

**SECOND GMS TOURISM MINISTERS' MEETING  
9 January 2009, Ha Noi, Viet Nam**

**Remarks  
by  
Mr. Ayumi Konishi  
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Excellencies – Tourism Ministers of the GMS Countries,  
Heads of the GMS National Tourism Organizations,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to address this Second GMS Tourism Ministers' Meeting. On behalf of the Asian Development Bank, and the rest of the delegates, I would like to express our deep appreciation to the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, particularly the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, for organizing and hosting this important event.

The tourism sector is an important component of the GMS Economic Cooperation Program and continues to play a very significant role towards the realization of the vision and goals of the GMS Program. We appreciate the tourism sector's demonstrated capacity and potential as an instrument for reducing poverty and promoting broad-based economic growth in an environmentally sustainable manner. No less than the GMS Leaders have recognized that a subregional approach to sustainable tourism development is needed to promote the subregion as a single destination, while protecting its natural, historical, and cultural heritage, and mitigating negative social and environmental impacts. Toward this end, the GMS Tourism Working Group (TWG), assisted by the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO), has been effectively driving the subregional tourism marketing and development agenda consistent with the principles outlined under the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy.

This Second Meeting of the GMS Tourism Ministers has taken added significance in the context of new directives emanating from the Third GMS Summit held in Vientiane, Lao PDR in March 2008. Specifically, the GMS Leaders called for the (i) strengthening of the sustainable management of natural and cultural tourism sites; (ii) promoting the joint marketing of tourism in the subregion; and (iii) strengthening of the MTCO. At the same time, we are very much aware

that tourism sector in GMS countries are all facing serious challenges as tourism is adversely affected by the evolving global economic turmoil. Our deliberations today will help guide the TWG and MTCO in translating the Summit directives into concrete and doable activities in the challenging global context we are facing together.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I think we all need to accept the fact that the current global economic turmoil is so serious, and that unfortunately tourism will be one of the sectors that will be most seriously affected. And because of that, we are aware that some people even questioned the appropriateness of discussing tourism cooperation in the context of evolving economic challenges we are facing today. Some people are pessimistic about the prospects for closer cooperation as the countries or tourist destinations will “compete” each other for limited visitors as the tourist traffic is anticipated to stagnate.

I however do believe that in fact, the current situation calls for much closer cooperation, and through closer and improved cooperation, we may be able to create opportunities despite the adverse economic environment.

It is to be noted that there will be a possible shift in the profile of the visitors as the economic crisis will not affect different countries evenly. As the economies of Asia and the Pacific region is less affected by the financial sector crisis, the share of Asian tourists can increase in the total. And if the GMS countries are to promote tourism, GMS as a whole as a single tourist destination can have much stronger appeal than trying to promote different sites separately.

Promotion of domestic and intra-regional tourism would be another potential area. As the countries are to stimulate domestic economies, there will be an emphasis on enhancing consumption, and larger consumer spending can actually mean increased opportunities for short domestic tourism. And if GMS countries are to facilitate intra-regional tourism to make things just as easy as domestic tourism, there will be increased opportunities to have a much larger market.

I am convinced that now, more than ever, GMS countries need to intensify coordinated tourism promotion and marketing efforts, improve access to tourism sites and infrastructure, facilitate the movement of tourists to and within the GMS, and promote private participation. While priority projects to implement these measures have been agreed upon, resources need to be mobilized and productive partnerships intensified.

In this context, you may wish to note that ADB has just recently approved a new GMS Sustainable Tourism Development Project amounting to \$20 million comprising \$10 million grant to Lao PDR and \$10 million soft loan to Viet Nam. An earlier Mekong Tourism Development Project also funded by ADB has been completed in Lao PDR but is continuing to support a number of activities in Cambodia and Viet Nam. The community-based component of the project has assisted local communities in the participating countries to develop and manage more than 20 tourism products and destinations. Tourism development projects are actually highly desirable and effective in the current economic context as they support creation of jobs, development of human resources, promotion of small scale business and improvements in rural infrastructure.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Indeed, the tourism sector in GMS is facing a number of serious challenges, but we do strongly believe that there are also opportunities. There are even possibilities to turn challenges to opportunities if we are to work closely together. Under the GMS tourism sector cooperation, I recognize that a lot has been achieved but much remains to be done. The results of our deliberations today will guide the work of TWG and MTCO in the months ahead. I look forward to our cordial and productive discussions and wish all of us a successful meeting.

Thank you.