

OPENING SPEECH
BY
H.E. MR. NGUYEN TAN DUNG, PRIME MINISTER OF THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
AT
ASEM SEMINAR ON WATER AND RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT
(Can Tho City, 21 March, 2013)

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me a great pleasure to join you here today at this opening ceremony of the "ASEM Seminar on Water and River Basin Management" in Can Tho City, the heart of Viet Nam's Mekong river delta and the gateway to the whole basin of Mekong river.

On behalf of the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, I warmly welcome distinguished delegates, experts from 51 ASEM members and representatives of the UN bodies, and other regional and international organizations.

As one of ASEM's important events in 2013, our seminar takes place at a time when meaningful activities are happening around the globe to celebrate World Water Day and 2013 is designated by the United Nations as the International Year of Water Cooperation. In that light, your gracious presence at this seminar is yet another manifestation of our collective resolve to sustain water, a new global strategic resource.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we all know, water-related challenges have existed throughout human history. Yet today they are getting ever more urgent, strategic and global.

First, water resources have direct impacts on the quality of life of each and every individual and country all over the world. The rapid growth in global population results in huge demands for water, food and energy. By 2025, 1.8 billion inhabitants will be living in regions with absolute water scarcity, and two-thirds of the world population could be under water-stressed conditions.

Second, climate change has made water-related challenges more complex and unpredictable. Global warming has been accompanied by changes in climate and ecosystems, resulting in abnormal disasters with larger scale and intensity. Many countries are facing the drastic degradation and exhaustion of river water and underground water, faster-than-expected melting glaciers, rising sea levels, high tides and increased salinization that affect water resources and agricultural production.

Third, while water use and management and environmental issues are yet to receive adequate attention, fast industrialization and urbanization have taken their toll on water resources. This is one of the major causes of water pollution, epidemics, thus seriously affecting our people's life and access to clean water.

In addition, the fact is that nearly 150 countries share water resources for their daily life and economic and development needs. As such, **it is imperative for riparian countries bordering transboundary waters to make stronger joint efforts in order to tackle water-related issues**, especially in the context of growing globalization and interdependence.

Hence, sustaining water resources has become high on the agenda of a number of regional and international organizations and fora. Notably, World Water Day, International Decade for Clean Water and Water Sanitation and International Decade for Action "Water for Life" advocated by the United Nations and the initiative on Water and Green Growth by the World Water Council.

We are proud that ASEM has strongly engaged in and made significant contribution to these common endeavors, as evidenced by numerous initiatives. Many ASEM members have been spearheading in integrating water resources management into the realization of the MDGs and sustainable development. At the 9th ASEM Summit in Vientiane last November, ASEM Leaders agreed to reinforce our collective efforts to promote sustainable usage and management of water resources, and decided to establish ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As one of the world's major suppliers of agricultural products and with the desire to join global efforts to resolve water-related challenges, Viet Nam places a high priority on sustainable management of water resources. This is an essential part of Viet Nam's Sustainable Development Strategy for 2011-2020 and National Strategy on Water Resources by 2020.

It is our policy to engage vigorously in and contribute to international cooperation at all levels, including the World Water Forum, the Global Water Partnership Network, the International River Basin Organization, ASEAN, ASEM, APEC ... We are also actively implementing ASEAN's Strategic Plan of Action on Water Resources Management.

Viet Nam attaches special importance to the expansion and efficiency of Mekong river cooperation. Just within the last decade, Mekong has become one of the world's five largest river basins that suffer the most from low flow due to drought, thus severely affecting Viet Nam's largest rice bowl. Viet Nam has been in close coordination with other riparian countries to enhance mutual assistance, has proposed and undertaken numerous cooperation initiatives and programs within the frameworks of the Mekong River Commission, Greater Mekong Sub-region cooperation, ACMECS and Mekong cooperation with partners such as WB, ADB, Japan, Republic of Korea and the U.S.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Only by joining hands to take bold action today, can we mitigate and prevent the anticipated challenges. Facts have shown us that sustaining water resources offers opportunities for cooperation rather than disputes.

As an important inter-regional forum, ASEM represents around 60% of the world population and accounts for almost 55% of global GDP. Stretching across the two continents of Asia and Europe are major rivers known as the cradle of great civilizations and cultures, such as the Volga, the Danube, the Rhine, the Yellow River, the Ganges and the Mekong, just to name a few. Therefore, ASEM has a huge demand, shared responsibility and sufficient capability to contribute to sustaining water resources.

With a substantive agenda, our today's seminar provides fresh impetus for us to put in place effective cooperation measures. Building upon the encouraging outcomes achieved so far, especially those of the 9th ASEM Summit and the ASEM Sustainable Development Seminar in Budapest in 2012, I call upon all delegates to focus our deliberations on following major issues.

First, an issue before us now is how to identify the substance and approaches of water resources management in our strategy for economic restructuring and transformation of growth model. I hold that water resources management could only be sustainable when we have long-term, comprehensive, cross-sectoral and cross-functional approaches. This also needs to be incorporated in our national strategy for sustainable development and green growth and closely aligned with the achievement of the MDGs.

Second, one of the questions that need to be addressed is as to how we can make cooperation for water resources management between the two continents more viable. Should ASEM be more proactive in supporting and connecting our members' ongoing sub-regional and regional programs on water cooperation? Viet Nam therefore welcomes and appreciates the support and engagement of ASEM members in the Mekong cooperation projects.

Third, we also need to work out orientations for ASEM to take bolder action and contribute more meaningfully to international efforts for sustainable management and development of water resources, especially to the upcoming Asia - Pacific Water Summit this May in Chiangmai and the Budapest Water Summit in October.

I am confident that, only through dialogue in a constructive manner and on the basis of equal partnership, can we resolve effectively the challenges pertinent to water resources and ensure the legitimate economic and development interests of our peoples. By so doing, we can realize our common objective of "building a new Asia - Europe partnership, further deepening the understanding between the peoples of our two continents, and establishing a close dialogue among partners on an equal basis," thus asserting ASEM's profile in the evolving global landscape.

With that, I hereby declare open the ASEM Seminar on Water and River Basin Management.

I strongly believe that our Seminar will be crowned with success.

I wish you all continued good health, happiness and greater success!

Thank you very much. 
