

**WELCOME SPEECH**

By

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*Excellency Mr. Sin Niny*

*Vice Chairman of Cambodia National Mekong Committee*

*Member of the MRC Joint Committee for Cambodia;*

*Dr. Armand Evers, First Secretary Integrated Water Resources Management,  
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*Excellencies;*

*Donors, Partners and International Organisations;*

*Distinguished Delegates;*

*Ladies and Gentlemen*

On behalf of the Mekong River Commission I am delighted to welcome you all to the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Mekong Flood Forum here in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

I would like to extend my gratitude to H.E. Mr. Sin Niny, Vice Chairman of Cambodia National Mekong Committee, Member of the MRC Joint Committee for Cambodia for presenting the opening address and to the Government of the Netherlands which generously sponsored this forum.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the governments of the Netherlands, Germany, France, Denmark, Japan and the United States of America as well as the Asian Development Bank and the European Commission for their support of the MRC's Flood Management and Mitigation Programme and welcome delegates from these countries.

I welcome our distinguished guests from our member countries of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam and our dialogue partners, Myanmar and China and all those participants and delegates who have travelled from other countries to be here today. I would also like to acknowledge the important inputs and continued support of our member countries and associated line agencies.

For the next two days the delegates in this room will be discussing a broad range of topics concerning the improvement of flood forecasting and warning systems for flood management and mitigation in the Lower Mekong Basin. We are confident that this forum will raise awareness of the current state of flood forecasting and warning systems at the national and regional levels in the Lower Mekong Basin as well as providing an opportunity for participants to discuss emerging needs within the basin.

As we know the flooding of the Mekong Basin is an annual event, and we acknowledge its importance for the ecology of the river and the fishery in some areas, but the flood can also have some devastating downsides. Each year floods cause many deaths and millions of dollars worth of destruction of property.

As the population of the basin has grown, agriculture has intensified and land use has changed and this, in turn, has had an effect both on the flood patterns and the toll on humanity and the economy. Today the existing flood forecasting and warning systems in

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the Mekong River Basin are not yet adequate enough and there is a real and urgent need to improve the quality of flood information available.

We need to develop professional, high-tech operational solutions to the basin's needs. We need to create a highly efficient flood forecasting system, which must also include the ability to cope with flash floods and which will provide accurate, timely and easily understood data to all those people likely to be affected by floods.

This is not a small undertaking. We are looking at a large investment in human, institutional and technical capacity. We will need more and better basic as well as real-time data and this will certainly need more investment from donors if we are to achieve these goals.

It is the task of this forum to address these issues and to contribute to the design and development of a fully operational system based on strong cooperation among the riparian countries and the regional flood centre. Delegates will also have the opportunity to exchange experiences, best practices and ideas with the international community, academic institutions, international organisations and civil society organisations. But I really hope that the discussion will not just remain at a conceptual level, but that the forum will be able to identify what is needed in very concrete terms to turn these concepts into reality, including realistic cost breakdowns, so that we can institute optimal operational solutions to the problems facing the Mekong Basin's people.

On an optimistic note, I am delighted to announce that recently MRC has signed funding agreements worth nearly US\$4 million with the French Government through The Agence Française de Développement (the French Development Agency) to support the development of the Mekong-HYCOS regional hydrological cycle observing system.

The main objective of the Mekong-HYCOS, which has been developed in partnership with the World Meteorological Organisation, is to establish a basin wide hydrometeorological information system, which spatially covers the mainstream and main tributaries of the Mekong river system. It is expected that under the Mekong-HYCOS project, more than 20 hydro-meteorological stations will be upgraded. The Mekong-HYCOS system will be integrated into the existing MRC monitoring system, which will improve national hydrological networks and strengthen the FMMP's river monitoring/flood forecasting capacities.

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***Ladies and Gentlemen***

The MRC's Flood Management and Mitigation Programme has been in operation for one year now and it is well on its way to achieving its goals. The Regional Flood Management and Mitigation Centre is firmly established in Phnom Penh and last wet season produced daily flood forecasting data which was posted daily on the MRC website, [www.mrcmekong.org](http://www.mrcmekong.org). We are grateful to our Dialogue Partner China for the provision of daily hydrological data which enhances our capacity to provide more accurate flood forecasts and we hope this partnership will be further strengthened in the coming years.

The Mekong River Commission's Mekong Programme is a regional cooperation programme for the sustainable development of water and related resources in the Mekong Basin and the FMMP is a first class example of how such regional cooperation on transboundary issues between our member countries works. The work of the FMMP is also fully integrated with other MRC programmes, such as the Basin Development Plan, the Environment Programme, the

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Information and Knowledge Management Programme, the Navigation Programme, the Water Utilisation Programme and the Fisheries Programme.

With this type of cooperation and with continuing donor confidence, MRC is sure we will be able to help the Mekong Basin's inhabitants meet their needs. This forum represents one step toward meeting their needs for improved flood forecasting and early warning.

Thank you for your attention and I am sure you will all work together over the next two days to produce some highly professional and concrete outputs.