DATE & TIME: 3 February 2021 @ 0900 Geneva / 1500 Phnom Penh/Vientiane/Bangkok /Hanoi

TOPIC:

Upholding Mekong Cooperation for Present & Future Challenges: Data & Information-Sharing for Regional Cooperation

OPENING REMARKS BY:

His excellency Pirkka Tapiola, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, European Union in Thailand

TITLE:

Support from the European Union to the Mekong River Commission and the Water Convention as transboundary water cooperation platforms

Dr Somkiat Prajamwong, Secretary General, Office of Natural Water Resources (ONWR) and Thai National Mekong Committee; Dr An Pich Hatda, Chief Executive Officer, MRC Secretariat; Mr Dong Yanfei; Deputy Secretary General, LMC Water Centre; Dr Lea Kauppi, Senior Advisor, Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE); Dr Anoulak Kittikhoun, Chief Strategist MRC; Ms Solene Le Doze, Environment and Development Division, United Nations Economic & Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am pleased to participate in this morning’s webinar on upholding Mekong Cooperation for present and future transboundary challenges.

25 years since the signature of the historic 1995 Mekong Agreement, the MRC remains the region’s premier knowledge hub and sole treaty-based water diplomacy platform. The European Union is a strong believer in regional integration and cooperation, and we firmly believe the MRC facilitates this on a daily basis – practical cooperation in an area of ever growing mutual interests to everyone living in the six countries that share the land and waters of the Mekong Basin.

This being said cooperation can always improve and one way to strengthen the cooperation in the Mekong Basin is through the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (the Water Convention). The Convention obliges Riparian Parties to prevent, control and reduce transboundary impact, use transboundary waters in a reasonable and equitable way and ensure their sustainable management. Not too different from the Mekong Agreement, and yet, there would be some clear advantages for the Mekong countries in joining the water convention and its strong institutional framework, which can assists Parties in implementation and progressive development of the Convention, including exchange of experience and good practices, elaboration of guidelines and recommendations.

The EU calls upon states, those in the Lancang-Mekong basin, the region of Southeast Asia and globally, to assess and consider the practical benefits and broader ‘value add’ of acceding to the Water Convention as a global legal framework and institutional platform that can support and strengthen transboundary water arrangements at regional, basin and bilateral scales, both new and existing, such as the Mekong Agreement of 1995 for example.

The 2018 EU Council Conclusions on Water Diplomacy recognize that transboundary water cooperation is critical to ensuring water and sanitation for all (SDG 6) and for achieving other SDGs including climate action, sustainable energy, food security and peace.

The Council Conclusions also promote legal and intergovernmental frameworks for transboundary cooperation, such as the Water Convention at the global level and at other scales including regionally and in basins, for example, the Mekong River Commission in Southeast Asia.
The EU is a strong partner of the Water Convention and contributes funding to its global outreach to support awareness raising, capacity-building and to promote accession to the Convention in the furtherance of transboundary water cooperation around the world.

In the spirit of stronger cooperation among all the riparian states of the Lancang-Mekong River I would also like to take the opportunity to welcome the positive news on increased sharing of data between the MRC and People’s Republic of China, announced in August 2020, including the establishment of a Mekong-Lancang Water Resources Cooperation future Information Sharing Platform”.

Joint monitoring and assessment of transboundary waters for water quantity and quality as well as data exchange is a core requirement to Parties to the Water Convention, it is a crucial part of building trust and also part of the SDG indicator 6.5.2, measuring transboundary water cooperation worldwide.

As the current chair of the MRC development Partners group, I know that I speak for us all when I nevertheless highlights that this information sharing platform should not overlook or bypass, but rather build on and integrate with, the knowledge base and system that the MRC has created over the past six decades among its member countries.

Thank you very much for listening.