Draft Opening Speech
By H.E. Say Samal
Minister of Environment and Chair of the National Council for Sustainable Development, Royal Government of Cambodia
At Inception Workshop of
Cambodia National Environment Strategy and Action Plan (NESAP) Formulation Process
02 November 2015, Intercontinental Hotel, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

− Mr. Pavit Ramachandran, Senior Environment Specialist, Asian Development Bank;
− Distinguished Representatives of the Greater Mekong Sub-region Environment Operation Center;
− Representatives of the Line Ministries and Agencies;
− Distinguished Representatives of the Development Partners, and Civil Society Organizations;
− Directors and Representatives of the Provincial Departments of Environment;
− Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my great pleasure and honour to attend the multi-stakeholder gathering today to kick start the formulation process of the Cambodia’s National Environmental Strategy and Action Plan (NESAP). I personally consider that it is significant and timely initiative to bring together all the key stakeholders to discuss and come up with stronger commitments and concrete and practical actions for sustainable development. I believe that the NESAP will support making environmental sustainability a centrality for economic and social development planning as required by our Constitution, Law on Environment Protection and Natural Resources Management, the Rectangular Strategy (RS) Phase III, and the National Development Strategic Plan (NSDP) 2014-2018.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to the Asian Development Bank and Greater Mekong Sub-region Environment Operation Center for the financial and technical support to the NESAP process and other on-going support to the Ministry of Environment.

Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our country has gained remarkable development achievements over the last decade thanks to the long-lasting peace, strong economic growth and improvement in the democratic institutions, secured national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and improved livelihoods of our people. With establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015, Cambodia is well positioned together with our ASEAN “to play a centrality role in regional architecture”, and in attracting huge foreign and domestic investment. All these developments will offer Cambodia opportunities to attract investments and expand its export markets through industrial and trade linkages as well as deepen physical and institutional connectivity with the regional and intra-regional production networks and supply chains. It also requires us to strengthen the enabling environment to attract investment and achieve balanced and inclusive development.

Our country has managed to achieve an average annual growth rate of 6.7% during the last Rectangular Strategy Phase II, in spite of the global financial crisis and economic downturn in
2009. The public financial management reform program has been further strengthened, and as a result, budget formulation and execution have improved through strengthened revenue collection and management, cash management, expenditure rationalization, and improvement in expenditure management.

The country has made a considerable progress in reaching four of the Cambodia Millennium Development Goals (CMDGs) ahead of schedule, in reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other communicable diseases, and forging a global partnership for development. Cambodia is well positioned to achieve eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, and achieving universal primary education by the end this year. However, we need to exert much stronger and more concerted effort to achieve Goal 7 of ensuring environmental sustainability.

The importance of environment and natural resource sustainability is recognized by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC). The RGC’s RS Phase III highlights that even though the management of environment and natural resources has improved with the mineral resource management and reforms in the forestry and fisheries sectors, land and water resource management as well as the management of major river and lake basin ecological system, there remain challenges requiring further efforts and initiatives to ensure sustainable development. We further recognize that the risks from climate variability and climate change pose further adversely impacting on Cambodia’s ecological system and socio-economic development. Economics and ecology must be completely integrated in decision making and law making processes not just to protect the environment, but also to protect and promote development, as well as to promote linkages and involvement among different sectors, and key stakeholders. Such engagement and integration are just developing and need to be drastically strengthened.

**Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Throughout history, the environment and natural resources have been one of the main foundations for the civilizations to be established and people to prosper. A Chinese historian and envoy—Zhou Daguon, writing in the late 13th century about the Angkor Empire located on the bank of the Tonle Sap Great Lake in Cambodia—described the Khmer Empire as a civilization built on the success in the natural resources management, especially in water development and drainage. From the 9th to 15th centuries Siem Reap Angkor served as the seat of the Khmer Empire. It is well known not only for its monumental architecture, but also recently for its complex hydro-engineering systems, comprised of canals, moats, embankments, and large reservoirs, known as barays. Angkor was the most extensive urban complex of the preindustrial world during that time when the Khmer Empire reached its highest point of development.

Many recent studies confirm the important role of land cover and forest, rich surface and ground water resources in ensuring not only water and food security but also the structural stability of hundreds of temples and hydraulic structures. Studies further confirm that the downfall of the Khmer Empire was caused by ecological imbalance and breakdown of infrastructure due to severe droughts and floods, drastic changes in land cover and lack of proper maintenance and operation of key hydraulic infrastructures. They further concluded that reason was both the then rulers and resources managers did not see the associated risks until it was too late or could not prevent or mitigate the disasters. It gives us very useful lesson in pro-actively coping with the modern development context in a more collaborative and inclusive manner.

It is clear that the linkages and inter-dependencies of economy and environment has been well acknowledged by us, but it still requires a lot of well concerted and adequately planned
and executed actions by all concerned actors to secure long-term sustainable and inclusive development.

**Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The review shows that Cambodia is very vulnerable to the climate change and disaster risks due to its low adaptation capacity and high dependence on water resources and agriculture—rice and crop production, fisheries and forestry. These sectors and rural subsistence livelihood are highly dependent on the environment resources, and hence make them vulnerable to the natural shocks and disasters. Moreover, Cambodia’s water resources are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts on account of the country’s unique hydrological system, which is primarily dependent on the monsoon and predominately on water-flows from neighboring countries.

The Royal Government of Cambodia has reaffirmed its constitutional obligation to build “a prosperous nation with long-term economic growth, sustainable and equitable development, enhanced livelihoods of people, and reduced poverty incidence; a society which is committed to environmental protection, enhanced culture and national identity...”. However, the natural disasters and degradation of the natural resources and environment will make the government’s efforts to meet the remaining Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and future sustainable development goals, especially in extreme poverty eradication and achieving environmental sustainability, extremely challenging.

The commitment of government alone will not deliver environmental sustainability per se. A clear set of legal measures and regulations, policy actions and investments are needed to guide Cambodia for maintaining and improving its environment and natural resources. This is the primary objective of NESAP. Given the multi-sector nature of environmental management, NESAP is not a strategy specifically for the MOE, but rather for all government ministries as well as private sectors, civil societies and development partners to integrate environmental concerns into national and sub-national economic policies and investments.

On behalf of the National Council for Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Environment, I would like to express our deepest gratitude to the **Samdech Akka Moha Sena Phadey Techo Hun Sen**, Prime Minister, Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) for graciously allowing the Ministry of Environment (MOE) to lead the process for formulation of the NESAP 2016-2023, and for the National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD) to serve as a Highest Body for reviewing and endorsing the draft NESAP 2016-2023 before submitting to the RGC for approval. The MOE is now working with related Line Ministries in setting a Task Force with an inter-ministerial composition for coordinating and leading at the technical level the formulation of the NESAP 2016-2023. A series of multi-stakeholder meetings, and national consultation workshops are planned to enable wider consultation with government ministries and institutions, NGOs and research organizations and universities, and development partners.

The Ministry of Environment (MOE) has been strengthening its organizational capacity and stepping up cooperation with concerned ministries and institutions aimed at effectively discharging their role and responsibility in environment protection, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

**Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

To avoid strategic plan and action plan’s fatigue, the NESAP must be based on country’s priority, needs and capacity, and an inclusive and transparent process of engagement to identify issues of common concern and evaluate options. It shall be based on proper assessment, including institutional and finance assessment by the key stakeholders to create country ownership. We need to establish a strong working relationship with the Inter-
Ministerial Bodies, Budgeting and Oversight Agencies, development partners, CSOs and all key stakeholders from the onset to secure strong will and readiness to finance and implement it.

NESAP should be at all times practical, implementable, and flexible with a feedback mechanism and must ensure a range of financing options are considered and integrated into the national development framework, and closely monitored for reporting to stakeholders and for strengthening its success and better performance.

On this note, I would like to declare this workshop open, and strongly encourage all participants to actively engage and contribute to the fruitful deliberation and success of the workshop.

For achieving a common goal of sustainable and inclusive development for our beloved country and people it requires continued support and tireless and honest collaboration among all key stakeholders and sectors. We are looking forward to a much stronger commitment, fruitful joint actions, and collaboration among us all.

I wish the workshop a great success.

Thank you for your kind attention!