

**Intervention of H.E. Prak Sokhonn, DPM, Minister of
Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation**

ASEAN High-Level Forum on Sub-Regional Cooperation
for Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth

Hanoi, 30 November 2021, via videoconference

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- *H.E. Pham Minh Chinh, Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam*
 - *H.E. Bui Thanh Son, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam,*
 - *Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. First of all, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for organizing this *High-Level Forum on Sub-Regional Cooperation for Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth*. I am most honored to represent my Prime minister, Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen at this event.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. In the course of the ASEAN integration process, it is widely acknowledged that sub-regional cooperation frameworks are important mechanisms to complement ASEAN's efforts to build an inclusive and people-centered community. Sub-regional efforts have significantly narrowed the development gap between ASEAN member states, strengthened regional connectivity, and assisted in mitigating regional calamities. In the present context, where our region is at the heart of the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, ASEAN-led mechanism and the Mekong sub-regional cooperation frameworks have played, in their respective ways, an important role in effectively tackling regional health security measures, promoting the recovery efforts, and revitalization of the regional economy.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. On the issue pertaining to the theme of this forum, allow me to share my perspectives as follows:

4. This [High-Level Forum](#) is about sub-regional cooperation for sustainable development and inclusive growth, which by default is related to climate-resilient agricultural production, bearing in mind that the Mekong countries are still largely dependent on agriculture. Indeed, for agriculture to thrive, water resources management is an important and indispensable factor. In this regard, we welcome the strengthening of the sharing of hydrological data and the joint efforts between the Secretariat of the Mekong River Commission and the Mekong-Lancang Water Resources Cooperation Center. The collaboration between these two institutions will assist our sub-region to better deal with future floods, droughts and other climate related disasters. Based on scientific data, the Mekong countries can adjust to changes in hydrological

conditions, adapt to climate change and prepare for natural disasters.

5. Cambodia wishes to see the existing sub-regional cooperation focusing more on the implementation of concrete and practical projects to capitalize on the huge economic potentials of the Mekong region, be they in the form of providing solutions for development, institutional strengthening, building of reliable public-private sector partnerships, and as basic as promoting intra-subregional trade and investment.

6. For that matter, we should enhance the implementation of regional free trade agreements, in particular the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement, which will enter into force in January 2022.

7. Needless to say that other ASEAN frameworks and sub-regional mechanisms should be reinvigorate to strengthen regional connectivity, boost supply chains and

enhance people-to-people exchanges. The digitalization of our economy and e-commerce, the science, technology, and innovation should further accelerate our industrial transformation, while enabling our MSMEs and our women entrepreneurs to take good advantage of this growing sub-region.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. Cambodia reiterates the importance of synergies and complementarities of the various existing Mekong sub-regional cooperation frameworks within the ASEAN region, which include as well the ACMECS. All these frameworks have, thus far, brought about socio-economic benefits as well as contributed to the progress of our region. This positive trajectory was made possible thanks to the spirit of openness and transparency, regional ownership, complementarity, but foremost on the non-confrontational aspects of our cooperation.

9. We are all conscious of the current tension between the two superpowers. Their rivalries are heating up, putting our Mekong cooperation under severe stress. We have to ensure that our sub-regional cooperation does not turn into a political platform and the securitization of our Mekong sub-region should be avoided at all costs. For that we do have already ASEAN and its ASEAN led mechanisms, which are fully equipped to deal with this issue. No one wants to see the Mekong region becoming once again an arena of major power rivalries or proxy wars as it was, sadly, in the 1970s and 80s. We should be cautious of any action that would lead to a mini alliance-building that pitch us against one another. This is definitely not conducive for the development of the sub-region nor in the best interest of our people.

10. Let me wrap up my intervention by stressing that only through non-confrontational cooperation that we can enhance trust and mutual understanding. With that

positive frame of mind, everything is possible and we can foresee a strong, cohesive sub-regional cooperation that is truly sustainable and inclusive.

Thank you.