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S. RES. 126

Recognizing the vital importance of the Mekong River to Southeast Asia and the role of the Mekong-United States Partnership in supporting the prosperity of the region.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 28, 2023

Mr. MERKLEY (for himself and Mr. SULLIVAN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

RESOLUTION

Recognizing the vital importance of the Mekong River to Southeast Asia and the role of the Mekong-United States Partnership in supporting the prosperity of the region.

Whereas the Mekong River supports the livelihoods of approximately 60,000,000 people, making it the most important river in Southeast Asia and one of the most important rivers in the world;

Whereas the Mekong-United States Partnership, comprising the United States, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, and the predecessor of that partnership, the Lower Mekong Initiative, have contributed greatly to the economic, social, and human resources development of the countries in the Mekong River Basin and the protection of the Mekong River;

Whereas the United States has longstanding diplomatic relations with the countries in the Mekong River Basin, including a nearly 200-year-old relationship with treaty ally Thailand;

Whereas the development of the countries in the Mekong River Basin is critical for the unity, economic strength, and institutional development of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, a strategic partner of the United States;

Whereas the Mekong River is increasingly imperiled by the threats from worsening and extreme changes in the environment, coupled with the construction of upstream dams that have altered the natural flow of the river and vital ecological processes supported by natural flow;

Whereas, since 2019, the flow of water in the Mekong River during the wet season has been abnormally low;

Whereas the Nuozhadu and Xiaowan Dams in China account for more than 50 percent of the water storage of all dams in the Mekong River Basin and can restrict up to 10 percent of the total wet season flow of the Mekong River, exacerbating drought conditions downstream;

Whereas the Mekong River Commission is an integral partner in ensuring the long-term health of the Mekong River;

Whereas the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy can be a leader in supporting river development and protection;

Whereas the Mekong Dam Monitor, funded partly by the Mekong-United States Partnership, has provided essential data and information about the impacts of hydro-power dams along the Mekong River to the people and governments of the Mekong River Basin to allow them to

prepare for irregular water flows and mitigate the economic and environmental impacts of those flows;

Whereas the Mekong River has become a hub for criminal elements to traffic in drugs, people, and wildlife, undermining the rule of law in the countries in the Mekong River Basin and impacting the world through the proliferation of illegal drugs and fauna that can cause spillover of zoonotic diseases;

Whereas the international community has committed to support the development of countries along the Mekong River through internationally recognized development goals;

Whereas the Friends of the Mekong, which includes the countries in the Mekong River Basin, the United States, Australia, the European Union, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, the Asian Development Bank, the Mekong River Commission Secretariat, and the World Bank, is committed to supporting the shared principles that have underpinned peace and prosperity across the Indo-Pacific for decades;

Whereas close coordination and collaboration with civil society groups throughout the Mekong River Basin is essential to the protection of the Mekong River;

Whereas, among the countries in the Mekong River Basin, there has been a negative trend toward the detention and detainment of civil society actors and journalists and an increase in violations of human rights;

Whereas the February 1, 2021, military coup in Burma was illegal and unjustified and has resulted in more than 2,000 deaths, more than 1,000,000 people displaced, and tens of thousands of people in detention, and continued

violence threatens the stability of the entire region, especially those countries along the borders of Burma; and

Whereas diaspora communities from countries in the Mekong River Basin are a vital part of the United States and help build thriving people-to-people ties between those countries and the United States that lead to strong commercial, civil society, and cultural ties: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) expresses sincere concern over the environ-
3 mental, economic, and humanitarian threats to the
4 Mekong River and the communities of the Mekong
5 River and continued support to counter those
6 threats; and

7 (2) declares it is the policy of the United States
8 Government to—

9 (A) through the Mekong-United States
10 Partnership and the Friends of the Mekong,
11 promote the economic and environmental well-
12 being of the people of Mainland Southeast Asia
13 in the 5 countries through which the Mekong
14 River flows, namely, Burma, Cambodia, Laos,
15 Thailand, and Vietnam;

16 (B) support a whole-of-government ap-
17 proach in providing and coordinating Federal
18 aid and assistance throughout the Mekong
19 River Basin under the Mekong-United States

1 Partnership, including programmatic support
2 provided by the Department of State, the
3 United States Agency for International Devel-
4 opment, and other Federal agencies;

5 (C) contribute to the development of qual-
6 ity infrastructure, the development of national
7 electricity markets, cross-border energy trade,
8 the facilitation of cross-border transport, clean
9 energy acceleration and deployment, the devel-
10 opment of micro, small, and medium enter-
11 prises, agriculture, transportation, the facilita-
12 tion of trade and investment, strengthened sub-
13 regional production linkages and supply chains,
14 digital infrastructure, and the digital economy
15 in the Mekong River Basin;

16 (D) promote engagement and buy-in of the
17 United States private sector to support inclu-
18 sive economic growth, resilience, global health,
19 education, and long-term development in the re-
20 gion;

21 (E) leverage the expertise of the United
22 States, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Aus-
23 tralia, and other partners in high-quality infra-
24 structure to support the economic development

1 needs of the countries in the Mekong River
2 Basin;

3 (F) support the development of quality in-
4 frastructure, including through projects fi-
5 nanced by the United States International De-
6 velopment Finance Corporation, as appropriate,
7 in the countries in the Mekong River Basin;

8 (G) encourage all members of the Associa-
9 tion of Southeast Asian Nations to view the en-
10 vironmental, humanitarian, and economic
11 threats to the Mekong River as a danger to the
12 entire region;

13 (H) promote effective water use policies,
14 natural resources management, and environ-
15 mental conservation and protection, including—

16 (i) through support for a technically
17 sound, well-coordinated, and consensus-
18 based approach to managing the shared re-
19 sources of the Mekong River Basin;

20 (ii) through support for environmental
21 conservation, protection, and resilience in
22 the Mekong subregion; and

23 (iii) by enhancing the capacity of
24 countries in the Mekong River Basin in the
25 sustainable conservation and management

1 of natural resources, including fishery re-
2 sources, for sustainable food security;

3 (I) continue the important work that pro-
4 vides vital data and monitoring to the people
5 and Governments of the Mekong River;

6 (J) support the development of the capac-
7 ity of the region to respond to a variety of
8 threats, including countering transnational
9 crime such as trafficking of drugs, wildlife, tim-
10 ber, and persons, and criminal activity associ-
11 ated with illegal, unreported and unregulated
12 fishing, and to improve health security, includ-
13 ing emergency preparedness and response for
14 pandemics and epidemics, cybersecurity, and
15 disaster response and preparedness and human-
16 itarian assistance and disaster relief;

17 (K) promote the development of human
18 capital through education, medical and public
19 health partnerships, vocational training, youth
20 empowerment, women's economic empower-
21 ment, gender equality, university cooperation,
22 and educational and professional exchanges;

23 (L) work together with countries in the
24 Mekong River Basin to combat pollution, over
25 fishing, natural resource degradation, and the

1 effects that changes in the global climate sys-
2 tems are having on the Mekong River, and the
3 communities that depend on the river, and to
4 support the abilities of such communities to
5 adapt and build resilience capacities of those
6 countries;

7 (M) encourage all countries in the Mekong
8 River Basin to provide timely early warning for
9 natural and unnatural operations of the river;

10 (N) support freedom of expression in the
11 countries in the Mekong River Basin through
12 promoting independent journalism and the free-
13 dom to access information;

14 (O) continue to call for the cessation of vi-
15 olence in Burma and support the return of
16 Burma to a path of inclusive democracy, so that
17 it can fully contribute to regional development;

18 (P) prioritize the strengthening of people-
19 to-people ties through United States exchange
20 programs such as the Fulbright Program, the
21 Peace Corps, the International Visitors Leader-
22 ship Program, and the Young Southeast Asian
23 Leaders Initiative Program, including the
24 Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative
25 Academy at Fulbright University Vietnam; and

1 (Q) recognize that strong democratic insti-
2 tutions, the promotion and protection of funda-
3 mental freedoms, independent civil society, and
4 free and fair elections are central to imple-
5 menting the shared vision of a Mekong River
6 region, and an Indo-Pacific region, that is free,
7 open, secure, and prosperous.

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