

Closing Statement

Stratbase ADR Institute

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ALBERT DEL ROSARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STRATEGIC & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES



DEFEND OUR RIGHTS IN THE WEST PHILIPPINE SEA

Stratbase ADR Institute

The Philippine government, under the leadership of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., is expected to deal with multifaceted and complex challenges brought by power shifts and heightened geopolitical risks in the Indo-Pacific. His call for “unity” and policy pronouncements will be tested against actual circumstances, especially on critical issues such as the territorial and maritime disputes in the West Philippine Sea.

The 2016 Arbitral Ruling has continued to play a pivotal role in shaping the country’s foreign policy– it has defined what is ours as it legitimized and validated our claims in the disputed waters. Under a rules-based international system, the Permanent Court of Arbitration has legally transformed our maritime claims into territorial rights.

With the ruling in our favor, the Philippines has every right to exercise sovereignty over its maritime territory. Our maritime vessels have the right to patrol our waters without being threatened. Our scientists have the right to conduct research without being closely observed. Our fishermen have the right to fish safely and earn a living without fear. When this right is taken away from us, we cannot do our duty to protect our territory.



President Marcos Jr. and his administration should learn from the lessons of the past administration and listen to the voice of the Filipino people. In the Pulse Asia survey commissioned by the Stratbase Albert Del Rosario Institute last June 24 to 27, 2022, 89% of Filipinos believe that President Marcos Jr. must assert the country's rights in the West Philippine Sea as stipulated in the 2016 Arbitral Ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration. In asserting these rights, 90% agree that the new administration must invest in the capability of the Philippine Navy and the Philippine Coast Guard to protect the country's territory and marine resources within its EEZ. Likewise, public opinion on alliances also remains high at 84% agreeing that President Marcos Jr should form alliances with other countries to defend Philippine territorial rights in the West Philippine Sea.

On the sixth anniversary of the Arbitral Ruling, the legal victory of the Philippines is further reinforced by the support and acknowledgment of the international community, including the United States, Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. The Philippines recognizes the efforts made by its partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific to promote a peaceful and stable region for all. Indeed, fostering multilateral and inclusive cooperation through alliances and strategic partnerships is the most viable solution to maintaining a rules-based international order.



Together, we face a new age of uncertainty, particularly in the maritime domain. It is only through the realization that maritime security is a collective responsibility that we can effectively address the present and emerging threats in the region. With our collective will and effort, we must not allow any blatant disregard of the United Nations Convention of the Law on the Sea (UNCLOS) or the rule of law by any state.

The Philippines is at a turning point in its foreign policy, and the Filipinos expect nothing less from President Marcos Jr. and his administration. The public deserves a pro-Filipino foreign policy that will allow the country to advance its strategic interests, address issues in the West Philippine Sea, and become a more significant player in regional and global affairs.