



Speaking Notes for

Notes d'allocution de

The Honourable Harjit S. Sajjan

Minister of National Defence

Ministre de la Défense nationale

12th Annual Conference on the South China Sea: Welcome Dinner Keynote

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Good evening everyone.

I'm pleased to join you for this dinner, even if only virtually.

Though it is morning here in Ottawa, it's important for us to come together in a spirit of friendship, cooperation and partnership, no matter the hour.

The global pandemic has added a new layer of complexity to an already challenging global environment.

It is why this year underscores the need for us to collaborate to keep our nations safe and secure, while protecting human rights around the world.

And though we are focused on helping our people make it through the pandemic and other security challenges, we cannot ignore climate change, which is contributing to more extreme weather events and natural disasters.

No nation or people are immune from this destructive force, and I want to offer my sincere condolences to the people of Vietnam, who've lost loved ones as a result of the worst typhoon season in decades.

We mourn with you the tragic loss of Vietnamese civilians and military personnel in the resulting landslides.

And Typhoon Vamco bears down, I want to extend my condolences to our Filipino friends for the loss of life they have experienced, and hope for the safety of those impacted in Vietnam.

In situations like these, Canada will always help our friends in need. We know that today's challenges demand an unprecedented level of international cooperation and unity.

That is why Canada is committed to working with our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific.

It's my honour to be here with so many distinguished guests and friends from our partners and allies in the region, including:

- Doctor Pham Lan *Dzung* [FAH' LAn dzoong] ; and
- His Excellency, Ambassador Giorgio Aliberti [AL-i-BER-tee].

I want to thank the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam,

The Vietnam Lawyers' Association,

And the Foundation for East Sea Studies

For organizing this important annual conference...

And for inviting me to speak with you tonight about the importance of the Indo-Pacific, not only to Canada but to global peace and security.

As a Pacific nation, Canada has played an active role in the Indo-Pacific region.

Whether by addressing peace and security issues...

Advancing economic cooperation...

Or assisting with humanitarian and development efforts...

Canada has been committed to strengthening relationships between our peoples and our nations.

It is why Canada remains deeply committed to forging closer cooperation with ASEAN. It's why we've been a dialogue partner for more than four decades, with Canadian diplomatic representation in all 10 ASEAN member states.

We are also committed to expanding our defence representation. And so this month, we officially opened our new Defence Attaché office in Vietnam.

And as we grow our defence ties, Canadian trade and investment in the region is rapidly growing, across multiple sectors — in areas like aviation, telecommunications, and agri-food, to name a few.

This mutually beneficial trade generates billions of dollars each year for ASEAN countries and Canada alike.

And we remain ready and eager to expand our role and deepen our relationship with ASEAN and its member nations.

ASEAN is a testament to cooperation and mutual respect between nations in the region...

Its strong multilateral architecture creates a whole that is far greater than the sum of its parts.

All of us here understand that there is significant power in working together to promote global security, stability, and prosperity.

Multilateralism is the framework that affords all of us the fortitude and flexibility to face our common challenges head on.

That's why we stand united with you in upholding and defending the rules-based international order.

All nations must come together to ensure that our global commons remain free and safe, and benefit all of us.

And one of the key pillars of our global framework is international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

For nearly 40 years, UNCLOS has helped us maintain freedom of navigation and other navigational rights, while respecting the rights and jurisdiction of coastal states.

The success of UNCLOS underscores the importance of maintaining and respecting international law.

All of our countries benefit by respecting international law, including as contained in UNCLOS. We call on all nations to comply with the Convention.

As you know, approximately 90% of the world's trade travels by sea — with one third passing through the South China Sea – or the East Sea as it is known in Vietnam.

So of course Canada remains concerned by the tensions associated with territorial and maritime disputes in the region...

Canada opposes unilateral actions that escalate regional tensions, and undermine stability in the South China Sea.

We oppose the threat or use of force...

Large-scale land reclamation...

Building outposts on disputed features and using them for military purposes.

Canada supports lawful commerce, freedom of navigation and freedom of overflight in accordance with international law.

We continue to urge all parties to live up to previous commitments.

Including the commitment to demilitarize disputed features.

And commitments made in the 2002 Declaration of Conduct for the Parties in the South China Sea.

We expect that any future Code of Conduct will be rooted in international law — and that it will not affect the rights of third parties.

We also call on all states to refrain from taking actions that could put at risk the lives and security of fishers in the region.

We will continue to work with close allies to foster dialogue and cooperation, based on mutual respect between nations, because Canada favours a multilateral approach to problem-solving.

Across a range of issues, Canada has demonstrated a strong record of effectively convening nations...

Of bringing them together to discuss difficult challenges ...

And achieving positive results.

That includes addressing defence and security challenges facing the international community and the region.

For example, in 2018, we co-hosted twenty Foreign Ministers and representatives in Vancouver to develop a clear strategy on North Korea and strengthen the sanctions regime.

We believe that a diplomatic solution to instability on the Korean Peninsula is the best way forward.

In the face of aggressive actions, the international community responded with a unified approach.

And as part of this effort, Canada launched Operation NEON.

Currently, approximately 240 Canadian crew members of HMCS WINNIPEG and a [CH-148] Cyclone maritime helicopter are deployed on Operation NEON, monitoring attempts to evade UN Security Council sanctions on North Korea.

They are assisted by a CP-140 Aurora maritime patrol detachment, based out of Japan.

Our personnel are working with our international partners to identify and share information on suspected evasion activities, like ship-to-ship fuel transfers.

We also have military personnel deployed at the United Nations Command, where Canada's Lieutenant General Wayne Eyre recently held the position of Deputy Commander.

As such, Canada has assumed greater leadership and responsibility in the region.

And as Canada's Minister of National Defence, I'm proud of the important collaboration between the Canadian Armed Forces and our regional partners and allies.

Our defence policy – *Strong, Secure, Engaged* – acknowledges the importance of the Indo-Pacific to Canadian security and prosperity. It reinforces Canada's commitment to being a reliable partner in the region, through consistent engagement and strong partnerships with likeminded nations.

We have conducted humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations.

And we have stepped-up our contributions to initiatives that advance peace and security across the region.

Initiatives that promote cooperation, multilateralism and the respect of international law.

Some of those initiatives include the port visits and engagements conducted by the Royal Canadian Navy with allies and partners, as well as transits in the region.

Recently, HMCS WINNIPEG sailed to the East China Sea, through the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.

Canada fully respects and supports international law, including the rights of navigation, and the rights and jurisdiction of coastal states.

Beyond our work with navies around the region, Canada has also been collaborating with partners for decades through training and capacity building programmes.

For example, we provide staff courses, peace support and language training, for countries around the world.

A dozen member states from the Indo-Pacific region are currently participating in our Military Training Cooperation Programme, building more effective militaries and partnerships.

To date, more than 3500 personnel have participated in this programme.

And Canada's Counter-Terrorism Capacity Building Programme provides counter-terrorism training, equipment, and technical assistance to ASEAN members.

For example, we trained over 900 regional law enforcement officers through our partnership with Indonesia and the Philippines. And our capacity building partnership with Malaysia has helped first responders better prepare for terrorist attacks.

Through our training and capacity building programmes, our military personnel have had the opportunity to work with members of allied and partner nations — learning from each other, and developing new skills.

Canada will continue to maintain its defence presence in the region.

We will work with our trusted allies and like-minded partners to uphold the rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific region, including in Southeast Asia, and around the world.

If called upon, we are willing to do more.

We will always look for ways to work together to advance our common interests for peace and security.

We remain eager to share knowledge and learn from our allies and partners in the region — and we welcome new collaborations and ways of working together.

Conferences like this one are so important, because they foster productive dialogue and bring together diverse and valuable perspectives.

And they promote coordinated and multilateral approaches to problem solving.

I wish you well in your upcoming discussions.

I hope they are productive and help unlock solutions to some of our most pressing challenges.

Thank you, and *Bon Appétit!*

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