

Third Annual Mekong Flood Forum
Don Chan Palace Hotel
Vientiane, Lao PDR
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OPENING REMARKS

By

H.E. Mr. Erwin Starnitzky
German Ambassador, Vientiane
German Embassy to Lao PDR

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,

Dr. Ayse Sezin Tokar, USAID Advisor,

Mr. Nico Bakker, First Secretary of the Royal Netherlands Embassy, Hanoi

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

Excellencies and dear Colleagues, distinguished delegates, fellow
countrymen,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Since unfortunately I will not be able to attend the whole Forum, I am grateful that I have this opportunity to address all participants already now during the opening ceremony.

Let me start by thanking the government of Lao PDR and the Mekong River Commission for organizing and hosting this important meeting and congratulate them on the wise choice of dates, which makes this Forum coincide with the 10th anniversary of the signing of the MRC agreement on sustainable development in 1995. The Forum brings together representatives of the MRC member states, regional and international experts, partners and staff from relevant cooperating agencies with the aim to review recent flood activities and to raise awareness of the need for a regional and balanced approach to flood management in the basin. As we all can see from the program of the meeting, the Forum will also serve as a comprehensive introduction to MRC's Flood Management and Mitigation Program.

I am very grateful to have this opportunity to personally express the high importance the German Federal Government attaches to the developments of the Mekong River Commission, which it sees as an example of successful regional cooperation. This importance is now once more confirmed by its support and contribution to this Forum, making inter alia possible the participation of the German experts well known in the field, Professor Meon and Dr. Schulze, whom I would like to personally welcome here in Vientiane. Looking at their expertise in the subject especially on early warning systems I am sure their input will very much appreciated by all participants.

Flood Forecasting and Early Warning indeed are the most effective means of saving lives endangered by flooding of rivers or the sea. The German Government has supported Early Warning activities in many parts of the world. It has hosted two conferences on Early Warning in Potsdam (1998) and Bonn (2003). The recent Tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean has made it clear to everyone that Early Warning is of outmost importance in many parts of the world, and Germany has responded by helping to set up an Early Warning System for Indonesia. In the line of this activity, Germany through the GTZ is also contributing to improve the Early Warning System for the Mekong, and furthermore by supporting this meeting.

There is no need I think to enumerate the various projects of the Mekong River Commission the Federal Government has supported and still is supporting in order to show the importance it attaches to the MRC. Let me just mention the German support for the Forest Cover Monitoring Project from 1993 to 1999, the Sustainable Management of Resources in the Lower Mekong Basin Project from 1996 – 2002, the Sustainable Watershed Management since 2002, and since 2004 the two components of the Flood Management and Mitigation Program " Flood Emergency Management Strengthening" and " Land Management", not to forget that already in 2001 Germany provided support for the process of formulating the FMM- Strategy.

Germany's support to MRC is in line with the principles of its development policy in Asia and other parts of the world as expressed in the Federal Government's Agenda 21 and its Action Programme 2015. German development co-operation concentrates on three core problem areas, namely the alleviation if not eradication of poverty, the protection of the environment and natural resources, and the democratization of state and society, which are also reflected in the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals of 2000 and in the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy of the Lao PDR.

I think that the MRC Secretariat has a crucial role to play not only for the solution of problems caused by repeated flooding of the Mekong, but also for the efforts of the Mekong Basin countries to achieve an overall sustainable development in the region. And I think its is well prepared to play this role by its capacity as a knowledge center having acquired unparalleled professional expertise over the past ten years. So it can provide independent analysis, elaborate strategies and concepts for common development program complementing the national ones. It can also work as facilitator and mediator in

difficult situations. By doing so, it will strengthen even more the position of MRC as an important player in the region, and I am sure the Secretariat under the able leadership of the CEO, Dr. Olivier Cogels with the support of the Commission, is willing to accept this role.

I wish us all, organizers and participants, a successful conference.