



Australian
National
University

ANU College
of Asia and
the Pacific

Mekong Update 2026: Cross-cutting challenges in mainland Southeast Asia

Program booklet

6 May 2026

This event is a collaboration between the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, and Thailand's Institute of Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University.

ANU College of Asia and the Pacific
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ANU College of Asia and the Pacific

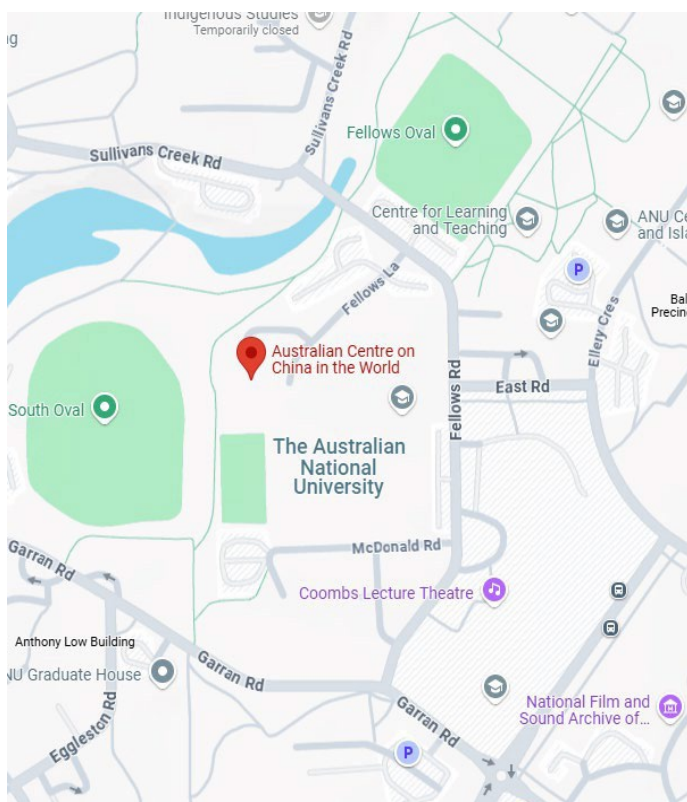
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General information

Location

Australian Centre on
China in the World,
Building 188, ANU,
Fellows Lane, Acton
ACT 2601



Program

Mekong Update 2026: Cross-cutting challenges in mainland Southeast Asia

All sessions: Auditorium, Australian Centre on China in the World, Building 188, Fellows Lane, ANU

TIME	PROGRAM
8.45am	Arrival and registration
9.00am	Opening Address Professor Helen Sullivan, Dean, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific Ambassador Arjaree Sriratanaban, Royal Thai Embassy, Canberra
9.30am	Panel I: Climate Change and Green Transition Dr Kanya Souksakoun, National University of Laos Mr Akkanut Wantanasombut, Chulalongkorn University Associate Professor Keith Barney, Crawford School of Public Policy, ANU College of Law, Governance and Policy Dr Mira Käkönen, Crawford School of Public Policy, ANU College of Law, Governance and Policy
11.00am	<i>Morning tea (Foyer)</i>
11.30am	Panel II: Transnational Crime Dr Katrin Travouillon, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific Ms Bopha Phorn, PhD candidate, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific Dr Anuk Pitakthanin, Chulalongkorn University Mr David Boyle, Producer - 101 East, Al Jazeera
1.00pm	<i>Lunch (Foyer)</i>
1.40pm	Short documentary screening: Climate and Labour (directed by Mr Akkanut Wantanasombat, Chulalongkorn University).
2.00pm	Panel III: Border Conflicts and Geopolitics Honorary Professor Craig Reynolds, School of Culture, History and Language, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific Dr Debby Chan, Australian Centre on China in the World, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific Ms Dana Lee, Master's student in Peace and Conflict Studies, ANU Ms Angela Suriyasenee, Fellow at Verve Research Mr Samuel Hmung, PhD candidate, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific
3.30pm	<i>Afternoon tea (Foyer)</i>
4.00pm	Transnational and Domestic Repression Associate Professor Greg Raymond, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific Dr Janjira Sombatpoonsiri, Chulalongkorn University Dr Andrea Haeffner, Griffith University Dr Swe Oo Mon, Myanmar Research Centre, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific
5.30pm	End of Update

Wi-Fi details

For the Mekong Update at Australian Centre on China in the World, Building 188, please connect to the following Wi-Fi:

- Wi-Fi: ANU-Secure
- Username: MekongUpdate
- Password: ANU2601!

Update Speakers

Associate Professor Keith Barney

Crawford School of Public Policy, ANU College of Law, Governance and Policy

Keith Barney is a human geographer in the Resources, Environment and Development Department at the Crawford School of Public Policy. His research draws on political ecology, resource and economic geography, and agrarian studies, with sectoral expertise spanning forestry, land, water, energy, and mining governance. Grounded in long-term, multi-sited case studies and detailed ethnographic fieldwork, his work examines how public and private sector interventions reshape natural resource management and livelihood systems across Laos and the wider Southeast Asian region. Keith's recent publications extend this work to the intersections between natural resource governance, state power, socialist regime durability, and macroeconomic transformation in Laos.

Mr David Boyle

Producer - 101 East, Al Jazeera

David Boyle is an investigative journalist and producer at Al Jazeera. He specialises in transnational crime in Southeast Asia, where he lived for 15 years. David revealed the existence of scam compounds in Cambodia in 2019. He's since produced critically acclaimed documentaries penetrating deep into this shadowy industry. His work has implicated major scam syndicate bosses, including jailed Prince Group kingpin Chen Zhi and 'Alice' Guo. David and his colleagues were the first journalists to gain open access to the notorious Shwe Kokko crime hub in Myanmar and broadcast the only interview with imprisoned tycoon and self-proclaimed spy She Zhijiang.

Dr Debby Chan

Australian Centre on China in the World, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific

Debby Chan is a lecturer at the Australian Centre on China in the World and the Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University. Her research is grounded in the view that societal actors possess agency and influence over international political and economic outcomes. She focuses particularly on social responses to China's economic statecraft, with an empirical emphasis on Southeast and East Asia. She is the author of *Defying Beijing: Societal Resistance to the Belt and Road in Myanmar* (ANU Press, 2024).

Dr Andrea Haefner

Griffith University

Andrea Haefner (SFHEA) is the Southeast Asia Hub Lead and a Senior Lecturer at the Griffith Asia Institute at Griffith University. Andrea has 20 years of experience working with academia, government, and international organisations across Australia, Germany, and Southeast Asia, especially the Mekong region. Andrea's research focuses on civil society, water governance and transboundary river basins in the Mekong region. Besides publishing several peer-reviewed articles, Andrea's book on *Negotiating for Water Resources - Bridging Transboundary River Basins* was published with Routledge. Besides focusing on impact research and policy relevance, Andrea also leads capacity building programs and works alongside governments to improve legislation.

Mr Samuel Hmung

PhD candidate, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific

Samuel Hmung is a PhD candidate at the Australian National University and research officer at the ANU Myanmar Research Centre with over 10 years of professional experience in the field of peace negotiations, electoral politics, and youth activism in Myanmar, Australia, and Thailand. His PhD project explores the relationship between armed and unarmed movements in Myanmar and beyond. He received a Master of Political Science (Advanced) from the ANU, under an Australian Awards scholarship. His broader research interests include civil conflict, power-sharing institutions, and revolutions.

Dr Mira Käkönen

Crawford School of Public Policy, ANU College of Law, Governance and Policy

Mira Käkönen is a scholar of political ecology and an ARC DECRA Fellow at the Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University. Her work has explored the politics of environment and development in the Mekong Region focusing on how hydropower expansion, climate interventions, and extractive infrastructure projects converge in ways that profoundly reshape rivers and the lives of riverine communities. Her DECRA project, *Volatile Rivers and the Infrastructure Politics in the Mekong Region* continues this trajectory, examining entanglements of rivers, infrastructure, and power relations, and how these are increasingly shaped by a globalising China and changing climate.

Ms Dana Lee

Master's student in Peace and Conflict Studies, ANU

Dana Lee is a master's degree student in Peace and Conflict Studies at the Australian National University and a Young Leader at the Pacific Forum. She has worked across international policy and research environments, including contributions to institutions such as the Asia-Europe Foundation and regional EU-ASEAN think tank initiatives. Her experience spans strategic dialogue, regional cooperation, and security-focused policy analysis. During the Khmer-Thai border tensions, she engaged in informal diplomatic advocacy, contributing to de-escalation efforts through written engagement and direct high-level dialogue, including discussions with Tun Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad. As an academic, she writes extensively on Southeast Asian security dynamics, peace and war studies, trust in conflicts, and on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS).

Dr Swe Oo Mon

Myanmar Research Centre, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific

Swe Oo Mon is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific where she conducts independent research on the political, social, and economic conditions of contemporary Myanmar. She received her PhD from the International University of Japan in 2024. Her dissertation, 'Fragile Democracy in Times of the Pandemic in Myanmar', examines the impact of COVID-19 and the 2021 military coup on political attitudes and behaviors. It explores how these crises have shaped public perceptions of politics, government, and society. She has experience across corporate, non-governmental, public policy, and academic sectors, strengthening her interdisciplinary research and teaching.

Ms Bopha Phorn

PhD candidate, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific

Bopha Phorn is a journalist who has written for a host of publications, including *Al-Jazeera*, *Nikkei Asia*, *Rest of World*, *Vice Asia*, *VOA*, and *AP*. From 2018-2019, she was a reporter at ABC, based in New York. Phorn collaborates with ICIJ on the Pandora Papers and the World Bank, which won awards and recognition from the Overseas Press Club of America. She also worked with OCCRP on tobacco smuggling. She was a class of 2018 Fulbright Hubert H. Humphrey Fellow and a 2023 fellow at the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard. She won IWMF's 2013 Courage in Journalism Award. Currently, Bopha is a PhD student at ANU Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, Department of Political and Social Change. Her PhD research explores politics and state-building, with a focus on Cambodia.

Dr Anuk Pitakthanin

Chulalongkorn University

Anuk Pitakthanin is Director of the Mekong Studies Center at the Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University. His work centres on the protection and rights of vulnerable populations including people experiencing homelessness, migrant workers, and borderland communities across the Greater Mekong Sub-region. He currently leads research on money mule networks, examining how scam compound operations exploit marginalized groups through illicit financial systems and how this intersects with social protection gaps in the Mekong borderlands.

Police MAJGEN Paween Pongsirin (ret)

Pol Maj Gen Paween Pongsirin (Ret.) is a former Deputy Commissioner of Provincial Police Region 8, Thailand, with 33 years of service. In 2015, led the investigation into the Rohingya human trafficking case—the largest in Thai history. The operation issued 153 arrest warrants, targeting high-ranking military and influential politicians. Despite immense obstacles and interference, successfully completed the investigation before being forced to seek asylum in Melbourne. Currently lives in Australia and contributes a weekly column on police life for *Matichon Weekly* in Thailand, a role maintained for over three years.

Associate Professor Greg Raymond

Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific

Gregory Raymond is an Associate Professor in the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre in the Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs researching Southeast Asian politics, defence and foreign relations. He convenes the ASEAN Australia Defence Postgraduate Scholarship Program, is current President of the Association of Mainland Southeast Asia Scholars (AMSEAS) and is international relations editor for the journal *Asian Studies Review*. Before joining the Australian National University, Greg was a policy advisor in the Australian Government, including in the strategic and international policy areas of the Department of Defence and the Australian Embassy in Bangkok.

Honorary Professor Craig Reynolds

School of Culture, History and Language, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific

Craig J Reynolds is an Honorary Professor in the School of Culture, History and Language at the ANU. His research interests include the cultural, political, and intellectual history of Thailand. Publications include *Power, Protection and Magic in Thailand: The Cosmos of a Southern Policeman* (ANU Press, 2019); in Thai, *Letters from the Edge of the World: Thinking about the Past in the Present* (Kledthai, Bangkok, 2022). *Thai Radical Discourse: The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today* (Ithaca, 1994) was translated into Thai and Chinese. He is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

Dr Janjira Sombatpoonsiri

Chulalongkorn University

Janjira Sombatpoonsiri is a social scientist whose work examines how authoritarian power adapts in the digital age and how civic actors respond. She is a Research Fellow at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg and a full-time Assistant Professor at Chulalongkorn University's Institute of Asian Studies in Bangkok. Janjira's writings appear in academic and policy outlets, including *Democratization*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *International Journal of Communication*, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's *Emissary*. She is the author of the forthcoming *Death by a Thousand Cuts: Digital Repression and Pro-Democracy Movements in Thailand* (University of Wisconsin Press).

Dr Kanya Souksakoun

National University of Laos

Kanya Souksakoun holds a PhD in Resources, Environment and Development from the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University (ANU). He has over 15 years of professional experience as a leading practitioner of environmental impact assessment, monitoring of safeguard compliance, and sustainability for renewable power projects. Kanya has also been interested in and worked on political economy of energy landscape in Laos and the Mekong region to explore the country's resource extraction for export-oriented power generation, and power development-related debt. Kanya is a faculty member in the field of environmental governance at the National University of Laos.

HE Ambassador Arjaree Sriratanaban

Royal Thai Embassy

Arjaree Sriratanaban is currently Ambassador of Thailand to Australia. She also serves as non-resident Ambassador to Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu and Ambassador-Designate to Solomon Islands. A career diplomat, she has worked in various departments in the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including as Director of the Office of Policy and Planning and Director-General of the Department of East Asian Affairs. Her earlier overseas assignments include the Permanent Mission of Thailand to the United Nations in New York and the Royal Thai Embassy in Washington, D.C. Ambassador Sriratanaban graduated with Bachelor of Arts from Chulalongkorn University and obtained Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from Tufts University, United States.

Professor Helen Sullivan

Dean, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific

Helen Sullivan is a public policy researcher, teacher, advisor, and senior university leader. A political sociologist, she was educated in the humanities and social sciences and holds degrees in Modern History and Political Science (BA Comb Hons, University of Birmingham, UK), Women's Studies (MA, University of York, UK), and Public Policy (PhD, University of Birmingham, UK). She currently serves as Dean of the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University.

Ms Angela Suriyasenee

Fellow at Verve Research

Angie Suriyasenee is a Fellow at Verve Research specialising in cyber and technology security policy, digital sovereignty, and international security in the Indo-Pacific. Her research examines how critical and emerging technologies reshape power, governance, and security in the region, with broader interests spanning human security, gendered dimensions of conflict, technology-facilitated violence, and intersectionality in foreign policy and national security. Angie has held leadership roles with the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Youth Partnership and served as a Cyber and Technology Fellow with Young Australians in International Affairs. She holds a Master of International Security and a Double Bachelor's in Arts (International Development) and International Relations from the University of Adelaide.

Dr Katrin Travouillon

Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific

Katrin Travouillon is a Senior Lecture at the Department of Political and Social Change, ANU Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs. She first visited Cambodia in 2005 and spent half a year in a small rural village in Takeo province to conduct a survey for an international development organisation. I have been fascinated by the country, its people and the Khmer language ever since. To develop my language skills, I relied on the help of my generous Cambodian colleagues and friends in Phnom Penh, Takeo, and Berlin.

Mr Akkanut Wantanasombut

Chulalongkorn University

Akkanut Wantanasombut is a researcher and scholar-activist at the Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, where he leads the Research Group on Innovation for Social Solidarity and Inclusive Economy in Asia. His work focuses on the intersection of the digital economy, climate change, and labour, particularly the transition of informal urban transport in Southeast Asia. He leads research and policy development on the electrification of motorcycle taxis in Bangkok as a pathway for a just transition. He is the Principal Investigator of Fairwork Thailand, a 2023 to 2024 ICDE Fellow at The New School, and a current Post Growth Fellow at the Post Growth Institute.