

**PHILIPPINE FOREIGN POLICY:**

**IN PURSUIT OF A JUST AND ENDURING PEACE**

**H.E. ALBERT F. DEL ROSARIO**

**Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines**

**Philippine Conference**

**Washington DC, 26 September 2012**

Dr. John Hamre, President of the CSIS

Our good friends Asst Secretary Kurt Campbell and Asst Secretary Mark Lippert,

Secretary Cesar Purisima,

Secretary Leila de Lima,

Ambassador Joey Cuisia,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me begin by expressing my warmest thanks to the CSIS and the US Philippines Society for jointly organizing this inaugural Philippine Conference. We believe that your initiative signals that American attention is once again moving out east, towards the Western Pacific and the maritime margins of eastern Asia.

The geo-strategists would present this as part of the new U.S. strategic pivot to Asia. Business leaders would argue that such a shift is logical, given the increasing geo-economic weight of East Asia. We, however, prefer to see this as America's coming home. The United States has been a Pacific power with vital interests in Asia for more than a century. And we, in the Philippines, certainly welcome this rediscovery of your Eastern connections.

May we also say that America's renewed regard for the Asia-Pacific is met by a rising Philippines. Under the visionary and determined leadership of H.E. President Benigno S. Aquino, III, the Philippines has embarked on a new era of reform and reinvigoration that touches all fields.

President Aquino has inaugurated a national strategy of competitiveness and inclusive growth, enshrined in his Social Contract with the Filipino People. His efforts are already earning dividends. The Aquino Administration is fighting corruption. It is cleaning out the government. Good governance is now the main organizing principle. More people than ever before are included in economic development through directed social support intervention measures and intensified job generation. At this juncture, let me just emphasize that good governance and transparency are being translated into good economics. And the Philippines' economic numbers will speak for themselves, as our government economic managers I am sure will tell you.

Early fruits are ready for harvest. The country remains stable in macroeconomic terms. Business confidence in the Philippines is rising. The horizon for investment is bright.

This is reflected in our foreign relations, where the Philippines follows a policy of reaching out to all who seek partnership with us in all fields.

We pursue a confident policy of openness, engagement and partnership in a world of deep economic uncertainty, an unclear security environment and intense globalization. We aim to meet this world in terms of three action areas: safeguarding our national security; enhancing national development through economic diplomacy; and protecting the rights and welfare of every Filipino overseas.

In order to attain these goals, with respect to our immediate regions in Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Western Pacific, we believe that dialogue and cooperation to maintain broad and enduring stability is essential for the continued pursuit of growth and development. Without such stability, our individual and collective endeavors to improve the lives of our people may be severely compromised.

The Philippines, therefore, is active in efforts to erect the political, security and economic architecture for the emerging world of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Towards this end, the Philippines has been continuously active in ASEAN, in ASEAN's dialogue relationships, in the ARF, and in EAS. In 2015, the Philippine will host the 2015 APEC Summit.

As regards, regional security, the Philippines has been supportive of confidence-building and even preventive diplomacy within the context of the ARF. We joined with our ASEAN partners in crafting the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, which China agreed to subsequently join. We have utilized ASEAN's dialogue relationships to deepen engagement and mutually beneficial linkages in many non-security areas that enhance the general atmosphere of regional amity and cooperation.

Clearly, however, these prudential measures have not been sufficient. The tensions generated in and near the West Philippine Sea (WPS) are stark reminders of the work that still has to be done by many of us.

There is a wise saying that good fences make good neighbors. Drawing this to heart, the Philippines has been taking steps to build a minimum credible defense posture sufficient to defend the nation's boundaries and sovereignty at sea. Our posture is and will remain entirely

defensive in this regard.

Our foreign policy is also focused on the promotion and attainment of economic security through the mobilization of external resources for economic advancement and social development. Our economic diplomacy program firmly supports President Aquino's goal of poverty alleviation and the creation of employment through good governance.

Development and poverty alleviation are our most urgent nation-building priorities today. Foreign policy has to incorporate this. When we were appointed as Secretary of Foreign Affairs, we immediately directed a renewed economic diplomacy drive to increase exports, raise investment, expand tourism, upgrade technology and create more jobs at home.

We are re-tooling the Philippine Foreign Service to be the overseas arm of our economic diplomacy drive. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the business of diplomacy must include business promotion in the public interest. We have also made sure that officers of the Department of Foreign Affairs have the right tools for this economic diplomacy effort. We have entered into a formal partnership with the Asian Institute of Management to ensure proper training for our Ambassadors, Career Ministers and even the Honorary Consuls Generals. Believing that systematic inputs will ultimately result in positive outputs, we have set input targets and are closely monitoring the performance of our Posts.

Migration is another major front that must engage Philippine foreign policy. The Philippines is one of the largest source nations of migrants in the world today. Some 9 million Filipinos, around 10 percent of our total population, live or work overseas. They make tremendous contributions to the well-being and economic health not only of the Philippines but more so of their host countries. For this reason, the Philippines' basic strategy is to cooperate with host nations and with international organizations so that shared responsibilities to care for all migrants are respected and fulfilled.

We have often told the story of how, within hours of being sworn in as Secretary of Foreign Affairs, we were off to Libya on the first of several trips to repatriate our people affected by the Arab Spring. In a break with the tradition that the Foreign Secretary first visits the countries where we have the closest relations, my first official travel was to where our countrymen were in the greatest danger.

Since then, we have repatriated over 11,000 Filipinos from many countries including Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Japan and New Zealand, either due to civil strife or natural disasters.

While many countries have closed their Embassies in Damascus because of the deteriorating situation in Syria, we have increased our presence there primarily to extend protection to our workers and facilitate their repatriation.

But in our quest for just and enduring peace, we must consider certain specific commitments that reinforce our efforts and give further substance to our results. Let me now discuss some of these.

***First, is the Philippine commitment to principle.*** The Philippine constitution states clearly that "the State shall pursue an independent foreign policy." Some have taken this to mean an arms-length approach to interaction with the external sphere and an inward-looking development strategy

Yet there is for me no inherent contradiction between our regional and global integration thrusts and the faithful implementation of an independent foreign policy. Our national interest is best served by being in and not apart from this world, by sitting at the conclaves of nations drafting global rules rather than standing outside.

Thus we encourage the increased contacts, communication and trade, and interaction among our people. We are part of the emerging community that is ASEAN, a long standing ally of the US, and close partners of our neighbors in the region. In multilateral fora, we stand with our partners in the Group of 77 and in the Non-Aligned Movement. But as we nurture our traditional alliances and forge new partnerships, we continue to pursue a path that is uniquely ours.

As the first democracy in all of Asia, the Philippines has deeply rooted democratic values, and the protection and promotion of these values are evident in our relations with other nations. In the conduct of our diplomacy, we stand for the observance of the rule of law, and for the preservation of democracy and its institutions.

As a Charter Member of the United Nations, the Philippines vigorously promoted all decolonization efforts and staunchly stood with the rest of the Global South to champion the cause of development.

In the region, we sought to make ASEAN a stronger entity by promoting its centrality in our shared security concerns. More importantly, we were a major advocate in establishing the ASEAN Charter, with a vision of making ASEAN a rules-based organization capable of strengthening norms and rules of good behavior, for the region and the Asia-Pacific as a whole.

***Second, is the Philippine commitment to peace.*** Our Constitution enshrines the renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy, and we have been active contributors to the cause of peace. Hundreds of men and women from our Armed Forces and National Police have served in UN mission areas since the first Filipino peacekeepers were deployed 50 years ago in the Congo. There are presently 922 military and police personnel serving as military observers, staff officers, police officers and members of formed contingents in Cote d'Ivoire, Darfur, the Golan Heights, Haiti, Kashmir, Liberia, South Sudan and Timor-Leste.

Our work in the area of non proliferation is another evidence of our country's dedication to the cause of peace. We are among the original ASEAN members behind the SEANWFZ [*shawn fez*], and we have been unceasing in our efforts to get the P-5 onboard this regional initiative. As Chair of the 2010 NPT Review Conference, we succeeded in rallying the parties behind a landmark outcome document, specifically a 64-point Action Plan, which spells out concrete steps to be taken towards disarmament.

***Third, is the Philippine commitment to the People.*** As we mentioned earlier, the presence of millions of Filipinos all over the world has enriched the fabric of our diplomacy. Earlier this year, the Philippines deposited in Geneva its instruments of ratification for the Maritime Labor Convention and the Decent Work for Domestic Workers. Our ratification will bring these two key international instruments that protect millions of migrants into force and effect next year.

The Philippines is an original member of the UN Human Rights Council and has acceded to eight of the major international human rights treaties. Last month, the Philippines' second Universal Periodic Review (UPR) report was adopted by consensus in the Human Rights Council. This manifest the world's good regard for human rights in the Philippines, and inspires us to seek more improvements from ourselves and for our region and the world in cooperation with our partners.

Yet beyond looking after the welfare of our own people, we are equally zealous in the promotion of human rights, human security and human dignity.

In ASEAN, the Philippines has led many key people-centered initiatives. We have been at the forefront in the ASEAN Inter-Governmental Commission on Human Rights, the ASEAN Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, the draft ASEAN Convention on Trafficking in Persons and an envisaged ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights.

We have also made it our priority to send a judge to the International Criminal Court, a token of our ardent desire to actively participate in ending impunity, and ensuring that perpetrators of the most serious crimes against humanity are brought to justice.

***Fourth, the Philippine commitment to progress.*** Traditional Philippine diplomacy came out of the Cold War with all that it implies. Since then, Philippine foreign policy has evolved to include not just new partnerships, but also new avenues for engagement and cooperation. The emergence of new transnational issues, such as disaster risk reduction, pandemics, drugs and human trafficking have compelled us to reach out to our neighbors and collaborate in addressing these common threats.

As part of our progressive and forward looking policy, we have also pioneered innovative interchanges for greater international understanding, such as in interreligious and intercultural dialogue. We have these dialogues within the United Nations and at the regional level.

These principles also drive the revitalization of our relations with the US. Sixty one years after we codified our alliance under the Mutual Defense Treaty, the United States remains our only treaty ally and one of only two strategic allies. The U.S. is our largest source of official development assistance in terms of grants, our second largest trading partner, our second largest in terms of inward tourism, and our third largest source of direct investments. The US is also home to the largest population of Filipinos living outside our country.

In the context of the present regional challenges, our good friend Ernie Bower has described US and Philippine interests as "having converged to create an alignment of interests that has reinvigorated the alliance." [\[1\]](#)

We may at times disagree, indeed, as do all allies or even members of the same family. Yet at all times, though we do disagree, we stay together on the fundamental questions because of our shared history and values that continue to animate our respective national visions of who we are and where we should go as peoples. Ours are democratic, open and liberal societies. We have traditions of free speech, inclusiveness and egalitarianism that set us apart from so many others. This is the cement of an alliance that can endure many crises.

Of course, we have friendships with other countries that have their own special characteristics. We have long-standing ties with China, and extensive historical people-to-people links. The President's family for example, traces their roots to an ancestor from Fujian province in China. China is our third largest trading partner, and investments from both sides remain robust.

Undoubtedly, we are at a very challenging period in our relations, but as we have said before, the issue in the West Philippine Sea does not constitute the sum total of our relations with China. While we are working to strengthen other areas of the bilateral relations, we will not hesitate to speak out to protect our legitimate national interests.

In ASEAN, we have also successfully managed bilateral differences using these principles and we remain on track towards the goal of building an ASEAN Community in 2015.

The events that transpired in Cambodia during the Ministerial Meetings in July were described by some as a success for those who want to break ASEAN solidarity. We would like to view these events as tests to ASEAN unity, and believe that by intensifying dialogue, we can learn from these experiences and come out stronger. After all, as President Aquino said in remarks he delivered to the diplomatic corps in the Philippines earlier this year, in a world where the challenges of today may compel nations to look inwards, there is need for the community of nations to work together in amity and in peace. [\[2\]](#)

Nonetheless, the West Philippine Sea remains focus of concern for the Philippines, for the region and for international community. The WPS is naturally a core national interest of the Philippines. As we have maintained many times before, a rules-based approach is the only legitimate and viable way to address the WPS issue.



To implement a rules-based approach, the Philippines has formulated a comprehensive foreign policy approach which is composed of three tracks: the political, the diplomatic and the legal.

For the political track, our objective is to transform the area into a Zone of Peace, Freedom, Friendship and Cooperation (ZoPFF/C). We want to establish an actionable framework to define, clarify, and segregate, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the disputed and non-disputed areas of the West Philippine Sea. This would pave the way for feasible cooperation between ASEAN and China in the medium-term.

For the diplomatic track, we continue to keep channels of discussions with China open. Last month, we travelled to Beijing where we had the occasion to meet with my counterpart, Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi. This shows that high-level contact is being maintained.

For the legal track, we continue to study and evaluate the possible availment of the dispute settlement mechanisms under UNCLOS.

Given the many interests involved, furthermore, the Philippines maintains the utility of submitting maritime disputes in the region, including the WPS, to multilateral discussions in appropriate fora, in accordance with international law, specifically UNCLOS. These parameters have the full support of many countries including the United States, Australia, Japan, the European Union, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, and our various ASEAN neighbors.

Finally, because the region's maritime disputes can have global implications, we also feel it is important for the broader public to understand what is happening. Public discussions, such as what we are having today, are important for this purpose.

But let me make it clear: our foreign policy does not seek to isolate one country, nor even force the resolution of a dispute. Our core interest lies in being able to contribute to ensuring that the global security and economic system is based firmly on the rule of law. We are firmly committed to helping build an international system that will be just and fair to all states, regardless of economic size or power.

We have no doubt that this perspective has broad support in the United States. As a naval power, a maritime nation and a global business center, the United States has a vested interest in the long-term peace and stability of the region.

We welcome recent US statements on the South China Sea. America's counsel is always valued, especially if it helps calm the situation, just as America's presence is important to maintain the regional balance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us not be prisoners of the old history of conflict in our region. With clear vision and firm resolve, we can imbibe the spirit of a new age of dialogue and cooperation to contain and resolve our differences. The countries of the region and the United States all have the same interest in our region's continued growth and prosperity, which must be protected from uncertainties and instability.

In that noble endeavor, we are happy to note that the Philippines and the United States can build on their long-standing record of friendship and make new contributions for the common interest of peace and security for all in our region.

Thank you very much.

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[\[1\]](#) Ernest Bower and Prashanth Parameswaran, "President Aquino's US Visit will Cap Revitalization of Alliance", *CSIS Critical Questions*, 4 June 2012

[\[2\]](#) President Benigno S. Aquino, remarks at the Vin D'honneur, 12 June 2012