



## **Joint Statement on the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lower Mekong Initiative August 1, 2019 Bangkok, Thailand**

### **Preamble**

1. On August 1, 2019, on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI), the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR, the Union Minister for International Cooperation of Myanmar, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, the United States Secretary of State, the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam, and the Secretary-General of ASEAN met in Bangkok, Thailand for the 12<sup>th</sup> LMI Ministerial Meeting, celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lower Mekong Initiative. The meeting was co-chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand Don Pramudwinai and U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo.

2. The LMI is a partnership between the United States and Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam to advance equitable, sustainable, and inclusive economic growth in the Mekong sub-region, in support of building a strong and united ASEAN by narrowing the development gap. The LMI aims to address transboundary challenges and strengthen good governance by upholding the rules-based system that underpins regional prosperity and stability.

3. U.S. engagement with the Mekong sub-region, including through LMI, a priority under the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, and is guided by principles that align with those enshrined in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. These principles include, among others, strengthening ASEAN Centrality, openness, transparency, inclusivity, a rules-based framework, good governance, respect for sovereignty, self-determination, non-intervention, complementarity with existing cooperation frameworks, equality, mutual respect, mutual trust, mutual benefit, and respect for international law.

### **A Decade of Achievements**

4. Commemorating 10 years of partnership under the LMI, the Secretary and the Foreign Ministers re-affirmed their commitment to advancing Mekong regional connectivity and economic integration.

5. The Foreign Ministers commended the United States for its sustained commitment to the countries of the Mekong sub-region. Over the past 10 years, the United States has contributed \$ 3.8 billion in foreign assistance, and U.S. businesses created over 1.4 million jobs in the United States from their exports to Mekong countries. People-to-people ties have grown rapidly, to include 33,000 students from five Mekong countries in U.S. colleges and universities, and over 72,000 Mekong country citizens as members of the U.S.-supported Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) network as of 2018.

6. Recognizing the LMI's close alignment with the goals of the ASEAN 2025, including the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity, and the Initiative for ASEAN Integration, as well as the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, the Foreign Ministers and the Secretary commended the group's achievements of the last decade. These include numerous capacity-building programs that have helped to: strengthen regional power markets and cooperation to encourage cross-border electricity trade; promote access to real-time data to reduce the risks of floods and droughts while improving sustainable development and management of the river system;



improve agriculture-led economic growth, food security, and trade; strengthen regional educational institutions and student networks through a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education, innovation, and critical thinking; improve health security through bridging gaps in regional pandemic preparedness and response efforts; empower women to become business leaders; foster entrepreneurship and innovation; and build the capacity of government officials to attract private investment in sustainable and eco-friendly infrastructure.

7. The Foreign Ministers and the Secretary welcomed ongoing progress on the Mekong Water Data Initiative (MWDI), including the launch of its data access platform, ‘Mekong Water’ ([www.mekongwater.org](http://www.mekongwater.org)), with the goal of strengthening the coordinating role of the Mekong River Commission (MRC). ‘Mekong Water’ is designed to provide new technological tools to share water data that profoundly supports transparency and accountability, based on capability and voluntary basis of participating countries with an aim of improving flood and drought forecasting, science-based decision-making, and policy development. Ministers recognized that effective water data-sharing will require openness and inclusiveness in providing information in order to safeguard the interests of upstream and downstream countries, and ensure coherent long-term joint stewardship of the Mekong River. The Foreign Ministers and Secretary also agreed to further support the work of MRC.

8. The Foreign Ministers and the Secretary recognized the complementarity between Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) and LMI, noting especially that the United States has become an ACMECS Development Partner. They agreed to look actively for ways to ensure LMI programs integrate ACMECS goals wherever possible.

9. The Foreign Ministers and the Secretary welcomed the establishment of the LMI Public Impact Program, to be implemented through a local institution (e.g. university or think-tank), to promote the development of LMI project proposals that draw from local development needs and expertise and aim to maximize positive impact on the lives of Mekong country citizens.

### **LMI Flagship Projects 2009 – 2019**

10. The Foreign Ministers and the Secretary welcomed a decade of progress in capacity building in the Mekong sub-region to meet transboundary and common challenges, including through the following programs:

**10.1 The Sustainable Infrastructure Partnership (SIP)**, which trains Mekong government officials in best practices to manage shared natural resources, and to harness new technology for natural resources conservation and management;

**10.2 Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong (SIM)**, which provides technical assistance to prepare socially and environmentally responsible safeguards for hydropower dams and other large infrastructure projects;

**10.3 The LMI Pacific Resilience Disaster Response Exercises & Exchanges (DREE)**, an annual series of events led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to improve preparedness for floods, droughts, and other disasters;

**10.4 The Sister River Partnership**, an annual exchange between the Mekong River Commission (MRC) and the Mississippi River Commission;



**10.5 The Power Sector Program (PSP)**, which provides training on the design of sound electricity markets and regulatory frameworks. PSP has supported Viet Nam's transition to a market-oriented power sector, improvements in Lao PDR's capacity to forecast national demand and craft power purchase agreements, and technical expertise on cross-border electricity trade;

**10.6 The LMI Strategic Hydropower Project**, which builds Mekong country officials' capacity to make informed decisions about collective water management, a critical factor underpinning the sub-region's stability and economic development;

**10.7 LMI Seed Sector Project**, a two-year project to build capacities and promote cooperation in the seed sector such as harmonization of plant seed trade policies among LMI countries;

**10.8 The Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training (COMET)** project, which has trained over 1,150 educators from Mekong countries over five years in methods to implement high-quality Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education curriculum. The training provided through COMET has improved STEM education for an estimated 68,000 students across the Mekong sub-region;

**10.9 TIGERS@Mekong**, a public-private alliance platform aimed at enhancing and deepening the startup and innovation ecosystems of targeted Mekong economies by supporting young innovators and entrepreneurs in the high-tech sector;

**10.10 The Third Country Training Program**, jointly funded by Singapore, has trained over 1200 ASEAN and Timor-Leste officials in technical sectors such as health security, WTO trade facilitation, intellectual property rights, and environmental challenges;

**10.11 The LMI Young Scientist Program**, an annual competition for college students in Mekong countries to win seed money for innovative solutions to common environmental, water, energy, and food security challenges. The 2018 winning team from Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Thailand devised a way to use rice husks to absorb-heavy metal runoff generated as a by-product of wastewater treatment;

**10.12 One Health Program**, which established an information-sharing network among Mekong country health officials to identify and treat mosquito-borne diseases, including Zika and Dengue, with prospect to expand such information-sharing initiatives to include other communicable diseases in the sub-region;

**10.13 The Commercial Law Diplomacy Program (CLDP)**, which has trained nearly 100 Mekong country officials on best practices in public procurement, with the goal of increasing transparency and combating corruption;

**10.14 The LMI Quality Infrastructure Training series**, which builds the capacity of Mekong officials to prepare and execute sustainable energy infrastructure projects to attract private sector investment;

**10.15 LMI Women's Entrepreneurship Centers**, located in Lao PDR, Viet Nam, and Cambodia, promote access to financial, technical, and educational resources for women business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs.

### **Looking Ahead: Towards a Stronger U.S.-Mekong Partnership**

**11.** The Foreign Ministers and the Secretary agreed that continued, close partnership between the United States and the countries of the Mekong sub-region in addressing transboundary challenges and promoting sustainable development is in the common interest of all parties, as the sub-region faces new and growing challenges. They further agreed that:



- U.S.-Mekong partnership, through LMI and other regional programs and initiatives, should strive to be as focused, inclusive, and effective as possible, and adapt to new challenges and opportunities facing the sub-region;

- LMI should strive to align its efforts more closely with other regional mechanisms, including through information sharing and closer cooperation between LMI and the many regional efforts of the Friends of the Lower Mekong (FLM) countries and institutions;

- LMI should support the development of ACMECS, Mekong countries' home-grown sub-regional framework and other regional bodies of Mekong countries and seek opportunities for LMI programs to complement and incorporate the goals of their work plan, including the ACMECS Master Plan.

**Heads of Delegation:**

**His Excellency Mr. Prak Sokhonn**, the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia

**His Excellency Mr. Saleumxay Kommasith**, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR

**His Excellency U Kyaw Tin**, the Union Minister for International Cooperation of Myanmar

**His Excellency Mr. Pham Binh Minh**, the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam

**His Excellency Mr. Don Pramudwinai**, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand

**The Honorable Michael Pompeo**, the Secretary of State of the United States of America

**His Excellency Dato Lim Jock Hoi**, the Secretary-General of ASEAN