

Calendar No. 95

118TH CONGRESS
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

[Strike out all after the resolving clause and insert the part printed in *italic*]

[Strike the preamble and insert the part printed in *italic*]

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

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 pro-

liferation of illegal drugs and fauna that can cause spill-over 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
20 Partnership, including programmatic support
21 provided by the Department of State, the
22 United States Agency for International Devel-
23 opment, and other Federal agencies;

24 (C) contribute to the development of qual-
25 ity infrastructure, the development of national

1 electricity markets, cross-border energy trade,
2 the facilitation of cross-border transport, clean
3 energy acceleration and deployment, the devel-
4 opment of micro, small, and medium enter-
5 prises, agriculture, transportation, the facilita-
6 tion of trade and investment, strengthened sub-
7 regional production linkages and supply chains,
8 digital infrastructure, and the digital economy
9 in the Mekong River Basin;

10 (D) promote engagement and buy-in of the
11 United States private sector to support inclu-
12 sive economic growth, resilience, global health,
13 education, and long-term development in the re-
14 gion;

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

21 (F) support the development of quality in-
22 frastructure, including through projects fi-
23 nanced by the United States International De-
24 velopment Finance Corporation, as appropriate,
25 in the countries in the Mekong River Basin;

1 (G) encourage all members of the Associa-
2 tion of Southeast Asian Nations to view the en-
3 vironmental, humanitarian, and economic
4 threats to the Mekong River as a danger to the
5 entire region;

6 (H) promote effective water use policies,
7 natural resources management, and environ-
8 mental conservation and protection, including—

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

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

16 (iii) by enhancing the capacity of
17 countries in the Mekong River Basin in the
18 sustainable conservation and management
19 of natural resources, including fishery re-
20 sources, for sustainable food security;

21 (I) continue the important work that pro-
22 vides vital data and monitoring to the people
23 and Governments of the Mekong River;

24 (J) support the development of the capae-
25 ity of the region to respond to a variety of

1 threats, including countering transnational
2 crime such as trafficking of drugs, wildlife, tim-
3 ber, and persons, and criminal activity associ-
4 ated with illegal, unreported and unregulated
5 fishing, and to improve health security, includ-
6 ing emergency preparedness and response for
7 pandemics and epidemics, cybersecurity, and
8 disaster response and preparedness and human-
9 itarian assistance and disaster relief;

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

16 (L) work together with countries in the
17 Mekong River Basin to combat pollution, over
18 fishing, natural resource degradation, and the
19 effects that changes in the global climate sys-
20 tems are having on the Mekong River, and the
21 communities that depend on the river, and to
22 support the abilities of such communities to
23 adapt and build resilience capacities of those
24 countries;

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

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

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

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

20 (Q) recognize that strong democratic insti-
21 tutions, the promotion and protection of funda-
22 mental freedoms, independent civil society, and
23 free and fair elections are central to imple-
24 menting the shared vision of a Mekong River

1 region, and an Indo-Pacific region, that is free,
2 open, secure, and prosperous.

3

4

5 *That the Senate—*

6 (1) *expresses sincere concern over the environ-*
7 *mental, economic, and humanitarian threats to the*
8 *Mekong River and the communities of the Mekong*
9 *River and continued support to counter those threats;*
10 *and*

11 (2) *declares it is the policy of the United States*
12 *Government—*

13 (A) *to, through the Mekong-United States*
14 *Partnership and the Friends of the Mekong, pro-*
15 *mote the economic and environmental well-being*
16 *of the people of Mainland Southeast Asia in the*
17 *5 countries through which the Mekong River*
18 *flows, namely, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thai-*
19 *land, and Vietnam;*

20 (B) *to support providing and coordinating*
21 *Federal aid and assistance throughout the*
22 *Mekong River Basin under the Mekong-United*
23 *States Partnership, including programmatic*
24 *support provided by the Department of State, the*

1 *United States Agency for International Develop-*
2 *ment, and other Federal agencies;*

3 *(C) to contribute to the development of qual-*
4 *ity infrastructure, national electricity markets,*
5 *cross-border energy trade, cross-border transport,*
6 *greater energy access, the development of micro,*
7 *small, and medium enterprises, agriculture,*
8 *transportation, the facilitation of trade and in-*
9 *vestment, strengthened subregional production*
10 *linkages and supply chains, digital infrastruc-*
11 *ture, and the digital economy in the Mekong*
12 *River Basin;*

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

18 *(E) to leverage the expertise of the United*
19 *States, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia,*
20 *and other partners in high-quality infrastructure*
21 *to support the economic development needs of the*
22 *countries in the Mekong River Basin;*

23 *(F) to support the development of quality*
24 *infrastructure, including through projects fi-*
25 *nanced by the United States International Devel-*

1 *opment Finance Corporation, as appropriate, in*
2 *the countries in the Mekong River Basin;*

3 *(G) to encourage all members of the Associa-*
4 *tion of Southeast Asian Nations to view the envi-*
5 *ronmental, humanitarian, and economic threats*
6 *to the Mekong River as a danger to the entire re-*
7 *gion;*

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10 *mental conservation and protection, including—*

11 *(i) through support for a technically*
12 *sound, well-coordinated, and consensus-*
13 *based approach to managing the shared re-*
14 *sources of the Mekong River Basin;*

15 *(ii) through support for environmental*
16 *conservation, protection, and resilience in*
17 *the Mekong subregion; and*

18 *(iii) by enhancing the capacity of*
19 *countries in the Mekong River Basin on*
20 *conservation and management of natural*
21 *resources, including fishery resources, for*
22 *long-term food security;*

23 *(I) to continue the important work that*
24 *provides vital data and monitoring to the people*
25 *and Governments of the Mekong River;*

1 *(J) to support the development of the capac-*
2 *ity of the region to respond to a variety of*
3 *threats, including countering transnational*
4 *crime such as trafficking of drugs, wildlife, tim-*
5 *ber, and persons, and criminal activity associ-*
6 *ated with illegal, unreported and unregulated*
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8 *ing emergency preparedness and response for*
9 *pandemics and epidemics, cybersecurity, and*
10 *disaster response and preparedness and humani-*
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13 *capital through education, medical and public*
14 *health partnerships, vocational training, youth*
15 *empowerment, women's economic empowerment,*
16 *gender equality, university cooperation, and edu-*
17 *cational and professional exchanges;*

18 *(L) to work together with countries in the*
19 *Mekong River Basin to combat pollution, over*
20 *fishing, natural resource degradation, and the ef-*
21 *fects that environmental changes are having on*
22 *the Mekong River, and the communities that de-*
23 *pend on the river, and to support the abilities of*
24 *such communities to adapt and build resilience*
25 *capacities of those countries;*

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2 Mekong River Basin to provide timely early
3 warning for natural and unnatural operations of
4 the river;

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6 countries in the Mekong River Basin through
7 promoting independent journalism and the free-
8 dom to access information;

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

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

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- 1 *gion, and an Indo-Pacific region, that is free,*
- 2 *open, secure, and prosperous.*

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