

Conference: 'The Mekong River at Risk'

May 8, 1999

Ramada Plaza Hotel

10022 Garden Grove Boulevard

Garden Grove, CA.

Tel: (714) 534-1818.

The Mekong River at Risk: The impact of development on the river, her delta, and her people. In response to the unprecedented challenges and threats posed by development to the Mekong River and Delta, the Vietnamese American Science and Technology Society (VAST) and the co-sponsors are convening the conference, The Mekong River at Risk: The impact of development on the river, her delta, and her people. The one-day conference, to be held May 8, 1999 at The Ramada Plaza Hotel, 10022 Garden Grove Boulevard (at Brookhurst) Garden Grove, CA. Tel: (714) 534-1818. The Conference will focus on the growing environmental and economic damage inflicted on the Mekong River, Delta and its people.

The Mekong River, the world's 11th longest river, is also the world's 2nd richest river in its biodiversity. Fed by the melting snows of the Tibetan Himalayas and monsoon rains of Southeast Asia, the 2,268 miles [4,200 km] Mekong is home to thousands of rare and endangered species of plants and animals. The river and her countless tributaries nourish and support over 50 million people, from China in the north to Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and finally to the millions living in Vietnam's Mekong Delta region. That Delta is not only the most productive agricultural region of Vietnam - its \$1 Billion of export crops are feeding and sustaining the people of many other nations, and making Vietnam the world's second largest rice exporting country in the world -- leading even the United States.

Today, the Mekong River, the Delta region, and all those residing in the Mekong Basin are threatened by the reckless development and misuse of this great river and her waters. The new threat is far greater than any drought or flood. Water diversion and development projects along the Mekong River are posing new and formidable threats throughout the river's basin, but most particularly in the Delta -- threats not only to the Delta inhabitants' way of life and agricultural productivity, but to the river and Delta ecosystems. Scientists and engineers in Vietnam and abroad are concerned by the environmental damage to the Delta being caused by the development projects far upstream from Vietnam. These projects include large scale hydropower developments in Yunnan [China] and in Laos, and the massive Mekong water diversion

projects undertaken by Thailand. The economic costs and environmental consequences of the projects, however, are being borne by people with no voice in these decisions, by people who reap no benefit from these projects, and borne most heavily by those living and farming far downstream in the Mekong Delta.

Alarm bells are now ringing in the Delta, the annual flood farmers always need for their cropland and the control of soil acidity did not arrive in 1998 and the water level at Tan Chau monitoring station, at the end of the rainy season, has fallen to a 73-year record. Accompanying the drastic reduction in Mekong water levels and water flow are similar reductions in fishing harvests, and loss of the Mekong's nutrient-rich river sediments essential for productive rice farming. The ground water level in the delta is now falling due to the shortfall of river water needed for aquifer recharge. Saltwater has invaded up to 70 km (32 miles) into the Mekong delta, threatening to contaminate existing ground water supplies and to render millions of hecta's of farmland useless. The agricultural and environmental richness of the Mekong River Delta must be protected. Not only on behalf of Vietnam, but on behalf of all the people of Southeast Asia. The Mekong river - the world's last remaining major river to still flow through largely undeveloped and natural ecosystems - must be preserved and safeguarded.

VAST, The Unified Mutual Associations of Tien Giang, The Mekong Forum, and affiliated organizations are launching a campaign to heighten awareness of the threats to the Delta within the scientific community, and to educate the public at large. We urge that a moratorium on all further Mekong River development projects be issued immediately, pending a thorough scientific assessment of ecological conditions throughout the Mekong basin. We also call for independent assessments of the environmental impacts of these upstream development activities, conducted by qualified scientists free from conflict of interest or political influences. To begin this campaign, VAST has invited a number of scientists, engineers and researchers who have been observing the Mekong development to come and inform all interested stakeholders about the magnitude of the current and potential threats. Those stakeholders - concerned members of the scientific and international development communities, natives and friends of the Mekong Delta and Vietnam - are invited to attend The Mekong River at Risk: The impact of development on the river, her delta, and her people, being held Saturday, May 8, 1999, in Garden Grove, California. The purpose of the conference is not simply to inform, but to mobilize -- we must send a wake-up call to all responsible international

development agencies and the national governments throughout the Mekong Basin.

VAST and the Mekong River Conference co-sponsors cordially invite you to attend and participate in the discussion on how to develop the Mekong while protecting the environment and preserve the agricultural and ecological integrity of the Delta. To register for the conference, please visit the web site at

<http://www.mekong.org>

E-mail to:pop@mekongforum.org or

contact VAST at (626) 965-0911 Ex: 314, FAX:

(626) 965-9569 or by e-mail to: mttruyet@aol.com

Conference Sponsors:

The Vietnamese American Science & Technology Society

The United Hometown Associations of Tien Giang

The United Hometown Associations of Hau Giang

The Mekong Forum

The Petrus Ky High School Alumni

Association The Gia Long High School Alumni Association

Di Toi Magazine

The Ky 21 Magazine

Nguoi Viet Daily News

Viet Bao Kinh Te Daily News

Vien Dong Daily News

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Mekong Conference Program

The Mekong River at Risk: The impact of development on the river, her delta, and her people

May 8, 1999

9:30 - 10:00 AM: Registration & Coffee

10:00 - 10:10 AM: Welcoming Remarks,

Dr. Nguyen Huu Xuong, Chairman, VAST

10:10 - 10:15 AM: Opening Statement,

Dr. Mai Thanh Truyet, Conference Chairman

10:15 - 12:00 PM: Presentations:

* The Impacts of the Mekong River Development Plans, Pham Phan Long, P.E. Editor, MekongForum

* Power Struggle: The Impacts of Hydropower Development in Laos, Aviva Imhoff, Mekong Program Coordinator, International Rivers Network

* Rice Marketing in the Mekong River Delta, Nguyen Ba Loc, M.S., Economist

12:00 - 1:00 PM: Light Lunch

1:00 -2:00 PM: Presentations:

* Planning and Urbanization of Rural Areas in the Mekong Delta, Nguyen Dat, A.I.A., Architect/Planner The Mekong River Development,

* A Viewpoint on International Relations, Nguyen Huu Chung, M.S.,

Environmental Scientist, Former Congressman of The Republic of South

Vietnam

2:00 -3:30 PM: Discussion and Actions:

* Roundtable Discussion of current conditions and potential threats to the Mekong River, Delta ecosystem and populace, and issues with planning agencies. * Question & Answer.

* Conference Action 1: The 1999 Mekong Declaration

* Conference Action 2: Mekong Task Force

***Concluding Remarks, Mai Thanh Truyet, Ph.D., Conference Chairman**

To register for the conference, please visit the web site at

<http://www.mekongforum.org>, e-mail to: pop@mekongforum.org or contact

VAST at (626) 965-0911 Ex: 314, FAX: (626) 965-9569 or by e-mail to:

mttruyet@aol.com

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Westminster, CA 92684

The Ramada Plaza Hotel is located at 10022 Garden Grove Boulevard (at Brookhurst).
Hotel reservations and information at (714) 534-1818.