

**Keynote Speech by H.E. U Thant Kyaw,
Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, at the International
Conference on “Maritime Challenges to ASEAN and Prospects of South China Sea Dispute
Resolution” jointly organized by the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies
(Myanmar ISIS) and the Centre for Asian Strategic Studies-India (CASS-India)
(Yangon, 24 April, 2014)**

His Excellency Commodore Aung Thaw, Deputy Minister of Defence,
His Excellency Mr. Le Luong Minh, Secretary-General, ASEAN,
Mr. A. B. Mahapatra, Director, CASS-India,
Specially invited Guests,
Distinguished Speakers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Happy Myanmar New Year to you all!

It is an honour for me to inaugurate this important International Conference on “Maritime Challenges to ASEAN and Prospects of South China Sea Dispute Resolution.” I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (Myanmar ISIS) and the Centre for Asian Strategic Studies-India (CASS-India), which jointly make this meeting possible.

I would also like to extend my warm welcome to Myanmar to His Excellency Mr. Le Luong Minh, Secretary-General of ASEAN, Mr. A. B. Mahapatra, Director of CASS-India, and distinguished participants from abroad. I wish you all an enjoyable stay in our country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Southeast Asia is one of the world’s most strategic regions and is surrounded by major powers of Asia like Australia, China, India and Japan. Southeast Asia also lies along the world’s most strategic sea lanes. These are vital to countries not only in Asia but also to those of other continents.

Therefore, the maintenance of peace and stability within the region and the maintenance of good relations between the countries of the region are crucial. The same goes for their relations with other countries, near or far. Equally important also is ensuring the smooth flow of sea traffic in the region’s sea lanes.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been doing its utmost to maintain peace and stability and ensure that sea navigation in the region proceeds smoothly. Although, regrettably, some ASEAN Members have longstanding disagreements with China over certain islands in the South China Sea. It is to be hoped that with patience and goodwill on all sides, a solution acceptable and beneficial to all may be found.

ASEAN has been discussing among its members the situation in the South China Sea for many years. ASEAN is committed to the maintenance of peace, stability, and maritime security in the region in accordance with the principles contained in a number of major documents.

These include the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), ASEAN’s Six-Point Principles on the South China Sea. There is also the Joint Statement of the 15th ASEAN-China Summit on the 10th Anniversary of the DOC.

ASEAN also reaffirms the collective commitment under the DOC to ensuring peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). These principles exclude resorting to the threat or use of force, while exercising self-restraint in the activities.

ASEAN looks forward to continued engagement with China in implementing the DOC in full and effective manner. It has tasked Ministers to continue to work actively with China on the way forward for the early conclusion of a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) on the basis of consensus.

The formal consultations between ASEAN and China on the COC have commenced following two major meetings: the 6th ASEAN-China Senior Officials Meeting on the Implementation of the DOC and the 11th ASEAN-China Joint Working Group on the Implementation of the DOC held in Singapore in March 2014. We look forward to intensifying official consultations with China on the development of the COC with a view to its early conclusion.

The COC will serve to enhance peace, stability and prosperity in the region. As part of an “early harvest” package of the COC we also look forward to developing the ideas of establishing hotlines of communication to further enhance trust and confidence. It will moreover enable a rapid and joint response to emergency situations at sea and enhanced cooperation in the area of search and rescue for vessels in distress.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In line with the theme of “Moving Forward in Unity, To a Peaceful and Prosperous Community”, Myanmar has indeed been moving forward in unity together with ASEAN member states not only in the regional affairs, but also in the international arena while discharging her responsibilities as the ASEAN Chair.

Though Myanmar is not the claimant state, we attach great importance to maintaining peace and stability in the South China Sea. We have reaffirmed our commitment to the ASEAN Statement on the Six-Point Principles on the South China Sea.

We have also stress the importance of peaceful settlement of disputes through friendly consultations and negotiations between sovereign states directly involved in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

We appreciate the continued ASEAN-China consultations and dialogue for mutual trust, confidence and cooperation. We are very much satisfied with the developments in the implementation of the DOC and wish to sustain the positive momentum towards the adoption of COC.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the maintenance of international peace and stability, Track Two Diplomacy is well recognized as playing an important role. Parallel to Track One Diplomacy, Track Two Diplomacy also significantly helps prevent disputes from getting worse or escalating into armed conflicts. It may be able to reach ceasefire or peace agreements between disputants. In many cases, Track Two Diplomacy efforts have even achieved what Track One Diplomacy efforts would not have.

Thus, I would like to express my earnest hope that this event, a Track Two Diplomacy exercise, will produce useful recommendations or suggestions which would significantly contribute to resolving the issues of contention in the South China Sea. I wish the meeting all success.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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