversity and ecosystems. In this regard, I am pleased to note that we are working closely with the Government of Thailand to embark on the initiative that focuses on sustainable management of landscapes, by integrating values of forests and other Natural Capital into policies and operations of tourism and water services sectors, through applying Natural Capital accounting and market-based instruments. Establishing a natural capital risk register in the GMS to identify areas where natural capital and the benefits derived from it are most at risk in the region as well as the key private sector actors drawing on natural capital is another approach that could be undertaken. This in turn will allow for a more focused support to increasing public and private sector investments and action to conserve and grow natural capital.
- Let me turn now to another practical example of our work in partnership building. In the GMS, we need no reminder of the critical role of rice in food security. Less well known are the sustainability challenges. To cite two figures- rice is responsible for 10% of global anthropogenic emissions, and accounts for 30-40% of all the world's fresh water use. It is both a contributor to, and victim of, climate change. We are now tackling these challenges through the Sustainable Rice Platform, a global multi-stakeholder initiative with over 80 partner institutions. The launch of a Sustainable Rice Standard offers governments a robust benchmark for policy formulation as well as tools to incentivize wide-scale adoption of climate-smart best practice among rice smallholders. At UN Environment, we see such a transformation as critical to future food security, and also in its potential to contribute to meeting Nationally Determined

Contributions under the Paris Agreement, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals.

- Finally, the marine environment also provides food, livelihoods and income to GMS countries and the many millions of people living in coastal areas. Appropriately the ocean is increasingly considered a key part of development efforts in the region, but at the same time pollution including sewage as well as plastic and other waste from land are threatening marine ecosystems. Such challenges require regional cooperation, which we are supporting through the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia, including a new regional project on marine plastic litter and a regional GEF project implementing the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea. In the context of the International Year of the Reef 2018, we are also stepping up efforts to sustainably manage these rainforests of the ocean, as part of delivering the 2030 development agenda and SDG 14 including preparing for the Our Ocean Conference, to be held in Bali in October this year.
- I would like to end by reaffirm UN Environment's commitment to the GMS and I very much look forward to the guidance of the GMS Ministers here today so that we can ensure our work, collectively, addresses the environmental and climate challenges of the region. Thank you.