

**Remarks by
HON. ENRIQUE A. MANALO
Secretary of Foreign Affairs
“The Philippines-Japan Strategic Partnership and the Rules-Based Order”**

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Dr. Narushige Michishita, Member of the Board of Trustees, Vice President, and Director of GRIPS Global Leadership Development Program;

Excellencies and colleagues from the diplomatic corps;

Dr. Yusuke Takagi; Associate Professor, Director of GRIPS Maritime Safety and Security Policy Program, and moderator of today’s program;

Friends, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning to you all.

At the outset, I wish to thank the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies for its kind invitation to speak before this distinguished group this morning.

I will begin my remarks with a brief overview of the Philippines-Japan relationship and situating it within the post-1945 rules-based order and the evolving security and economic environment in the Indo-Pacific region. I will then elaborate on the Philippine interests in the rules-based order and discuss how the Philippines and Japan can work together to advance our ties as we pursue a peaceful, stable, and prosperous future for our peoples and the region.

Overview of bilateral relations

The Philippines’ bilateral relationship with Japan spans more than six and a half decades. It is a journey of reconciliation, friendship, cooperation, and mutual respect. From the ashes of war, we have forged a comprehensive and vibrant Strategic Partnership. Japan’s support for the Philippines’ post-war reconstruction and development has played a vital role in shaping our nation’s progress until this very day, as Japan remains a major partner of the Philippines in key sectors, such as infrastructure development, renewable energy, humanitarian assistance and disaster response, education and human resource development, and public health and agricultural system enhancement.

Our latest government data puts Japan as the top source of foreign direct investments in the Philippines in the first 60 days of 2023. Most recently, Japan was one of the first

countries that immediately lent assistance in managing the oil spill in the Philippine island of Mindoro that impacted the livelihood and safety of nearly fifty thousand people in more than 70 coastal communities.

In the words of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. upon embarking on his official visit to Japan last February, he said and I quote “Japan is a close neighbor, like-minded and future-oriented like us in many ways, and a most reliable partner in times of both crises and of prosperity.” [end quote]

Our relationship stands on powerful values. Bound by the common experience of recovery and rebuilding in the post-war period, both the Philippines and Japan hold an unshakeable faith in democracy, peace, and human rights. We both uphold the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter. And together, we champion the cause of fairness and justice, promote the rule of law, advocate for inclusive and sustainable development, and work towards global peace and security.

Current times present the Indo Pacific with challenges ranging from the existential threat of climate change and the impact on our societies of disruptive advances in science and technology, to the more persistent social and economic inequalities.

Among the bigger tests we face are developments challenging the rules-based order that has underpinned peace and prosperity for our region for the last seven decades.

Asia, especially Southeast Asia, is not a stranger to great power competition, as it has been a frontline ever since the Cold War. Contemporary rivalries are causing tensions and putting multilateralism under pressure. Even as technological advances make our lives easier, their dual use has introduced new risks and uncertainties, and we are dealing with new forms of warfare, a phenomenon which Japan’s National Security Strategy has recognized.

As transformation is inevitable, the rules-based order must be recognized as a touchstone for stability.

Philippine interests in a rules-based order

Ladies and gentlemen,

At this point, I wish to share my perspective on the importance of a rules-based global order to the Philippines and our intention of working closely with Japan and other partners whether bilaterally, regionally, and in multilateral fora. In this regard, I will highlight three key points:

Firstly, the rule of law ensures equity in the global commons. As an archipelagic nation with an extensive coastline of 36,289 kilometers or 22,548 miles), the Philippines recognizes the significance of equitable rules in governing our maritime domain. We take pride in our active involvement in the negotiations for the 1982 UNCLOS, the Convention

on Biological Diversity, and the future Treaty on the High Seas, through which we demonstrate our commitment to promoting fair and inclusive governance of the maritime commons.

Furthermore, the Philippines aims to become a space-capable and space-faring country by 2030, as evidenced by the establishment of the Philippine Space Agency—the first in Southeast Asia—in 2019. We recognize the growing importance of space-based technologies in various aspects of modern society, including climate change and disaster risk resilience. To realize our national goals, we require democratic access to these technologies, a level playing field, and an inclusive and predictable governance regime in both the maritime and outer space domains.

Secondly, the Philippines is on the cusp of attaining upper middle-income country status and is projected to become the 16th largest economy in the world by 2040. The strength of the Philippine economy lies in our robust economic fundamentals and a demographic sweet spot. Our primary agenda is to uplift the quality of life of all Filipinos, particularly the marginalized, and securing a peaceful and stable regional environment is paramount to this objective.

Thirdly, multilateralism must thrive as a unifying force and a platform for inclusion and empowerment of nations and their citizens. A rules-based global order forms the foundation for the kind of multilateralism that overcomes differences among actors, facilitates global action in response to challenges such as public health emergencies, humanitarian crises, and climate change, and addresses emerging risks and threats that jeopardize us collectively.

For as long as there is no credible alternative to the United Nations and multilateral institutions, we must persevere in making these institutions work. The Philippines has consistently endeavored to make multilateralism more constructive, inclusive, and equitable. Recognizing diversity of perspectives, we advocate for the engagement of a broader array of actors, allowing for a greater sense of ownership and resilience.

Let me recall how President Marcos enunciated this view succinctly in New York last year, where he said before the UN General Assembly, that (and I quote) “an open, inclusive and rules-based international order that is governed by international law and informed by the principles of equity and justice is an important ballast that stabilizes our common vessel amidst changing global tides.” (End of quote).

The Philippines has played a bridging and moderating role in many multilateral settings where polarities threaten consensus. We will continue to play this role, as it aligns with our overarching objective of fostering international cooperation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

During the visit of President Marcos to Japan, he and Prime Minister Kishida Fumio committed to “working towards a transformative and forward-looking partnership that will keep responding to contemporary needs and scoring practical successes.”

Such a partnership implies a shared vision, and necessitates a far-seeing approach. This entails refocusing traditional cooperation and fostering novel avenues of collaboration.

Amidst the changes we are seeing now and the immediate challenges before us, both the Philippines and Japan maintain a clear-eyed vision of a peaceful, stable, and prosperous world.

This clarity gathers the Philippines and Japan, within the ambit of our Strategic Partnership, around advocating for the rights of all nations, big and small; promoting the peaceful settlement of disputes; fostering dialogue and cooperation on non-proliferation and disarmament; and ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Preserving the rules-based order requires concerted efforts on multiple fronts. It means strengthening international institutions to effectively address emerging challenges. It means reforming these institutions to reflect the evolving geopolitical landscape and ensure their continued relevance for global governance. It means fashioning a more inclusive and representative international order that promotes collaboration and respects the sovereignty of all nations. It means harnessing the power of bridge-builders and middle voices in regional and global fora to find common ground, and therefore, build mutual trust and find solutions.

The evolving complexities in the security challenges confronting the Indo-Pacific behoove us to invest all the more in dialogue and diplomacy. Through ASEAN-led mechanisms like the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit, the Philippines and Japan actively contribute to the promotion of regional peace and security. We also engage vitally within the multi-faceted Dialogue Relations between ASEAN and Japan.

Directions of the Strategic Partnership

Our recent engagements, including the meetings between President Marcos and Prime Minister Kishida last September in the UN and in February here in Tokyo, as well as the exchange of visits by Japanese Ministers and Filipino parliamentarians last month accelerated the highly-positive trajectory of our relationship. Our economic partnership provides the basis for pursuing new domains of cooperation that will bring more meaningful dividends to our societies.

And we are on the path already: as we advance cooperation in infrastructure, green energy, making institutions capable and our communities connected, resilient, and confident about the future.

We have never been more convinced as now that our stronger security cooperation will allow our peoples to live in greater peace. We are driven by the same faith in rules and

commitment to multilateralism. For example, our cooperation in the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative, or NPDI, arising from our shared aversion to nuclear weapons, is more salient now that nuclear proliferation looms large in the horizon.

Yesterday, I attended an informal meeting where nuclear risks were discussed. The Philippines is working with Japan on this subject in regional and global fora.

In this context, our bilateral ties in the coming years will be acquiring stronger contours across the many sectors including in the following areas, in tune with our respective priorities:

- (1) economic security and resilience through cooperation in critical infrastructure, advanced technologies, and climate-smart, sustainable and inclusive growth;
- (2) more robust people-to-people connections;
- (3) a stronger focus on humanitarian assistance and disaster response as well as marine environmental protection, maritime domain awareness and maritime law enforcement, to implement the 1982 UNCLOS, and,
- (4) new workstreams in cyber-cooperation including connectivity and cyber-security, and, space cooperation, including space domain awareness.

Let me emphasize that maritime cooperation will always be a key feature of Philippines-Japan ties. Being island states binds us in the common objective of keeping the seas of the Indo Pacific safe, secure and peaceful.

The Philippines has consistently emphasized its commitment to maintaining the West Philippine Sea/South China Sea as a region of peace and stability. We recognize not only the strategic significance of the West Philippine Sea/South China Sea: the sea is the lifeblood to millions of Filipinos. As a nation situated in the heart of this seascape, the Philippines understands that protecting its rights in its Exclusive Economic Zone or EEZ and ensuring unimpeded access is vital for safeguarding the livelihoods of our fisherfolk and preserving the marine resources for future generations.

The President has unequivocally stated the country's commitment to upholding sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction in the West Philippine Sea, and it will continue to pursue peaceful and legal means in order to assert these rights.

The 2016 Arbitral Award on the South China Sea and UNCLOS provide a solid foundation for the peaceful resolution of disputes and the establishment of a regime in the South China Sea that promotes cooperation among all parties involved.

To achieve a peaceful and UNCLOS-based regime, sincere dialogue among all claimants is crucial, both bilaterally and through discussions between ASEAN and China on a code of conduct. The Philippines advocates for an effective and substantive code of conduct

that adheres to UNCLOS and takes into account the interests of all stakeholders, even extending beyond ASEAN and China.

To realize these objectives, all parties involved must demonstrate utmost commitment to engaging in dialogue and diplomacy as the primary means of addressing disputes and finding mutually acceptable solutions.

Nevertheless, repeated infringements on our sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction, and other destabilizing actions that go against international law, the 1982 UNCLOS, as well as the spirit and letter of the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, also necessitate the enhancement of our defense capabilities.

Concluding remarks

As I conclude my remarks this morning, let me underline that we need to continue to ensure that the regional security architecture maintains trust and confidence among parties, amidst the US-China rivalry and other geopolitical pressures. This regional architecture must empower diplomacy and the rule of law to prevail over any influence engaging in coercion, intimidation, the use and threat of use of force in violation of the UN Charter.

The Philippines and Japan share a commonality which no other nation in Asia possesses, with the exception of South Korea – our treaty alliance with the United States, our historic and important relationship with America stands alongside our huge economic relationship with China. Hence, our two nations must continue to engage both China and the United States constructively, and support calls for Beijing and Washington to responsibly manage their strategic rivalry.

Whilst every now and then, current and future challenges and transformations may make it seem that the relationship is treading on unfamiliar ground, the Philippines and Japan can always draw on the strength of our enduring values underpinning our Strategic partnership, and thus, chart a solid course towards mutual benefit, peace, and prosperity for our peoples in the years and decades to come.

Thank you.