

2nd G7 High Level Meeting on Maritime Security
Opening Statement by Mr. Kentaro SONOURA,
State Minister for Foreign Affairs (December 8th, 2016)

On behalf of the Government of Japan, I welcome you all to this meeting.

We had good discussions over maritime security in Hiroshima following last year's meeting and shared the common recognition as the G7 to seek peaceful resolution of disputes based on international law and take on initiatives to ensure the safety of transportation at sea.

Ensuring safety of the seas is a key to expanding the global economy as well. I look forward to active discussions today based on the main elements of the G7 Foreign Ministers' Statement on Maritime Security and the other relevant G7 Statements.

It is indispensable for the peace and prosperity of the entire international community to keep the seas free, open and stable.

In this context, Japan advocates "the three principles of the rule of law at sea", which comprises the following three points; (i) states shall make and clarify their claims based on international law; (ii) states shall not use force or coercion in trying to drive their claims; (iii) states shall seek to settle disputes by peaceful means. These principles were confirmed in the G7 Ise-Shima Leaders' Declaration and have received robust support from many countries concerned.

However, there remain many challenges for maintaining free, open and stable seas. We have been witnessing phenomena in the seas of the Asia-Pacific region that indicate increasing frictions and tensions between states. The international community is watching the situation closely with grave concern. In order to ensure free, open and stable seas as well as freedom of navigation and overflight, I would like to reiterate the importance of observing international law including the UNCLOS and enhancing concrete actions and cooperation based on international law.

In addition, we should call on all parties to refrain from unilateral actions which could increase tensions. It is vital to seek peaceful resolution of disputes through dispute settlement mechanisms based on international law including UNCLOS.

As for piracy, Japan has been conducting anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden since 2009 without any suspension. It is important for the multilateral naval coalitions to maintain their presence in the waters.

Japan has also contributed through assisting capacity building of maritime law enforcement agencies in Asia and through the ReCAAP. I visited the ReCAAP Information Sharing Center during my visit to Singapore in March 2015 and recognized its significance with my own eyes. Japan will continue to tackle the issue of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea as well.

Toward ensuring transparency in the maritime domain for maintaining free, open and stable seas, the G7 member states should demonstrate leadership to foster the information sharing and collaboration necessary for Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). Japan formulated its initiative toward strengthening MDA capability this July, and intends to promote international cooperation in this area.

Japan also aims to contribute to the international society for addressing new potentials and challenges over the Arctic Ocean, which is vulnerable to environmental changes and is increasingly gaining the world's attention.

Lastly, let me briefly touch upon the concept of "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy".

Prime Minister Abe announced the strategy at TICAD VI this August. The key of the stability and prosperity of the international community is the dynamism created by the synergy between the "two continents" - Asia, which is recording remarkable growth, and Africa, which is full with potentials - and two free and open seas - the Pacific and the Indian Oceans.

Japan will vigorously push forward its foreign policy, taking these continents and seas as an integrated region.

Toward realizing a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific,” we would like to closely cooperate with the G7 and EAS member states to deal with various maritime challenges.

Under the banner of “Proactive Contribution to Peace” based on the principle of international cooperation, Japan will further contribute to ensuring the peace, stability and prosperity of the region and the world. Once again, I look forward to your active contributions to our common goal of ensuring free, open and stable seas.

Thank you very much.

(End)