



JOINT MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Taking Action for Inclusive and Sustainable Development in the GMS

I. Introduction

1. We, the Ministers from the Governments of the Kingdom of Cambodia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, met in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 10 September 2015 for the 20th Ministerial Meeting of the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program (GMS Program).

2. We reviewed recent achievements of GMS cooperation, including progress under the GMS Regional Investment Framework Implementation Plan (RIF-IP) for 2014-2018 and discussed ways to implement this Plan more effectively. Recognizing that the 20th Ministerial Meeting is the first one immediately following the 5th GMS Summit in December 2014, we took it upon ourselves to consider ways toward fulfilling the GMS Leaders' mandate to take concrete actions toward realizing inclusive and sustainable development in the GMS. Considering significant developments in the subregion, and in the world, particularly on the eve of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the United Nation's anticipated adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda with a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we also assessed the GMS's strategic role in strengthening the AEC and advancing the SDGs.

II. Recent Achievements of the GMS Program

3. Since our last Ministerial Meeting in December 2013, the GMS Program has achieved a number of key milestones and deliverables across the various sectors of cooperation:

- In **transport**, physical connectivity has been further boosted by the completion and opening of the following major infrastructure projects: (i) the North South Economic Corridor International Mekong Bridge between Chiang Khong, Thailand and Houayxay, Lao PDR in December 2013; (ii) the Tsubasa Bridge in Neak Loeng, Cambodia along the Southern Economic Corridor in March 2015; (iii) the Noi Bai – Lao Cai Expressway in Viet Nam along the eastern arm of the NSEC in September 2014; and (iv) the section of the East West Economic Corridor from Myawaddy to Kawkaeik in July 2015. In terms of institutional development, the Greater Mekong Railway Association (GMRA) commenced its operations last year. An initial review of the GMS Transport Sector Strategy (2006-2015) was conducted in 2014 and assessed achievements under its strategic thrusts as well as identified areas where further efforts could be pursued.
- In **energy**, the process of selecting the host country for the Regional Power Coordination Center (RPCC), the permanent institution owned by all GMS countries to enhance regional power trade and implement regional power interconnection initiatives is ongoing. Meanwhile, the countries have agreed to further cooperate on removing technical as well as regulatory barriers to power trade in the subregion. Knowledge products on "Strategic Environmental Assessment for the GMS Regional Power

Development Planning” and “GMS Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Development” were completed, which provide useful tools for power development planning and promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency in the GMS.

- In **agriculture**, midway into implementing the GMS Core Agriculture Support Program Phase II, new approaches are being introduced for improving the sector’s competitiveness and delivering more sustainable and inclusive agricultural supply and value chains. Three new policy areas are being explored: (i) food security and climate-friendly agriculture; (ii) rural restructuring and production systems; and (iii) safe agri-food management and trade through ICT applications. To be effective, implementation of Phase II will emphasize synergies with other GMS sectors, demonstrate new technologies for small-holders and apply performance-based management aligned with national program priorities.
- On the **environment**, the 4th Environment Ministers’ Meeting (EMM4) held in Myanmar in January 2015, guided by the GMS Leaders 5th Summit Declaration, reaffirmed support to implement the priority environment projects included in the RIF-IP. Environment Ministers’ also emphasized the importance of investing in the subregion’s natural capital/resources as well as its physical, human, and social capital to secure more inclusive and sustainable development in the GMS.
- In **Information and Communications Technology (ICT)**, the Greater Mekong Subregion Information Superhighway (GMSIS) Steering Group and Implementation Group Meetings are scheduled to take place in late September 2015. The GMS countries will discuss the promotion of interconnected infrastructure based on the GMSIS in order to further enhance the role of ICT in facilitating economic and trade development among GMS countries. We also hope ADB will continue to support the implementation of ICT projects in the RIF-IP.
- In **tourism**, the sector looks forward to further increases in tourist arrivals and receipts. We welcomed the new GMS Tourism Marketing Strategy and Action Plan for 2015-2020 endorsed by the GMS Tourism Working Group this year. A Mekong tourism digital platform has been launched and features visitor information, an e-magazine, and social media. Efforts are also progressing towards establishment of the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO) in Bangkok, Thailand as an inter-governmental organization. We also welcomed ADB’s support to update the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy for 2016-2026, and we expect the update to be completed in 2016.
- In **human resource development**, we acknowledged that frameworks for the mutual recognition of skills and qualifications in selected skill areas as well as new training standards for TVET teachers are underway. An Academic Credit Transfer System Framework and a university networking system in the GMS are also being prepared. A new GMS Health Security Project is under preparation to help strengthen disease control and management. Implementation of Joint Action Program (JAP) is proceeding to provide better access to HIV and health services for migrants in the GMS. The Phnom Penh Plan Program has strengthened capacities of GMS officials and research institutions and we encourage ADB to help sustain the Program. The Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Project at border areas has been playing an important role in containing the spread of malaria, dengue fever, HIV/AIDS, new emerging diseases, and neglected tropical diseases.
- In **transport and trade facilitation (TTF)**, Thailand has ratified all remaining protocols and annexes of the GMS Cross Border Transport Facilitation Agreement (CBTA) and Myanmar is taking steps to do the same. Single Window Inspection and Single Stop Inspection (SWI/SSI) were implemented between Lao PDR and Viet Nam at Lao Bao –

Dansavanh, and new SWI/SSI initiatives are under consideration at border crossings along the East-West and Southern Economic Corridors. Negotiations for bilateral and trilateral transport agreements are also in progress to increase exchange of traffic rights as well as expand designated routes and border crossing points. With support from ADB and other development partners, more than 300 GMS officials attended nearly 20 workshops and training events in 2014-2015 on issues related to customs modernization, such as post clearance audit, rules of origin, advance ruling, and Authorized Economic Operators. Time Release Studies (TRS) were conducted in Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam in 2013-2015 to assess customs clearance procedures, and identify policy measures for improvement. The TTF Action Program for the GMS was presented in the Seventh GMS Economic Corridors Forum (ECF-7) in Kunming in July 2015, and received strong support from GMS countries.

4. Our Ministerial Conference also provided the opportunity to consider the results of the first Progress Report of GMS RIF-IP. Overall, this initial report indicates reasonably good progress for most of the sectors. Almost ninety percent of the projects have reported some progress since the RIF-IP was endorsed, though the progress ranges from modest to significant. This is quite encouraging, given the short timeframe since the RIF-IP's adoption. However, further efforts are needed to accelerate the implementation of projects in the RIF-IP pipeline, particularly for the multi-sectoral and software-oriented activities, such as TTF, ICT, and SEZs.

5. We also welcomed the important outcomes of the highly successful ECF-7 held in Kunming, PRC in June 2015, which highlighted a number of multi-sector initiatives that are key drivers for economic corridor development, including: (i) the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to generate new jobs and strengthen linkages with regional and international production networks; (ii) the launching of an e-Commerce cooperation platform for GMS countries; (iii) a review of the Strategies and Action Plans for the GMS Economic Corridors; and (iv) a preview of a new approach for corridor development planning, or section-specific concept plans (SSCPs), by focusing on select corridor sections with high potential for attracting investment. A GMS Governors' Forum was also successfully held immediately prior to ECF-7, thus reviving this important platform for participation by, and coordination among, governors and other local authorities in developing the GMS economic corridors.

6. At our Ministerial Meeting, we endorsed the GMS Urban Development Strategic Framework which defines a set of principles and guidelines for more coordinated approaches to urban development and spatial planning in the GMS. The Framework focuses on harnessing the economic potential of key urban centers, especially those along the GMS corridors and in border areas. It also emphasizes the importance of green development, disaster risk management, inclusiveness, and enhancing competitiveness. We highlighted the need to strengthen capacities for urban planning and the formulation of policies and regulations for urban development.

7. We also appreciated the establishment of the GMS Projects Database, an initiative of the ADB, which is an online platform with geo-coded information about existing and planned projects under the GMS Program. The Database is accessible to government agencies, development partners, the private sector and other interested stakeholders and provides an important tool for planning, marketing and implementing GMS initiatives.

III. The Role of the GMS in Current Regional and Global Developments

8. The GMS is also affected by noteworthy developments at the regional and global levels. Within the region, 2015 marks the beginning of the AEC. Much has been achieved

under the AEC Blueprint, adopted at the 13th ASEAN Summit in 2007. However, significant challenges remain, including nontariff barriers to trade; significant physical connectivity gaps, particularly for archipelagic members; and widening differences in levels of development among ASEAN member countries.

9. With our rich experience in implementing subregional programs and projects, we in the GMS are playing a pivotal role in contributing to Asia's economic integration. The extensive physical connectivity achieved under the GMS Program in transport, power, and telecommunications serves as an important building block for increasing physical connectivity in ASEAN and beyond. Likewise, GMS programs in the “soft” sectors, such as health, education, tourism, and agriculture, are contributing to greater institutional and people-to-people connectivity across the ASEAN community. The GMS Core Environment Program and the Biodiversity Corridors Conservation Initiative also provide useful lessons and models for the entire ASEAN region. Moreover, the GMS focus on enabling the “CLMV” countries to catch up with their relatively more advanced neighbors is aligned with, and will contribute substantially to, the ASEAN aim of “narrowing development gaps” among its members. Recognizing the benefits of gradual integration of the GMS into the overall Asia-Pacific region, we welcome the progress made under various regional and inter-regional cooperation frameworks.

10. We also noted with appreciation the PRC's initiative of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, and look forward to the synergy between this initiative and GMS cooperation programs, working together towards the common prosperity and sustainable development in the GMS.

11. Another historic event will take place soon after our Meeting: the adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda by the United Nations Summit, the core of which are the SDGs. Among the key aspirations of the SDGs are to end poverty and hunger, to combat inequalities, to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources, and to create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth and shared prosperity.¹

12. The SDGs build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were adopted almost 15 years ago. Much has been achieved under the MDGs, and this can also be observed across and within GMS countries. Most of the GMS countries are on track in achieving many of the MDGs, particularly those related to poverty eradication. However, performance with regard to some MDGs remains uneven. The SDGs will endeavor to fully achieve the MDGs, but go beyond them and to encompass an integrated, interdependent, and extensive range of economic, social and environmental objectives.² The role of spatial and land use planning for managing proper use and allocation of natural resources is also very important in meeting the SDGs.

13. Our GMS Leaders anticipated the emergence of the SDGs when they endorsed their Joint Summit Declaration: “Committed to Inclusive and Sustainable Development in the GMS.” The UN's Post-2015 Development Agenda recognizes the importance of regional cooperation in facilitating the “effective translation of sustainable development policies into concrete action at national level.”³ Our planned and ongoing cooperative undertakings in the GMS are, therefore, consistent and compatible with the development vision embodied in the MDGs and SDGs.

¹ Paragraph 3 of the Outcome Document of the United Nations Summit, September 2015, entitled “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

² Paragraphs 16 and 17, *ibid.*

³ Paragraph 21, *ibid.*

IV. Way Forward

14. The overarching mandate given by the GMS Leaders at their 5th Summit is to ensure that future development of the GMS is inclusive and sustainable. The main instrument for ensuring that medium term undertakings are consistent with this mandate is the RIF-IP. Implementing the RIF-IP in a timely and effective manner is therefore our core responsibility.

15. To accelerate implementation of projects and initiatives in the RIF-IP pipeline and to ensure each GMS country's sustained commitment, we hereby mandate our Senior Officials to mainstream the priority projects in the RIF-IP into their respective national development plans, as well as to coordinate closely with the specific agencies that will implement them.

16. Moreover, recognizing that projects require adequate funding, we re-emphasize the importance of proactively seeking support from our development partners and the private sector. We, therefore, encourage our Senior Officials to initiate strategic and focused resource mobilization efforts to identify new sources of financing for priority GMS projects.

17. We are also committed to accelerate implementation of the TTF Action Program for the GMS as well as the CBTA. We will ensure that future efforts are more comprehensive, balanced and better-coordinated so that we can remove existing constraints to seamless cross border transport and trade in the subregion. We, therefore, also support the proposal by Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam for the inclusion of borders along Routes 8 and 12 under the CBTA, and the eventual revision of the relevant CBTA protocols for this purpose.

18. We remain fully committed to the development of economic corridors as the anchor approach to realizing inclusive and sustainable development in the GMS. The ECF will continue to serve as the institutional mechanism for advancing economic corridor development, and pursuing complementary initiatives such as SEZs, especially along border areas, as well as cooperation in the establishment and promotion of border economic zones; integrated urban development along the economic corridors; and effective implementation of TTF measures.

19. To ensure that GMS efforts are convergent and synergistic with key regional and global initiatives toward inclusive and sustainable development, we also direct our Senior Officials to determine how and where the GMS Program can further contribute to the realization of the AEC and the achievement of the SDGs.

20. We welcome the efforts to advance energy cooperation by fully using regional resources in a sustainable manner, by extending power grid interconnections in the GMS, and by collaborating on the development and supervision of a subregional power market.

21. We also welcome the news that ADB has extended the technical assistance for secretariat, advisory and overall coordination support to the GMS Program through 2018. We take this occasion to again express our deep appreciation for ADB's enduring commitment to advancing GMS cooperation and development.

V. Conclusion

22. The GMS Program has certainly come a long way since the first GMS Conference on Subregional Cooperation hosted by ADB in Manila in October 1992. Our 20th GMS Ministerial Conference has highlighted that we now face many different challenges and opportunities in the subregion, but our basic approach to addressing them remains basically the same—to identify and pursue pragmatic, results-oriented actions and projects that will yield lasting development benefits and impacts for the people of the GMS, our countries, and

the subregion as a whole. This spirit of goodwill, pragmatism, and shared interest in the well-being of our people and their future is also what inspires us to take action for more inclusive and sustainable development in the GMS.

23. Finally, we wish to express our sincere gratitude to the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar for its gracious and able hosting of the 20th GMS Ministerial Conference.

Endorsed in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 10 September 2015.