

The Commemorative Conference on the 10th Anniversary of the Arbitral Award
Speech by Parliamentary Vice-Minister SHIMADA

Magandang umaga po, Honourable. Lazaro, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Honourable. Berberabe, Solicitor General, Honourable Cuna, Secretary of Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Honourable Oban, National Security Advisor, Honourable Centino, Presidential Assistant for Maritime Concerns, all those in attendance. I am Tomoaki Shimada, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Following the state visit of President Marcos and the First Lady in May and the visit of Secretary Lazaro in June, it is a great honour to visit the Philippines and speak in front of you today at the Commemorative Conference on the 10th Anniversary of the Arbitral Award.

The Arbitral Award in 2016 marks a crucial milestone concerning the South China Sea, highlighting the importance of the peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The attendance of government officials and experts from various regions in this conference underscores the significance of the Arbitral Award. Japan highly appreciates and strongly supports the Government of the Philippines' consistent emphasis on the rule of law and its position in accordance with the Arbitral Award.

The South China Sea is a vital sea lane not only for the region but also for the international community as a whole. For Japan, as a maritime nation that has been supported by a free and open maritime order, the freedom of navigation and overflight, as well as peace and stability in this region, are of great significance.

Against such backdrop, Japan is seriously concerned that unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion, which threaten regional peace and stability, have continued and strengthened in the South China Sea over the past ten years.

Unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion are unacceptable anywhere in the world. Japan will continue to consistently reiterate its position that disputes should be resolved peacefully in accordance with international law.

In line with this position, Japan has been advancing concrete initiatives towards realising a “free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)” and consistently supporting the “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which is a key principle for ASEAN in this region and shares fundamental principles with FOIP. In the maritime domain, Japan has been continuing capacity-building activities for the Philippine Coast Guard including through the provision of patrol vessels and joint training. Furthermore, maritime cooperation among Japan, the Philippines and the United States is also making steady progress.

Japan and the Philippines are neighbours across the sea. The Philippines, with which Japan shares fundamental values and principles, is one of the closest like-minded countries for Japan. Under our “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership,” we intend to continue strengthening our relationship in a sustained and multilayered manner, - including our response to issues concerning the South China Sea- without being swayed by changes in the international environment.

The Arbitral Award is final and legally binding on the parties to the dispute, rendered through proceedings based on UNCLOS. Respect for this Arbitral Award is critically important to ensure practical effect to the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes under UNCLOS.

No single country can maintain and strengthen a maritime order based on the rule of law alone. Japan will continue to play a proactive role in coordination with its ally, like-minded countries, and ASEAN member states, based on the core principles of FOIP such as freedom, openness, diversity, inclusiveness, and the rule of law.

In closing, I would like to express my respect to all those who have worked so hard to organize this conference and my best wishes for further development of our friendship. Maraming salamat po.