

**Sixth Ministerial Meeting of the Lower Mekong Initiative
Joint Ministerial Statement
1 July 2013, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam**

On July 1, 2013, the Foreign Ministers of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam, and the U.S. Secretary of State and the Secretary-General of ASEAN met in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam for the 6th Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) Ministerial Meeting.

Ministers endorsed LMI as a forum through which to address complex, transnational development and policy challenges. They agreed that the action plans for each of the six pillars will enable LMI members to advance regional priorities most effectively, and endorsed the role of the LMI Coordination Hub in providing information to LMI stakeholders through the upgraded LMI website.

Ministers launched the Eminent and Expert Persons Group (EEPG) for LMI based on the approved terms of reference. The EEPG will comprise two experts from the political, academic, cultural, economic, or business circles in each LMI member country who will make recommendations to the Ministers on the strategic direction of LMI and the way forward.

Ministers also stated that it is essential for LMI and the Initiative for ASEAN Integration to be more closely aligned and coordinated. They agreed that while both initiatives serve valuable purposes and should continue to exist independently, there is potential for collaboration and information sharing that needs to be realized.

Ministers reaffirmed the importance of integrating gender throughout all LMI pillars and programs and agreed to new language in the LMI Master Plan of Action supporting this principle. Specific efforts include integrating gender into Mekong Technology Innovation Generation and Entrepreneurship Resources (TIGERS) and developing a new program designed to provide capacity building for women in forestry management. Ministers also suggested holding the next Gender Policy Dialogue meeting on the margins of the next ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women. Ministers endorsed the priorities of the LMI Health Pillar: prevention and control of communicable and emerging infectious diseases; prevention and control of counterfeit as well as substandard medications (CSM); regional collaboration to support implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHR); and identifying and sharing best practices in public health. Ministers agreed that compliance with World Health Organization IHR core capacities requirements should be advanced, as should work towards a regional approach to prepare for public health responses to food safety events, chemical, radiation and/or nuclear incidents, and bio-terrorism. Ministers also agreed that prevention of production

of counterfeit and substandard medicines and capacity building to control and regulate CSM was also identified as a priority.

The ministers approved the following new health projects: Pandemic Health Threat Response to address outbreaks of H7N9 in the Asia-Pacific; a Healthcare Management workshop through the Third Country Training Program to be implemented jointly with Singapore and the U.S.; regional cross-border malaria cooperation, along the lines of that being undertaken by Thailand, the U.S. and Myanmar along the Thai-Myanmar border; and a technical exchange between Cambodia and Laos to enhance gender integration in health policies and structures for improved health outcomes.

Ministers reaffirmed the Education Pillar's focus on building educational ties and cooperation. They endorsed the continuation of the Professional Communications Skills for Leaders English language training to Phase 2—promoting capacity building among experts—exploring the equivalency of qualifications in tertiary programs between Lower Mekong partner countries, and encouraging regional cooperation on education reform.

The LMI Environment and Water Pillar promotes dialogue and information exchange between LMI countries to encourage policies and programs that support sound management of natural resources, with an emphasis on cross-cutting and transnational issues. The goal of the pillar is to advance economic growth and sustainable development through transnational policy dialogues and programs to improve the management of water and natural resources.

Ministers endorsed the following new Environment and Water Pillar projects: Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong (SIM), which is an on-demand USAID technical assistance mechanism for smart infrastructure design and development support; USAID's new planned work to build capacity in GIS and remote sensing technologies for natural resource management; and greater collaboration on environmental and water issues through events such as the 'NEXUS Dialogue on food, water and energy'. The ministers welcomed recent progress on planning for implementation of two proposals from Viet Nam on water resources management that were previously discussed at the fifth LMI Ministerial.

Ministers also welcomed the continuation of the Forecast Mekong project, which could include Thailand's proposal for LMI Members to consider integrated weather forecasting to aid in natural disaster preparedness.

Ministers welcomed the design of the Connectivity Pillar to reflect the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) by including infrastructure, information and communications technology, and people-to-people connectivity. They noted that this focus and the new emphasis on collaboration with ASEAN will support the achievement of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015.

In direct support of both the people-to-people connectivity and institutional connectivity components of the MPAC, the ministers endorsed a new project called Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training (COMET). The goal of COMET is to increase the number of skilled workers in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, accounting and tourism throughout the sub-region by utilizing breakthroughs in information and communication technology (ICT) and innovative partnerships among education institutions, governments, and the private sector.

Ministers also endorsed follow-up to the 'Connect Mekong' platform, including the kick-off Mekong TIGERS project, a private sector DEMO conference and training to be held in Viet Nam this August to support and evaluate sub-regional innovators and entrepreneurs. Ministers also endorsed the expansion of the Best Practices Exchange to areas including engineering, capital markets, aviation, health, energy, and ICT. BPEs share best practices in smart infrastructure financing and development through greater engagement of private sector resources. Ministers welcomed Thailand's continued efforts to develop its proposal on capacity building on cross-border procedures and border management. Ministers thanked Singapore for its role in providing Third Country Training to develop technical capacity in infrastructure challenges, and requested continuing involvement.

Ministers endorsed the Plan of Action for and recognized the work of the Agriculture and Food Security Pillar to expand agricultural trade and investment in the region and increase engagement with the private sector, agriculturists, and other sectors. Ministers approved the new text of the Plan of Action for the pillar and approved mapping donor activity in the Lower Mekong sub-region in the agriculture and food security sector, in order to detect programming gaps, identify potential partnerships, and avoid overlapping activities.

Over the next decade energy consumption in the Mekong sub-region is expected to increase at least five percent annually. Ministers approved the inaugural Plan of Action for the new Energy Security Pillar and welcomed its focus on regional market development, power interconnection, energy efficiency and conservation, transparency and good governance and research and development. Ministers welcomed the proposal for regulatory capacity building to address topics such as cost-reflective tariff design, system planning coordination, and regional interconnectivity.

The ministers looked forward to the convening of the fifth LMI Regional Working Group Meeting in Cambodia and the seventh LMI Ministerial Meeting in 2014 in Myanmar.