

Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program

**Ninth Meeting of the GMS Working Group on Human Resource Development
(WGHRD-9)**

Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, PRC
20-21 May 2009

Opening Statement

Ms. Shireen Lateef
Director, Social Sectors Division
Southeast Asia Department
Asian Development Bank

Mr. Li Dongxiang,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good Morning.

On behalf of the other participants, I wish to thank Mr. Li Dongxiang for his warm welcome greetings to this beautiful city of Guilin. I was here just 3 months ago for the GMS Regional Health Forum, one of the key activities of the Health Subgroup of the Working Group on HRD.

Since its establishment in 1995, the HRD working group has worked very hard in coordinating and providing direction to subregional cooperation in health, education, labor and migration, and social development. This has not been an easy task and remains challenging since the Working Group covers so many different sectors.

With active support from the GMS governments and various development partners, WGHRD has successfully implemented several projects and activities that address priority HRD concerns. In the health sector, projects have included the prevention and control of communicable diseases like malaria, dengue, avian flu, and HIV/AIDS. I am pleased to inform you that Phase 1 of a Communicable Disease Project will be extended into a Phase 2 for approval in 2010 with ADB financing. The importance of this work has been highlighted given the recent outbreak of swine flu globally i.e. regionally. In line with efforts to integrate HRD into the overall GMS program and forge better links between HRD and other GMS sectors, we have embarked on an ambitious program of integrating HIV/AIDS prevention efforts into the GMS transport infrastructure agenda to help mitigate the potential risks of HIV associated with improved physical connectivity. We are now implementing a technical assistance project co-

financed with the Government of Australia on HIV Prevention and Infrastructure: Mitigating Risk in the GMS. We are also linking with the GMS Subregional Transport Forum to brief the transport sector on the increased risk of the spread of HIV/AIDS and measures to effectively address the problem. Other projects in the HRD area have included capacity building programs - notably the Phnom Penh Plan for Development Management, health and education needs of ethnic minorities, and the prevention of trafficking of women and children and the promotion of safe migration. More recently, the involvement of the GMS youth in fostering a greater sense of community has been given impetus by no less than the GMS Leaders on the occasion of the Third GMS Summit. Between today and tomorrow, we will listen to presentations to update the working group on recent developments and activities concerning these areas of cooperation. There will be opportunity for discussion on these recent activities as well planning for future actions.

This 9th Meeting of the WGHRD marks a crucial milestone in the continuing evolution of subregional cooperation in this very important sector of the GMS Program. At this meeting, we will consider and formally endorse the Final Draft of the GMS HRD Strategic Framework and Action Plan. The Strategy and Action Plan evolved from discussions at earlier working group meetings, a series of national and subregional consultations with focal points for the working group and its subgroups, other national experts and line ministry officials, and development partners. ADB is privileged to have been an active facilitator and coordinator of this consultative process. We hope that the final document that we will consider tomorrow has faithfully captured and synthesized the strategic directions and priorities that you have articulated in our earlier meetings and consultations. The Strategy and Action Plan puts into sharper focus the goal, objectives, and strategic directions of GMS cooperation in HRD. It also outlines the institutional arrangements to strengthen support and coordination mechanisms at the national and subregional levels, as well as with other subregional initiatives.

The timing of this meeting and the formal endorsement of the Strategy and Action Plan by WGHRD is truly auspicious. On 17-19 June 2009, the 15th GMS Ministerial Conference is taking place in Thailand, for which the HRD Strategy and Action Plan is a major deliverable. A Development Partners' Meeting will also be held in conjunction with the Ministerial Conference to generate interest and mobilize much needed external support to the GMS Program.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

No less than the GMS Leaders at their Third Summit in March 2008 have directed the immediate implementation of the new HRD Strategy and action plan. Let us continue to work together in meaningful partnerships to implement the strategy and bring our cooperation in HRD to a higher plane.

I look forward to your active participation to ensure the success of our meeting. Thank you.