

**Opening Remarks
By H.E. PRAK Sokhonn,
Sr Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and
International Cooperation
at the Launching Ceremony of
the National Secretariat of Cambodia for Mekong-
Lancang Cooperation
Phnom Penh, 10 October 2017**

*His Excellency Xiong Bo, Ambassador of the People's
Republic of China to Cambodia
Ambassadors and Representatives of the Embassies
of the Mekong Countries,
Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and
Gentlemen,*

First of all, let me take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all our guests for taking the time to join us in the launching of the National Secretariat of Cambodia for Mekong-Lancang Cooperation, which is officially established under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation pursuant to a sub-decree of 13 June 2017.

Some of you may wonder why the need for a dedicated National Secretariat to cover just one cooperation framework and why now?

Allow me to share a bit the context as well as the rationale for such a decision. For Cambodia, the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation (MLC) is an important comprehensive sub-regional cooperation framework, whether you look at it from the political, economic or socio-cultural aspects.

Politically, it binds the destiny of six riparian countries that share geographically a sub-region located along the Mekong River. Within a short time span of some two years the strong political engagement of the leaders of six Mekong-Lancang countries has brought about the realization of an idea conceived in Nay Pyi Taw during the 17th China-ASEAN Summit into a thriving full-fledged cooperation mechanism. Already we had our first Leaders' Meeting in March of 2016 in Sanya, China and a few months from now Samdech Techo Hun Sen will co-chair with Chinese Premier H.E. Li Keqiang the 2nd Leaders' Meeting in January 2018 in Phnom Penh.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The **Sanya Declaration** adopted by our Leaders at the Inaugural Summit have set a very ambitious agenda as well as a good direction as to how they see this cooperation mechanism will evolve. Based on the three key pillars of cooperation, namely political and security issues, economic and sustainable development, and social, cultural and people-to-people exchanges, we have agreed on the five priority directions, comprising of connectivity, production capacity, cross-border economic cooperation, water resources as well as agriculture and poverty-reduction.

Parallelly, we have moved to establish the necessary institutional implementation mechanism to deliver concrete outcomes: Sectoral Joint Working Groups were set up; several Early Harvest Projects were launched and many other projects are lined up for the second round; a LMC Special Fund to support small-and-medium scale projects is in the final stage of being operational; the first MLC Five Year Plan of Action is being formulated so as to give us a good long-term planning perspective; a think tank Track II

network was launched last week right here in Phnom Penh under the name of the Global Centre for Mekong Studies. And today Cambodia is joining other Mekong Lancang countries to inaugurate our National Secretariat. For your information, all six Mekong-Lancang countries have officially established their National Secretariats or Coordination Units.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

What are we to expect from the new institution? My short answer is “a lot”.

For all intent and purpose, and pursuant to the decision of the 2nd Foreign Ministers’ Meeting last December 2016 in Siem Reap, its primary role is to serve as a coordinating body among the line ministries/institutions for all matters related to the implementation of the Mekong Lancang Cooperation. For me, I expect more from it. Aside from coordinating projects in the 5 priority areas, starting from the formulation of proposals to their actual implementation and monitoring, I foresee more of its contribution in a few important aspects:

First, in the MLC policy formulation. I believe the combined intellectual power of 22 member institutions of our Secretariat can act as a “thought leader” to contribute to the overall MLC policy process, i.e. on how to improve the MLC Five Year Plan of Action so that it is responsive to the needs of Cambodia; how to ensure that there is synergy and complementarity with other cooperation framework like the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) and other Mekong Cooperation mechanisms; how it can support Cambodia’s development agenda in line with that of the ASEAN Economic Community.

Second, in the capacity building of our officials. I take this challenge very seriously. As you come to this Ministry, you must have noticed the construction of two new wings. One building will be home to our new Institute for Diplomacy and International Studies. I expect to see a close cooperation between the Secretariat and the Institute, in terms of knowledge and experiences sharing, not just within Cambodia but cross-country sharing among all 6 countries.

Third, in term advocacy and awareness, the Secretariat is expected to play an active role in promoting the works and achievements of the MLC, i.e. in the form of media and university outreach, a quarterly magazine or newsletter, organizing conferences or seminars on topics of interests to MLC, etc.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen!

In closing, I can say that, in sum, we came a long way in such a short time. I believe we did it because of a strong sense of urgency, a spirit of inclusiveness in our collaborative and consensus-driven attitude. In this regard, I would like to take this opportunity to thank China for its leading role and active contribution in this initiative. I want to thank also our fellow Mekong countries for their goodwill and collaboration so far.

I thank you.