

CLOSING REMARKS

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SEMINAR ON THE
UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE LAW OF THE SEA (UNCLOS)

The Honourable Co-Chair,

Our distinguished speakers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

After two days of highly informative and enlightening presentations from our distinguished speakers and after productive exchanges of views from the participants, we have now come to the concluding part of the ARF Seminar on UNCLOS. Although admittedly we had limited time considering the vast areas that we attempted to cover, these two days nonetheless afforded us an excellent opportunity to share our views and learn from each other on the various concepts under UNCLOS.

As we revisited UNCLOS, I am convinced that our discussions tremendously helped enhance the participants' understanding of the key provisions of the Convention, and thus make us better appreciate its potential benefits for regional maritime security.

Needless to mention, several issues concerning the topics in the Seminar are multi-dimensional and even very complex. Perhaps, this may explain why our approach in this Seminar has been likewise multifaceted.

In this Seminar, we attempted to have a common understanding of the key provisions of the Convention. At the same time, we encouraged ARF participants to share their own national perspectives on the interpretation of significant UNCLOS provisions, which in several cases vary from each other.

It might also be worth sharing with you that the process towards the realization of the Seminar itself was not without complexities and challenges.

Firstly, on the dates of the Seminar, many of you might have been aware that we were supposed to hold the Seminar back in February. However, we had to postpone it for a month to ensure the participation of the speakers that we fortunately have now.

Secondly, the co-Chairs and the organizers had to go through several meetings to determine the Seminar's format, and the topics to be included in the agenda and other related issues.

From the drafting of the agenda, to the selection of topics to be included, to finalizing the list of speakers, our journey towards the realization of this Seminar had not been easy.

We can say the same in our quest towards a common language and a common understanding of UNCLOS. So many issues confront us in our efforts to promote maritime security based on the provisions of UNCLOS. Many of these issues have even persisted for decades. I need not cite any particular issue. But we could probably all agree that the interpretation and implementation of UNCLOS have ample room for improvement.

This is the very reason why we are all gathered here in this Seminar. To make every effort and take every step that we can towards a better understanding of a very important Convention for all of us.

As I mentioned in my Opening Remarks, we “envision this Seminar to be the first in a series of steps by which we will discuss the Convention towards the end of embracing its noble principles to develop our individual and collective security. We hope that these series of discussions will gradually move towards the formulation of concrete and practicable regional efforts and cooperation to enhance maritime security in the region.”

Speaking about the present challenges and issues concerning UNCLOS, if I may invite your attention to the wallpaper projected in the screens...You may

notice that it is not entirely the brightest setting for a sea or an ocean, with overcast clouds, seemingly reminding us of the dangers surrounding our seas.

With this wallpaper, we wish to project to you the reality of our maritime security situation. It's far from ideal or perfect, and confronted by a wide range of security threats and issues, from the traditional to non-traditional ones.

Yet, you may also see in the wallpaper, the sky above and the horizon, which provides the prospects of light and brightness. This, Ladies and Gentlemen, may symbolize the very source of our optimism and conviction that with our sustained cooperation and enhanced coordination, our future will indeed be very bright.

Indeed, it is such a privilege for me to have this opportunity to sit as co-Chair for the Philippines, together with my honourable co-Chair from Australia, Mr. Richard Rowe.

Once again, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, I wish to express my appreciation to our 10 distinguished speakers who all shared with us valuable information and insights.

I would like to convey the profound appreciation of the Philippines to all ARF participants and the ASEAN Secretariat for attending and participating in this seminar.

May you enjoy the rest of your stay in the Philippines.

Thank you and Mabuhay.