

PRESS RELEASE

Regional Experts Workshop on “Towards Common Action on Maritime Commons”

Co-hosted by the Philippine Foreign Service Institute, the University of the Philippines
and the Institute for International Policy Studies
at Discovery Suites, Ortigas Center, Pasig City, Metro Manila
15 June 2015

A select group of regional maritime security experts gathered at a workshop entitled “Towards Common Actions on Maritime Commons” at Manila, Philippines on June 15, 2015 to exchange views on the issue of regional maritime security in the East China Sea and South China Sea. The group, comprised of experts from Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines, and Malaysia sought common understandings and called for concerted actions on matters concerning maritime security in the Asia-Pacific region, highlighting that:

- 1) The East China Sea and South China Sea remain part of the global commons in which all members of the international community have shared interests, especially in safeguarding the free flow of trade for the purpose of regional prosperity. In particular, all parties should assure the freedoms of navigation and overflight, as well as all other related rights and freedoms, through the high seas and relevant maritime zones in accordance with international law.
- 2) International law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, should be the sole basis for resolving any maritime disputes, and the peaceful settlement of maritime disputes is a *sine qua non* for achieving regional peace and prosperity.
- 3) Early conclusion of negotiations for a Code of Conduct between ASEAN and China is urgently required, but pending those negotiations, unilateral acts that seek to change the status quo should not be accorded any legal effects under the principle *ex injuria jus non oritur* (law does not arise from injustice).
- 4) Massive environmental damage to the natural conditions and biodiversity of sensitive coral reefs and atolls should be avoided. The parties call for an immediate freeze on large-scale land reclamation activities that permanently damage the natural environment.
- 5) In order to overcome their principal differences, the regional States should reach a common legal understanding and interpretation of international law regarding the islands, atolls, and reefs in the South China Sea.
- 6) Robust and regular U.S. activities in the South China Sea, and Japan’s renewed cooperation with regional countries, are welcomed for safeguarding a rules-based order in the South China Sea.
- 7) Regional security, defense, and coast guard cooperation to strengthen maritime domain awareness among regional countries should be enhanced at all levels without delay. The conduct of joint exercises and joint activities such as regional intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance activities will also enhance regional maritime domain awareness.
- 8) The strengthening of the region’s maritime security architecture should be promoted in order to better manage the maritime disputes in the long run. To this end, the parties should consider the development of an Asian Maritime Organization for Security and Cooperation (AMOSC).