

## **Keynote Speech**

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At the Founding Ceremony of  
The Global Centre for Mekong Studies (GCMS) and  
International Workshop on Lancang-Mekong Cooperation  
Organized by  
The Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace  
And the China Institute for International Studies  
on 28 September 2017 at Raffle Le Royal, Phnom Penh

*Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,*

*Dear Colleagues and Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. It is indeed my great honour and pleasure to represent my Foreign Minister, H.E. PRAK Sokhonn, at the opening of the event. Let me express my congratulations to the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace and the China Institute for International Studies for organizing the launch of the Global Centre for Mekong Studies (GCMS).
2. Over the past two decades I have had the opportunity to be involved in the formulation of several multilateral mechanisms that are systematic, structured and require consensus among all parties. Generally they are slow by default. To my great astonishment, the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation mechanism has evolved so rapidly from a mere concept idea conceived a few years ago in Nay Pyi Taw during the 17<sup>th</sup> China-ASEAN Summit.
3. I recall the first Senior Official Meeting in Beijing in early 2015 when the initiative was launched. In about two years we have moved it, from a concept idea to a reality with the convening of the first Foreign Ministers' meeting in Chinghong in November 2015, and subsequently the historical inaugural Leaders' Meeting in March of 2016 in Sanya, China. The 2<sup>nd</sup> MLC Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held in

December 2016 in Siem Reap. We are now busy preparing the 3rd MLC Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Dali, China and the 2nd MLC Leaders' Meeting in January 2018 at the Peace Palace in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The pace of its development is dizzying.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

4. One must wonder why such a speed and how can we move so fast? I believe it is possible because of a strong sense of urgency, a spirit of inclusiveness in our collaborative attitude and perhaps effective coordination. In such a short time, we have reached wide consensus on many fronts, by this I mean the three key pillars of cooperation: (1) political security, (2) economy and sustainable development, and (3) social and people-to-people and cultural exchanges. We have agreed on the five priority directions of connectivity, production capacity, cross-border economic, water resources as well as agriculture and poverty-reduction.

5. We have managed in the last few months to set up sectoral Joint Working Groups covering the above priority areas to develop and implement the LMC projects. We have launched several Early Harvest Projects and we are now working on the second batch of projects. Next month, my Foreign Minister will launch the National Secretariat of Cambodia for Mekong-Lancang Cooperation. We should congratulate ourselves for these impressive achievements.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen!*

6. Moving forward, I believe we have already a good direction as set by our Leaders during the Inaugural Summit in Sanya when they launched the "Sanya Declaration of the 1<sup>st</sup> Leaders' Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Meeting". What I find so pertinent today is the creation of this Track II Global Centre for Mekong Studies (GCMS). The Mekong-Lancang Cooperation would benefit enormously from the inputs of the Center at a time when we have already good momentum on our side. Fresh ideas, critical ideas, out-of-the box suggestions would be welcome.

7. Allow me to propose a few thoughts for the Center to start thinking as they start on their first journey with the MLC. *First*, how can we could forge the synergy of six individual countries to promote our respective development, and revitalize

our sub-regional development in the context of a rising anti-globalization trends. In other words, to withstand global downturns we must be able to translate our economic complementarity into real development impetus and prosperity for our people.

8. *Second*, we have to bear in mind that all of our 5 Mekong countries are now an integral part of the ASEAN Community. As the three key areas of cooperation of the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation correspond effectively with the 3 pillars of the ASEAN Community, and China is already a strong supporter of ASEAN integration and the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), how can we capitalize on the strength and dynamism of the Belt and Road Initiative to further the development agenda of the MLC? Here I am referring to “Connectivity” and the “Production Capacity”. How can we formulate creative financing for major projects to build a comprehensive connectivity network of highway, railway, waterway, ports, and air routes in the Lancang-Mekong region.

9. For the Production Capacity, how can we translate our Leaders’ intent as found in the "*Joint Statement on Production Capacity Cooperation Among Lancang-Mekong Countries*" to help the Mekong countries advance their industrialization and go up the value chain. For my country, we have our “Industrial Development Policy 2015-2025”, as a guide to promote the country’s industrial development and we count on building our production capacity cooperation under this framework.

10. *Third*, how can we reinforce our mutual political trust and upgrade the level of security cooperation among our six countries to effectively cope with recurring cross-border problems and other non-traditional transnational threats.

11. *Last*, let’s not forget the most important component of all, our people. Ultimately it is the people-to-people exchanges that will bring greater understanding among our nations, which will lead the way to strengthen the foundation of good neighborliness. How can we promote such exchanges: from tourism and cultural exchanges, to youth and educational exchanges, high and mid-level official visits, just to name a few. In closing, let me congratulate once again the Global Centre for Mekong Studies and wish this event great success. I thank you.