

Remarks by Amb. Dang Dinh Quy, President of the Diplomatic Academy of Viet Nam, at the 7th South China Sea International Workshop “Cooperation for Regional Security and Development”

Vung Tau, 23-24 November 2015

Mr. Nguyen Hong Linh, Secretary of the Ba Ria-Vung Tau Party Committee,

Distinguished Guests,

Colleagues and Friends,

On behalf of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, the Vietnam Lawyers Association and the Foundation for East Sea Studies, I'd like to extend our warmest welcome to you all, especially to our friends and colleagues from all over Viet Nam and all over the world who have sent in their research findings and got ready to engage in in-depth discussions on some of the topics most important to this region today and tomorrow. I hope you will have two productive days here, and I hope you will also have time to explore the charm and beauty of Vung Tau City, one of the best tourist and vacation destinations in Viet Nam. And, in pursuit of common interests, I hope this Conference will bear fruit for all of us.

Distinguished Guests,

A year has passed since our sixth South China Sea International Conference was convened in Da Nang. The South China Sea in 2015 has apparently not experienced heavy storms, but dangerous undercurrents have still swirled beneath its surface, threatening to imperil the lifelines of international trade, jeopardize the lives and livelihoods of millions of fishermen who have trawled many traditional fishing grounds in the South China Sea for thousands of years, and disturb the stability, security and development of the entire region.

Some have argued that the South China Sea for the most part has remained peaceful and stable, and that navigational freedom and maritime security in this body of water have stayed unaffected. And yet there have also been growing concerns about recent developments in the region, about actions and behaviors of the relevant parties that are deemed contributing to further eroding trust, complicating the situation and aggravating threats to the peace, security, stability and development in the South China Sea.

While those two viewpoints persist, the South China Sea status quo is undergoing rapid changes. The balance of power between those directly involved in the South

China Sea is changing rapidly. The scope of presence and frequency of activities of all the parties concerned in the region are changing rapidly. And the scale of actual occupation by the respective claimants in the Paracels and Spratlys is changing rapidly.

Over the year we have witnessed greater efforts by the claimant states, by ASEAN and by all other South China Sea stakeholders to improve the contours of the regional security landscape. ASEAN and China have carried on discussions on the implementation of the DOC and establishment of a COC in the South China Sea; several regional and international organizations, fora and groupings such as ASEAN, ARF, EAS, ADMM, ASEM, G7... have continued to voice their recognition of the importance of ensuring maritime security and freedoms of navigation and overflight in the region and call on the concerned parties to exercise restraint, to refrain from committing acts that could further complicate the situation and alter the status quo, and to resolve disputes by peaceful means.

Over the year we have also witnessed enormous efforts by the regional and international scholar community who have closely followed the developments in the South China Sea, provided timely assessments of the policies and actions of the concerned parties and offered numerous recommendations for regional governments to consider. The essence of those recommendations has been for the parties concerned to consider placing their national interests within the broader context of common regional and global goods and acting more responsibly in the South China Sea so as to protect their own interests and maintain their international image and standing.

All those efforts have led to greater awareness of the South China Sea situation in the international and regional community and encouraged those involved in the decision-making process of the parties concerned to think more carefully and thoroughly before deciding on a course of action in the South China Sea. They have made the South China Sea a “litmus test” on the credibility and commitment of many countries to the enhancement of peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

And yet what is worrisome is that the South China Sea situation is becoming more and more complex and the likelihood of the South China Sea devolving into a regional, if not global, hotspot is ever-increasing. Does that mean our efforts are not strong enough – not up to the level required by the changing situation on the ground – and that we have not arrived at effective measures to stem the recurrence of hapless events?

Distinguished Guests,

In an ever-globalized world, the importance of the South China Sea to the security and development not just for this region but also for the world will only grow with time. In an ever-globalized world, the interests and destinies of states and nations as members of the international community are already increasingly linked to each other. And in an ever-increasing world wherein states all look to advance their own interests with or without full awareness of the linkages between those respective interests, international law and norms should play an ever important role in guiding the pursuit of those interests.

Perhaps dreams of a truly peaceful and stable South China Sea where disputes are resolved justly on the basis of international law and where development opportunities flourish might still be far over the horizon. It might probably takes several decades more for them to materialize. Which means our foremost objective now is to manage conflicts and preserve peace and stability in the South China Sea so that every regional stakeholder has a chance to grow and prosper.

Such a stability can only be maintained if all the parties concerned, in pursuit of their own interests, consider and respect the interests of others, if they all conduct themselves in accordance with the principles enshrined in international law and norms that have been recognized and accepted by the majority of nations in the international community.

Distinguished Guest,

With all this in mind, I hope our Conference this year will build on the success of our six previous conferences in both spirit and outcome: On the basis of candor, cooperation and constructiveness, let each and every one of us put ourselves in the others' shoes to understand and sympathize with each other. And, on the basis of mutual empathy and scientific objectivity, let us discuss and together work out new policy recommendations of high practical value for all the parties concerned in the South China Sea. This discussion will undoubtedly benefit not only from the erudition of our dedicated scholars but also from the insights of those directly involved in decision-making, and I encourage all government officials present here to contribute their voice so that our Conference will be a more useful venue for South China Sea dialogue.

I'd like to also note that, besides similar contents as in the previous conferences, our Conference this year has two new features: one is the addition of a session on assessing the impacts of global events on the South China Sea situation, and the other is the arrangement of a simulation exercise on possible scenarios in the South China Sea and responses from the concerned parties. The mode of discussion will also change a little bit: In addition to discussions between the speakers of each

session with other scholars and participants in the crowd, each session's speakers are encouraged to engage in discussions and debates among themselves. Last but not least, from this Conference onward, we also invite young scholars – “young leaders” of our time – to participate in our conference series so as to help develop a next generation of scholars that are committed to dedicating their research to and seeking practical policy recommendations for the South China Sea issues.

Distinguished Guest,

Let me once again thank you for your time and support for our Conference this year and hopefully further beyond. My sincerest thanks go to all the participants here: scholars, friends, colleagues, news journalists, and especially the Secretary of the Ba Ria-Vung Tau Party Committee for allowing us to organize our Conference in this beautiful city.

On behalf of the organizers, I am now declaring open our Conference, and please welcome Mr. Nguyen Hong Linh, Secretary of the Ba Ria-Vung Tau Party Committee to give us his remarks./.