

Speech by Mr. HIGUCHI Yoshihiro  
Minister/Deputy Chief of Mission  
of the Embassy of Japan in the Kingdom of Cambodia  
On the occasion of the Handover Ceremony of  
Mekong River Dolphin Conservation Activities Improvement  
Project  
July 20, 2012

- H.E. Mr. Touch Seang Tana, Chairman of the Commission for Mekong River Dolphin Conservation & Eco-tourism Development
- Mr. Ung Try, Deputy Director General of the Fisheries Administration
- Mr. Teak Meng Heang, Vice Governor of Kratie Province
- Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to attend today's handover ceremony of the Mekong River Dolphin Conservation Activities Improvement Project. First of all, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to those who have worked hard for the conservation of Mekong River Dolphins.

We know that the number of Mekong River Dolphins, which had once lived in much larger areas including Tonle Sap Lake, has gradually fallen mainly due to the modernization of inland water fishery. I understand that the dolphins are still caught by illegal fishing using gill nets and the number of dolphins is currently less than 200, putting them in danger of extinction.

Against this background, the Cambodian Government in 2006 set up the “Commission for Mekong River Dolphin Conservation & Eco-tourism Development (CMDCED)” at the Council of Ministers. The Commission has not only tackled the illegal fishing but also promoted rural development including ecotourism. I highly appreciate the Commission’s efforts and achievements made so far.

The conservation of Mekong River Dolphins has been highlighted in Mekong-Japan Summit, framework for cooperation between Japan and the five Mekong countries including Cambodia, as a measure for the protection of biodiversity. As a result, the need of dolphin conservation is explicitly addressed in the Action Plan for “A Decade toward the Green Mekong Initiative” and Japanese Government expressed its intention to assist the conservation efforts at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mekong-Japan Summit in 2010.

For this project, the Cambodian Government and the Japanese Government agreed to extend the amount of USD 22,700 to provide 15 motorized boats and 30 walkie-talkies, which will be used for the monitoring of the conservation areas in Kratie and Stung Treng Provinces. Through the monitoring activities, this project will reduce the use of illegal fishing gears and thus, maintain and even recover the number of the endangered dolphins. As Mekong River dolphins have a high potential as tourism resources in the region, it is also expected that the conservation activities will contribute to the local economy.

On this occasion, I would like to request the river guards and staff of the dolphin conservation and development working group to ensure an appropriate management of the patrol boats and the equipments and their maintenance in good conditions so that the facilities can provide long-term services for the improvement of Mekong dolphin conservation.

Last but not least, I strongly hope that this project will help maintain and even increase the number of Mekong River Dolphins and thus, further deepen the long-standing friendship between the Japanese and Cambodian people.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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