

## **Uphold the legacy of the 2016 arbitral victory!**

*Statement by the Stratbase ADR Institute*

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As we have seen today, the rising tensions in the West Philippines Sea have become more than just an issue of conflicting territorial claims. The security challenges brought by China's aggressive behavior in the region will seriously impact the future of the Philippines and other states in the Indo-Pacific. This also poses a challenge to the relevance of multilateralism and strategic partnerships.

The illegal presence of Chinese maritime vessels in our waters is a reflection of China's expansionist agenda and lack of respect for international law. The inaction of the Duterte administration on these issues has affected not only our country's strategic interests and marine environment but also the livelihood and security of our fishermen.

On the fifth anniversary of the 2016 arbitral ruling, the Philippines should be reminded of its commitment to the preservation of a rules-based international order, especially in conducting its affairs in the West Philippine Sea. As the country struggles to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Philippine government must not falter in asserting its national sovereignty and territorial integrity over the West Philippine Sea.

We have every right to exercise our sovereignty over these waters. We have the right to patrol, protect, and harness our resources, pursuant to international law. We should never tolerate any illegal incursions in Philippine maritime zones. We must protect our Exclusive Economic Zone's marine resources from the wanton exploitation and destruction by invading Chinese poachers.

Our legal victory against China is further reinforced by the recognition of the international community and like-minded states, including the United States, Japan, Australia, and India. The Stratbase ADR Institute believes that our cooperation with these states will ensure peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

In line with this, we must not allow China's blatant disregard of the UNCLOS and the rule of law. The Filipino people deserve a government that prioritizes the security and welfare of its citizens before others. We must unceasingly uphold the legacy of the 2016 arbitral ruling and our leaders should step up and create a unified action to defend the West Philippine Sea!

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