

PRESS RELEASE

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Flood Management and Mitigation Programme a first for Region

The Mekong River Commission's new Flood Management and Mitigation Programme was the focus of the Third Annual Mekong Flood Forum that opened in Vientiane today (7 April).

The topic of this year's forum, which was sponsored by the Royal Netherlands Government, the Government of Germany and the Government of the United States, was 'Flood Management and Mitigation in the Mekong Basin'.

The Mekong River Commission's Flood Management and Mitigation Programme (FMMP) will be the first programme of its kind to operate on a regional basis, bringing together the needs of the four member countries. The new Regional Flood Management and Mitigation Centre in Phnom Penh, Cambodia will be the first time such a permanent, regional centre has been established.

International experts from the MRC member countries of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam, Dialogue Partners China and Myanmar and from Japan, Germany, France and Nepal gathered for the two-day conference to discuss ways of managing the floods which claim many lives and cause untold damage every year in the Mekong Basin.

Over the past four years more than 1,000 people have died and the property, agriculture and infrastructure damage toll has soared to well over US\$500 million. As the population increases and the landscape changes through the construction of levees, drained fields, roads and buildings, the potential for loss of life and economic damage also climbs.

The FMMP was established specifically to meet the urgent need for improved flood management and mitigation to prevent, minimise or mitigate people's suffering and economic losses due to floods. It will also maintain an accurate flood forecasting system, to act as a facilitator on transboundary issues and to build capacity in member countries. The forum gave participants the opportunity to become familiar with the programme's five components and the FMMP's aims. It will discuss the problems facing the basin and how countries and organisations can find solutions by working together.

Topics under discussion at the AFF included disaster preparedness, early warning systems, forecasting tools, structural measures for flood proofing, capacity building and the economic value of floods. International experts will offer the benefit of their experience and the forum will conclude with a discussion on new areas of cooperation.

MRC Chief Executive Officer Dr Cogels officially welcomed the delegates and Vice Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and Member of the MRC Joint Committee for Lao PDR H.E. Mr Sitaheng Rasphone presented the opening statement.

Representatives of the National Mekong Committees and its line agencies, partner civil society and regional and international organisations, who are involved in flood management and mitigation as well as a number of lending institutions and members of the donor community from around the region attended the Forum.

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