

On behalf of the Government of Japan, following the reception last night, I would like to welcome all of you to Tokyo. My sincere gratitude goes to all who have made this seminar possible, especially to our colleagues from co-chair countries, namely, Vietnam and India.

Let me introduce myself briefly. “Sea” has been my lifework throughout my academic life and political career. After completing my undergraduate degree, I specialized in marine environmental science at a master’s program of the University of Maryland. I went on to continue my research at the Graduate School of Osaka University. On top of that, I kept myself engaged with maritime issues as a researcher at an international organization and a research institute. I ran for the political office with a strong determination to re-establish Japan’s future as a maritime nation.

Therefore, I am very delighted to be able to welcome all of you here as your host at the ARF Seminar on Regional Confidence Building and the Law of the Sea.

At the outset of this seminar, please allow me to cite the words of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on the importance of the rule of law at sea.

In his keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue last year, Prime Minister Abe advocated the “three principles of the Rule of Law at Sea.” These principles consist of; (1) states shall make and clarify their claims based on international law; (2) states shall not use force or coercion in trying to drive their claims; and (3) states shall seek to settle disputes by peaceful means. Now is the time to thoroughly implement them. In fact, the three principles have

received robust support from many states concerned, including those in Asia as demonstrated at the recent ASEAN related summit meetings.

The seas as global commons must be open for everyone's use; but at the same time, all activities at sea must be conducted in accordance with applicable international law including UNCLOS. There can be no room to tolerate any violent or coercive actions incompatible with internationally recognized principles.

Based upon this standpoint and as one of the largest beneficiaries of open and stable seas from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific, Japan falls second to no other country in its determination to ensure the rule of law at sea in close cooperation with ASEAN and other ARF member. This is, indeed, Japan's banner of "Proactive contribution to Peace" in action.

Last but not least, I hope that hosting this seminar in Tokyo will duly reflect Japan's willingness to further contribute to enhancing awareness of the importance of the rule of law at sea. It is my strong belief that, thanks to understanding and cooperation of the invited speakers from academia and practitioners, this seminar serves as a valuable venue to ensure the peace and stability in the region. I would hope that all of you here will actively contribute to the enhancement of the rule of law at sea by utilizing experiences and networks you will gain through this seminar.

Let me conclude my opening remarks by appreciating your active participation and contribution.

Thank you for your attention.