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1ST SESSION

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

JUNE 13, 2023

Reported by Mr. MENENDEZ, with an amendment and an amendment to the preamble

NOVEMBER 6, 2023

Considered, amended, and agreed to with an amended preamble

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 continues to be affected by environmental changes, 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 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 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—

9 (A) to, 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

1 River flows, namely, Burma, Cambodia, Laos,
2 Thailand, and Vietnam;

3 (B) to encourage the development of qual-
4 ity infrastructure, national electricity markets,
5 cross-border energy trade, cross-border trans-
6 port, greater energy access, the development of
7 micro, small, and medium enterprises, agri-
8 culture, transportation, the facilitation of trade
9 and investment, strengthened subregional pro-
10 duction linkages and supply chains, digital in-
11 frastructure, and the digital economy in the
12 Mekong River Basin;

13 (C) to promote engagement and buy-in of
14 the United States private sector to support in-
15 clusive economic growth, resilience, global
16 health, education, and long-term development in
17 the region;

18 (D) to leverage the expertise of the United
19 States, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Aus-
20 tralia, and other partners in high-quality infra-
21 structure to support the economic development
22 needs of the countries in the Mekong River
23 Basin;

24 (E) to encourage all members of the Asso-
25 ciation of Southeast Asian Nations to view the

1 environmental, humanitarian, and economic
2 threats to the Mekong River as a danger to the
3 entire region;

4 (F) to promote effective water use policies,
5 natural resources management, and environ-
6 mental conservation and protection, including—

7 (i) through support for a technically
8 sound, well-coordinated, and consensus-
9 based approach to managing the shared re-
10 sources of the Mekong River Basin;

11 (ii) through support for environmental
12 conservation, protection, and resilience in
13 the Mekong subregion; and

14 (iii) by enhancing the capacity of
15 countries in the Mekong River Basin on
16 conservation and management of natural
17 resources, including fishery resources, for
18 long-term food security;

19 (G) to continue the important work that
20 provides vital data and monitoring to the people
21 and Governments of the Mekong River;

22 (H) to encourage the development of the
23 capacity of the region to respond to a variety of
24 threats, including countering transnational
25 crime such as trafficking of drugs, wildlife, tim-

1 ber, and persons, and criminal activity associ-
2 ated with illegal, unreported and unregulated
3 fishing, and to improve health security, includ-
4 ing emergency preparedness and response for
5 pandemics and epidemics, cybersecurity, and
6 disaster response and preparedness and human-
7 itarian assistance and disaster relief;

8 (I) to promote the development of human
9 capital through education, medical and public
10 health partnerships, vocational training, youth
11 empowerment, women's economic empower-
12 ment, gender equality, university cooperation,
13 and educational and professional exchanges;

14 (J) to work together with countries in the
15 Mekong River Basin to combat pollution, over
16 fishing, natural resource degradation, and the
17 effects that environmental changes are having
18 on the Mekong River, and the communities that
19 depend on the river, and to support the abilities
20 of such communities to adapt and build resil-
21 ience capacities of those countries;

22 (K) to encourage all countries in the
23 Mekong River Basin to provide timely early
24 warning for natural and unnatural operations
25 of the river;

1 (L) to support freedom of expression in the
2 countries in the Mekong River Basin through
3 promoting independent journalism and the free-
4 dom to access information;

5 (M) to continue to call for the cessation of
6 violence in Burma and support the return of
7 Burma to a path of inclusive democracy, so that
8 it can fully contribute to regional development;

9 (N) to prioritize the strengthening of peo-
10 ple-to-people ties through United States ex-
11 change programs such as the Fulbright Pro-
12 gram, the Peace Corps, the International Visi-
13 tors Leadership Program, and the Young
14 Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative Program,
15 including the Young Southeast Asian Leaders
16 Initiative Academy at Fulbright University
17 Vietnam; and

18 (O) to recognize that strong democratic in-
19 stitutions, the promotion and protection of fun-
20 damental freedoms, independent civil society,
21 and free and fair elections are central to imple-
22 menting the shared vision of a Mekong River
23 region, and an Indo-Pacific region, that is free,
24 open, secure, and prosperous.

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