

Unofficial Translation

Statement of H.E. General Prayuth Chan-ocha, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand

At the 3rd Mekong – Lancang Leaders' Meeting

24 August 2020 via video conference

Excellency Mr. Li Keqiang, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China,

Excellency Mr. Thonglun Sisoulith, Prime Minister of the Lao People's Democratic Republic,

Excellency Samdech Akka Moha Senapadei Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia,

Excellency Mr. Ou Win Myin, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar,

Excellency Mr. Nyugen Xuan Phuc, Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam,

1. On behalf of the people of Thailand, I wish to extend my sympathy to China for the loss of lives and property caused by severe floods. I am confident that under the leadership of the Chinese premiers and the cooperation of the Chinese people, China will be able to recover from the said natural disaster very soon.

2. I am very pleased to attend the 3rd Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Leaders' Meeting, and would like to express my appreciation for MLC's continuous progress and increasing cooperation based on the common principles expressed in the Sanya Declaration of the 1st MLC Leaders' Meeting, namely supporting multilateralism, partnership, voluntarism, consensus, openness and respect for international and domestic laws.

3. This meeting, although via video conference, demonstrates the commitment of all parties to continuously expand our cooperation amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19, as result of geopolitics uncertainties, rapid technological development, climate change, and the losing confidence in multilateral system.

4. Amidst these uncertainties, Thailand would like to express our appreciation for the People's Republic of China's good example in managing various challenges by consistently promoting international cooperation, especially with countries in the Mekong sub-region bilaterally, in sub-regional frameworks and within ASEAN, and through constructive and concrete contribution in multilateral fora, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

5. This Meeting offers a forum for the MLC to work together to turn the COVID-19 challenges into an opportunity to enhance our cooperation and partnership using the strength of the MLC, which are the flexibility and openness to respond to new situations. Thailand believed that the Vientiane Declaration, which will be adopted by this Meeting, will underscore our collective commitment to extend our cooperation in political and security sphere, economic and sustainable development, social issues, and people-to-people interaction. It will also further develop the existing cooperation mechanism, especially the MLC Special Fund, which will support 10 approved projects from Thailand this year.

6. At this stage, I would like to highlight 4 areas of cooperation on which Thailand places great importance: (1) water resource management (2) health security (3) connectivity and (4) Post COVID-19 economic recovery and sustainable development

7. Regarding water resource management, since the establishment of the MLC, water resources management cooperation has made a steady progress. Prime Minister Li's statement echoed China's

determination to create tangible results and to work with countries in the lower Mekong in the spirit of partnership. On the auspicious occasion of the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Thailand and China in July 2020, I had a telephone conversation with the President of the People's Republic of China. We agreed to make the Mekong River a "River of Friendship". Therefore, the progress in the water resource management cooperation is an admirable consensus at a time when the Mekong sub-region experiences widespread impacts of climate change.

8. Thailand welcomes China's proposal on a systematic, year-round exchange of information for water resource management and supports the discussion on the establishment of a platform to exchange water information for sustainable water resource management as proposed by China. Thailand suggests that the water resource management cooperation in upstream, midstream and downstream areas be monitored and evaluated in order to further expand our collaboration and to achieve concrete outcomes that are beneficial to people living in the Mekong riparian countries. In addition, Thailand proposes that this platform should bring in experiences and good practices of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) and exchange water data with the MRC. Furthermore, Thailand supports the regular meetings between Ministers responsible for water resource in order to advance the cooperation at the policy-level. The meetings should report the result to the Foreign Ministers' Meeting, which is the focal point of the MLC according to the Sanya Declaration.

9. The second area, health security, is a key element for the sustainable recovery and the readjustment towards "new normal" and "next normal" (in the post COVID-19 era). The fact that Thailand has been recognized worldwide that it has controlled the COVID-19 situation effectively owes not only to the nation-wide efforts, but also to Thailand's health security policy, which emphasizes on the readiness of medical personnel and infrastructure, the access to public health services and medication, and the crisis-preparedness.

10. At the sub-region level, Thailand is ready to cooperate with China in vaccine research and development, capacity building for relevant personnel, epidemic prevention, and development of Thailand's capacity to become production base for medications and vaccines in the sub-region in the near future. Thailand commends China's concept and initiative on the "Shared Community for Public Health" and welcomes China's announcement to establish the "MLC Special Fund for Public Health", which will help strengthen human security in our sub-region.

11. At the global level, Thailand places great importance on strengthening international cooperation, in particular, with the WHO. While we are collaborating with international partners on research and development for vaccine against COVID-19, we agree with the member states that the vaccine, once successfully produced, should be made global public good, accessible to everyone.

12. With regards to the third focused area of cooperation, connectivity, Thailand encourages MLC member states to enhance connectivity to strengthen regional supply chains, both in normal times and in times of crisis. This includes China's idea of establishing a "Green Channel" and promoting cross-border travel that poses no risk to public health. Economic openness and the easing of control measures must be well-balanced with regional health security. Under the current circumstances, the Royal Thai Government is exploring the feasibility of relaxing restrictions for business travelers for the purpose of conducting business under special arrangements.

13. In addition, the MLC should expedite cooperation on enhancing connectivity in all dimensions, both physical, regulatory and people to people, as well as linking economic corridors to work in synergy and complementarity with sub-regional cooperation initiatives and frameworks such as ASEAN, Irrawaddy-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS), Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), especially in the fields of transport and logistics, digital, energy, and human resource development in order to thoroughly distribute income to areas further away from the economic corridors.

14. The last area is economic recovery and sustainable development. Thailand believes that the MLC should support the sub-regional economy, entrepreneurs and workers to be resilient and ready

to deal with future crisis, as well as sustainable production and consumption. I consider building resilience of the private sector, both big and small enterprises, a key factor that will lay a solid and sustainable economic foundation. Thailand is ready to share our experiences with MLC member countries on the application of the Sufficiency Economy philosophy to build resilience and human resource development. We also agree with China's call for accelerating the implementation of the Green Mekong - Lancang Plan and the Mekong - Lancang Environment Cooperation Strategy, expanding cooperation on environmental protection and innovation in agriculture, as well as increasing channels for exporting agricultural products from MLC countries to China. These indeed are the issues that the President of the People's Republic of China and I agreed upon recently during our discussion last July.

15. In order for all our peoples to get more benefits, Thailand wishes to propose that the MLC lend more support to the private sector, especially micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs) which are the foundation of the economy by facilitating their access to capital, capacity building, innovation and digital technology to ensure quality employment, while leveraging the existing cooperation mechanisms such as the Joint Working Group on Cross-Border Economic Cooperation. Thailand also wishes to encourage MLC countries to jointly stimulate economic activities, cross border trade, tourism and people to people exchange, while taking into account public health security.

16. Today is very important that we have witnessed China's continued commitment to the Mekong sub-region. We have also affirmed our strong willingness and determination to jointly address the challenges posed by several uncertainties, by turning the crisis into an opportunity for more constructive cooperation in order to create an environment conducive to growth, stability, and unity and to ensure sustainable development and prosperity of our citizens, without leaving anyone behind.