

Third Annual Mekong Flood Forum
Don Chan Palace Hotel
Vientiane, Lao PDR
7 April 2005

OPENING REMARKS

By

Mr. Nico Bakker

First Secretary of the Royal Netherlands Embassy, Hanoi
The Royal Netherlands Embassy to Vietnam

H.E. Mr. Sitaheng Rasphone
Vice- Minister of Agriculture and Forestry,
Vice Chairman of the Lao National Mekong Committee and
Member of the MRC Joint Committee for Lao PDR,

H.E. Mr. Erwin Starnitzky, German Ambassador,

Dr. Ayse Sezin Tokar, USAID Advisor,

Dear Dr. Olivier Cogels, Chief Executive Officer of the Mekong River
Commission Secretariat,

Dear members of the MRC Joint Committee and National Mekong
Committees,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Colleagues and friends,

Firstly may I also warmly welcome you all on behalf of the Royal Netherlands Embassies in Hanoi and Bangkok to this Third Annual Flood Forum, the first annual forum that had been made integral part of the implementation of the Flood Management and Mitigation Program.

Secondly, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, allow me to use this opportunity to congratulate the Council, the Joint Committee, the National Mekong Committee and the MRC Secretariat with the celebration of 10 years implementation of the 1995 Agreement.

On behalf of the Netherlands Embassies (RNE) in Hanoi and Bangkok, I wish complement the members of the Council, Joint Committee, National Mekong Committee, Chief Executive Officer and staff of the MRC Secretariat with the remarkable progress made since 1995.

Many flood related issues will be presented today and tomorrow, for which I would touch upon some more general topics, relating to the MRC, the FMMP and our role as and Embassy.

MRC's role over time has changed and its role will have to further adapt in order to be able to cope with the challenges of the future. In that context the RNE has welcomed the recent joint initiative undertaken by MRC, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank to identify and assess these challenges through a strategy building process.

After the 2000 floods "flood management and mitigation" was given a high priority by the Riparian States, subsequently requesting the Secretariat to develop a strategy and a program for implementation of the strategy. In line with that MRC gave the Flood Management and Mitigation Program the status of Core Program.

The instrument of "Annual Flood Forum" was included in the design of the flood management and mitigation program as a platform to provide practical inputs, food for thought, new ideas, lessons learnt, insight in new technologies etc.

The Netherlands Government will provide substantial funding to the FMMP, based on the following three major considerations:

- 1- to help implement the development co-operation goals of our Minister for Development Co-operation;
- 2- to contribute effectively to sustainable development through integrated river basin management, with a special focus on poverty alleviation;
- 3- to secure full funding, and to provide sound financial conditions for successful implementation of the FMMP by MRCS (without being hindered by the constant search for additional funding)

The RNE is happy to learn that MRCS is presently finalizing the preparatory phase and is in the process of putting the FMMP into full operation.

Most of our colleagues in the FMMP, like USAID, GTZ, ADB, DANIDA, JICA and others have concretized their commitments towards MRC; of some the support is already quite some time operational.

As part of the commitment to Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development Goals, our Minister for Development Co-operation pays more attention to regional developments leading to a growing regional involvement.

The Development Co-operation budget of the Netherlands Government is 0.8% of GDP of which 1/8th, being 0.1% of GDP, is identified to support the environment sector in partner countries and five regions with international river basins, of which the Mekong Region is one.

Our support to the Wetlands Program and the Flood Management and Mitigation Program is well in line with that policy.

The overall goal of the environmental involvement is "sustainable development" the complex but crucial balancing acts between social-economic development and the natural resource base.

With the prospect of accelerated economic growth on the Greater Mekong Subcontinent sustainable development will be the major challenge for the Riparian Countries.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, I'm sure,

- that this Third Annual Flood Forum will be extremely valuable for a proper development of the FMMP, and
- that a lively exchange of views and experiences during the Forum will be inspiring and motivating for organizers and participants.

In conclusion, the results of the Forum may contribute to the sustainable development of the Mekong Region, to each of the Riparian Countries individually, and jointly, to help shaping their future.

May I wish each of you a particularly useful, but also enjoyable Third Annual Flood Forum.

Thank you all.