Dear Member of COMMIT task force

We are young people from 6 countries of the Greater Mekong Sub-region. We represent our peers that participated in the Mekong Youth Forum 2010 and the National Forums on Trafficking and Migration, which were held across the region in 2010. We are here in Hanoi to attend SOM8 and IMM. We met with other young people and talked about our experiences, we shared the work we did in our countries to eliminate trafficking and unsafe migration. Some of us met with small groups of children and young people in our countries before we left home to come to this meeting. We are members of youth groups and children’s networks in our countries,

On 13th February, 2012 when we arrived in Hanoi, we all attended the Pre SOM Youth Consultation to prepare this statement outlining the issues that concern us. We reviewed the recommendations we presented at the Mekong Youth Forum 2010 and also the SPA III document. The following statement represents the voices of children and youth of the Mekong Region. We would like to present our views and aspirations for your consideration and we feel proud to be part of this important mission with you as delegates of SOM 8. The slogan of the 3rd Mekong Youth Forum in 2010 was “Let’s Talk, Let’s Act”.

What happens to children in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

1. A lack of opportunities to access education and the unequal quality of education pushes children into trafficking situations in this region. Many of them do not have any skills so they cannot find a good job, do not have the knowledge or life skills to protect themselves and are ready to take risks in their lives, including unsafe and irregular migration.
2. Children in the regional face different forms of exploitative situation, e.g. children on the street who are forced to work as beggars. Sexual exploitation of children is another important issue which concerns us. traffickers are using many ways including modern technologies such as the internet to reach out to young people and lure them into sexual exploitative situations.
3. There are many children in the region who have to work to help their parents due to the economic situation of their families. The inefficient implementation of labor laws mean that many children fall into the worst forms of child labour and are abused at their work places.
4. Some media broadcast inappropriate information which influences the behavior and wellbeing of children, especially the victims of trafficking. For example, some broadcast stories of trafficking victims without protecting their identity.
5. We are concerned about the situation where officials take advantage or benefit from trafficking situations as many traffickers still exploit children and adults even though anti-trafficking laws are in place, but in many countries it’s implementation is weak.
Recommendation

On behalf of our peers, we would like to reaffirm the recommendations we made at the 3rd Mekong Youth Forum in 2010. Those recommendations are still relevant to the situation related to trafficking and migration in the GMS. However, we would urge the COMMIT member governments, the, UN agencies, media, local and international NGOs to pay attention on the critical issues. The following are the main recommendations we selected through a voting process;

1. Governments and concerned agencies should strengthen cooperation to support the protection of street children in urban and rural areas and to rescue them to prevent them being trapped into trafficking or severely exploitative situations, e.g. forced begging where physical harm is threatened. The government should strictly punish those who disable children and force them to beg on the streets.

2. Governments and concerned agencies should promote anti trafficking and safe migration messages as part of the school curriculum and increase access to education for children in remote areas. Skills training for youth should be made more available, and in line with the demand of the private sector to enhance youth employment, allowing youth to make the transition from school to work and preventing youth from ending up in exploitative situations.

3. Governments should strengthen inspection or monitoring of factories and work places to prevent child labour and forced labour. The governments should also develop systems to monitor private homes and restaurants as many children are exploited in domestic work and small scale businesses.

4. Governments and concerned agencies should reassure that government official involved or facilitating traffickers and their networks are punished.

5. Governments should strengthen cooperation among the police and law enforcement agencies in the region to share information about trafficking and arrest them even if they are local people or from neighboring counties, as many times traffickers escape from one country to another country but they are not arrested and go on to exploit other children and adults.

6. We would like governments to continue to support children’s participation at the community and national levels. They should provide opportunities for young people to have share their ideas and facilitate dialogue between government officials and youth from the country in order to improve cooperation and influence policy and its implementation regarding issues that matter to their lives. This includes continued support for the participation of children at SOM and IMM events. Mekong Youth Forum has been acknowledged as one of the platforms for officials to dialogue with the new generation. We would urge governments to include this as part of their national plans and Sub Regional Plan of Action.

Lastly, we are very happy to be here at this very important event on anti- trafficking. We, as the young people of the region, are very happy to hear and see good cooperation among the governments of the 6 countries and we would like to be part of this cooperation. We hope you can help us to make our dreams come true and not let trafficking destroy the dreams of children and young people. We are ready to TALK. We are ready to ACT along with you. We are ready to help you sustain the UNITY and COOPERATION in this region.

Hanoi, Vietnam
15, February 2012