

**23<sup>rd</sup> GMS WORKING GROUP ON ENVIRONMENT ANNUAL MEETING**  
**Siem Reap, Cambodia**  
**12 July 2017**

**Welcome Remarks**  
**by**  
**H.E. Mr. Sao Sopheap, Director of Cabinet**  
**Ministry of Environment, Cambodia**

Mr. Pavit Ramachandran, Senior Environment Specialist ADB; Working Group on Environment delegates from the GMS countries; excellency, ladies and gentlemen.

Good morning. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 23<sup>rd</sup> annual gathering of the GMS Working Group on Environment. I would like to thank all of you for your active participation since yesterday's technical sessions on best practices for green growth that provide the context for today's meeting.

Since its launch in 1992, the GMS Economic Cooperation Program continues to recognize protection of the environment as a cornerstone of an integrated approach towards balanced, inclusive and sustainable growth. Over the past 10 years, we, the Working Group on Environment has achieved several key milestones toward "environmental friendly and climate resilient" GMS Economic Cooperation Program. These include the mainstreaming of sound environmental considerations into upstream planning of other development sectors; strengthened and expanded cooperation on transboundary biodiversity conservation landscapes and low carbon development; and increased knowledge sharing on best practices and experiences throughout the subregion.

However, there are still emerging challenges to be overcome. These challenges resulting from economic transformation leading to impressive economic growth driven mainly by the intensive use of natural resources, coupled with population growth, climate change, and natural disasters, continue to put pressure on the GMS country's environment. At the same time, emerging challenges, such as urbanization and expanded middle class, resulting from growing economies, imply increased demand for more natural resources to support activities and lifestyle. This also means increased pollution that adversely impacts on environmental quality. To meet these challenges, let us focus on intensifying and expanding our joint efforts toward ensuring a sustainable and healthy environment for the subregion. From the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> Term of the Royal Government, Cambodia has made substantial reforms within the environment and natural resources sector, resulting in better management of natural resources and increasing the protected area system to around 7.5 million hectares. Also, a National Environmental Strategy and Action Plan and an Environment Code have been developed and the National Council for Sustainable Development established to lead green growth, climate change, and biodiversity conservation initiatives.

This annual meeting comes at an opportune time with Phase 2 of the Core Environment Program, our flagship platform for regional cooperation on the environment, nears completion and preparations for the next phase of the program and the 5<sup>th</sup> Environment Ministers' Meeting are ongoing to ensure the continuity of our regional cooperation and partnership. Today's meeting, therefore, provides an excellent venue to take an honest look at what we have done, how effectively we have responded, and how ready we are in addressing the transformational and emerging challenges of and in advancing green growth in the region. More importantly, this gathering is an effort to further what we have started, by guiding the future direction, deciding on the role and strategic activities to prioritize, as well as renewing our commitment by setting aside adequate technical and financial resources for the implementation of the program.

On that note, I wish us all productive and engaging discussions. While working hard during the meeting, please do find time to enjoy and appreciate the many attractions that Siem Reap has to offer.

Thank you and good day to all.