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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

SEPTEMBER 21, 2022

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 of climate change and 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 hydropower 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 environmental, economic, and humanitarian threats to the
3 Mekong River and the communities of the Mekong
4 River and continued support to counter those
5 threats; and

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

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

15 (B) support a whole-of-government approach in providing and coordinating Federal
16 aid and assistance throughout the Mekong
17 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 Development,
4 and other Federal agencies;

5 (C) contribute to the development of quality
6 infrastructure, the development of national
7 electricity markets, cross-border energy trade,
8 the facilitation of cross-border transport, renewable
9 and clean energy acceleration and deployment,
10 the development of micro, small, and medium
11 enterprises, agriculture, transportation,
12 the facilitation of trade and investment,
13 strengthened subregional production linkages
14 and supply chains, digital infrastructure, and
15 the digital economy in the Mekong River Basin;

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

21 (E) leverage the expertise of the United
22 States, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia,
23 and other partners in high-quality infrastructure
24 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, in the coun-
7 tries 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 sustainable water use, natural
14 resources management, and environmental con-
15 servation 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 labora-
 19 tory research and development, vocational train-
 20 ing, youth empowerment, women's economic
 21 empowerment, gender equality, university co-
 22 operation, and educational and professional ex-
 23 changes;

24 (L) work together with countries in the
 25 Mekong River Basin to combat the impacts of

1 climate change and support the resiliency of
2 those countries;

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

6 (N) support freedom of expression in the
7 countries in the Mekong River Basin through
8 promoting independent journalism and the free-
9 dom to access information;

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

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

22 (Q) recognize that strong democratic insti-
23 tutions, the protection of human rights, inde-
24 pendent civil society, and free and fair elections
25 are central to implementing the shared vision of

- 1 a Mekong River region, and an Indo-Pacific re-
- 2 gion, that is free, open, secure, prosperous, and
- 3 sustainable.

