

**Opening Remarks**  
**Ambassador Nguyen Quoc Cuong**  
At "LMI: Broadening Cooperation Forum"  
1 May 2013, Vietnam Embassy

Good Morning

1. Welcome to the Forum "LMI: Broadening Cooperation". Thank you all for coming.

2. We are gathering here today to discuss a very, very important issue and the ways we are going to handle it would have long-term implications not only for countries in the region but for the world over.

Why should I make such a "big" statement? Now look at the facts:

The Lower Mekong Basin covers an area of over 600,000 km<sup>2</sup> and is home of over 60 million people, 80% of whom are rural poor.

More importantly, the LMB is well-known as a world's rice basket, providing food to 300 million people (5 times of its own population). Half of the world's rice exports are from the LMB. You can see that the world's No 1 and No 2 in rice exports (Thailand and Vietnam) are both in the LMB. Before coming to the US, I had a chance to tour the region and discuss the issues with authorities of 13 provinces in the Mekong Delta, South of Vietnam, and I was surprised to learn that 90% of Vietnam's rice exports, 70% of aquaculture exports are from the Mekong delta.

And how is the situation in the LMB now? The ecosystems in LMB are deteriorating. In fact, they are already IN DANGER now.

3. To enhance the livelihood of local people in LMB and to reduce the vulnerability of LMB ecosystems are also meant to attain sustainable development in the region and to secure food supply for the whole world. That's why we need to TAKE ACTIONS NOW, not LATER. And we need to ACT TOGETHER, not SEPERATELY.

Against that backdrop, it is understandably that the Lower Mekong Initiative (introduced in July 2009 by then Secretary of State Hilary Clinton) is considered very timely and warmly received by LMI countries and the

whole region. We are glad to see the growing interests in the Initiative from Friends of LMI (from World Bank, ADB, countries like Japan, Korea, Australia, and New Zealand).

4. The Embassy of Vietnam in Washington D.C is proud to work closely with the State Department and other relevant US Agencies to launch this forum in order to raise awareness, especially among US stake-holders, on this important Lower Mekong Initiative, and to exchange practices and ideas on how to further broaden cooperation.

5. In this connection, I would like to acknowledge the presence of my long-time colleagues, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, the Hon. Pham Quang Vinh and Ambassador Nguyen Quoc Dzung, D.G of International Economic Cooperation of MOFA, representatives from LMI and ASEAN Embassies here, from Friends of LMI as well.

On the U.S side, I wish to especially thank Acting Assistant Secretary of State the Hon. Joe Yun, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Mike H. Fuchs, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce Craig Allen, senior officials from USAID, USTDA, EXIM Bank, OPIC, representatives from USABC and the business community, many NGOs and Academia for your participation.

Thank you for your attention. /.