

Opening Statement

H.E. Cham Prasidh
Senior Minister, Ministry of Commerce
and GMS Minister of Cambodia

at the

Second Economic Corridors Forum (ECF-2)
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Your Excellencies, Vice President Greenwood of ADB, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning and a warm welcome to Phnom Penh.

It is our country's pleasure and honor to host this second meeting of the GMS Economic Corridors Forum. This Forum is fast establishing itself as the main promoter of economic corridor development in the region and as the principal venue for discussing and addressing key issues in this important aspect of GMS subregional cooperation. It is therefore successfully achieving the role envisioned for it under its terms of reference, which was formally adopted at the ECF inaugural meeting held in Kunming, China in June last year.

The highly significant and fruitful 15th GMS Ministerial Conference in June this year, which many of you also attended, has again emphasized the role of economic corridors in the overall development of the region. The Joint Ministerial Statement issued by the Conference has identified the transformation of the GMS transport corridors into true economic corridors

as an area of highest priority in GMS cooperation. The Statement also recognized the key role of the ECF in unifying and focusing all initiatives in this area and in ensuring the effective engagement of all stakeholders and actors, particularly the private sector and the local authorities.

In the Ministerial Retreat, which was a novel component of the 15th Ministerial Conference, we also focused much of the discussion on how to facilitate transport, trade, tourism and other economic flows across borders along the corridors, and thus maximize the impact of the enhanced physical connectivity that has been established. The Ministers in fact directed that work be accelerated on the improvement of systems, procedures, and institutional arrangements to accomplish this and that the results and recommendations of such work be made available for consideration by the ECF. They also emphasized the need to ensure that the potential negative social and environmental effects of corridor development are mitigated. Further, the GMS corridors must be inclusive and benefit broad segments of the population in the corridor areas, and in this regard should help promote the development and participation of small- and medium- sized enterprises or SMEs.

From all these, we can conclude that economic corridor development will continue to be a fundamental element of the GMS regional development strategy in the long-term. We therefore have our work cut out for us. Our meeting today will in fact consider the proposed basic ways and strategies by which we can accomplish our goals and tasks. For instance, in line with the directives given by the 15th GMS Ministerial Conference, the key elements of an integrated strategy and work plan for trade and transport

facilitation will be presented to us. We will also be looking into the issues in the implementation of the strategies and action plans for the various GMS economic corridors.

But what is also significant in this ECF meeting is that we will now be hearing from the governors and local officials of the provinces along the corridors, who will present the results of their first meeting yesterday. Representatives from the private sector and from development partner organizations are also with us today. Again, therefore, we are being true to our mandate to engage a broad range of stakeholders in the development of the GMS economic corridors.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The goal of integrating markets, spurring economic activity, and boosting competitiveness along the economic corridors is certainly not an easy one. This is a long-term endeavor that is full of grave challenges, and we may well be just at the beginning stages. But with the strategies and programs already put together and with the kind of enthusiasm evident among us today, I am quite confident that we will succeed.

Thank you for your kind attention.