

Remarks by Dr. Liangfu Zhang

Closed session: scene setting

(October 16, 2011)

Amb. Roberto R. Romulo, Chairman of CPR Foundation

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentleman,

I would like to thank Amb. Roberto R. Romulo for inviting me to attend the Forum on South China Sea. I wish to congratulate on the opening of this Forum and extend my high regards and appreciation to Carlos P. Romulo Foundation for Peace and the Institute for South East Asian Studies of Singapore.

The South China Sea has been regarded geopolitically, economically and strategically, as one of the most important seas in the world. It has attracted considerable attention within this region and outside. The South China Sea Issue is "hot topic" at many official or non-official discussions .

Please allow me in my own capacity to take this opportunity to

give a brief on latest development on the South China Sea Issue.

First, Leaders of China and Vietnam pledged in Beijing "not to let the maritime problem affect ties between the two countries, two peoples and the peace and stability in the South China Sea.

China and Vietnam signed a six-point agreement on basic principles guiding the settlement of existing maritime issues between the two countries. According to the agreement,

1. China and Vietnam should remain committed to friendly consultations in order to properly handle maritime issues and make the South China Sea a sea of peace, friendship and cooperation.

2. The two countries should seek a basic and long-term approach that will be acceptable for both sides in solving maritime disputes on the basis of legislation and principles enshrined in international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea signed in 1982.

Both sides should fully respect legal principles, take history and other relevant issues into consideration and accommodate each other's concerns in a constructive manner.

3. In the process of negotiating maritime issues, both sides

should abide by the agreements and consensus reached by the countries' senior leaders and implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC).

Both sides should solve maritime disputes through negotiations and friendly consultations, and the two countries should consult with other countries if they are also involved in the disputes.

4. While seeking a basic and long-term approach to resolve maritime issues, both sides should explore interim and temporary solutions, including research and negotiations on the joint development of the sea, without impacting each side's stance and position.

5. Both sides should seek steady progress in negotiations regarding the maritime demarcation of the bay mouth of Beibu Gulf and discuss the joint development of the sea area. Both sides should promote maritime cooperation in less sensitive fields, including marine environmental protection, scientific research, search and rescue, disaster reduction and prevention.

6. Heads of the border negotiation delegations of both countries should hold regular meetings twice a year, which will rotate between both countries. Special meetings will take place if necessary. Both sides agreed to set up a hotline contact mechanism in order to allow

them to promptly communicate and properly deal with maritime issues.

The China-Vietnam agreement reflects the common political willingness of both sides to properly handle and resolve maritime issues, also shows that the two countries have the capability and determination to settle maritime disputes through consultations. The agreement is a positive step in the process of negotiating maritime issues. It will provide important guidelines for the two countries to resolve maritime issues. China will work with Vietnam to earnestly implement the agreement.

Second, Last month, Philippine President Benigno Aquino III paid a state visit to China. During talks, Leaders of two countries exchanged views on the maritime disputes.

Chinese leaders said that China's position and proposition on the South China Sea issue has been consistent and explicit. China has always advocated that the South China Sea disputes should be resolved peacefully through consultation and negotiation between the two countries concerned. Before the disputes are resolved, the countries concerned may put aside the disputes and actively explore forms of common development in the relevant sea areas, which is in

the common interest of relevant countries. China is ready to work with the countries concerned to actively implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and jointly develop the South China Sea into "a sea of peace, friendship and cooperation".

President Aquino III reiterated that the South China Sea issue does not constitute all Philippines-China relations. The issue should not affect the development of bilateral ties and friendly cooperation in various fields. He hoped the issue can be solved at an early date for the benefit of both peoples.

Both leaders agreed to deepen China-Philippines traditional friendship, promote pragmatic cooperation and push bilateral strategic cooperative relations to a new level, and agreed not to let the maritime disputes affect the broader picture of friendship and cooperation between the two countries. The two leaders reiterated their commitment to addressing the disputes through peaceful dialogue, to maintain continued regional peace, security, stability and an environment conducive to economic progress. Both leaders reaffirmed their commitments to respect and abide by the DOC.

### Third, on the implementation of the DOC

On July 21, China and 10 ASEAN countries reached an agreement on the guidelines for implementation of DOC. It send a strong signal to the outside world that countries in the region are fully capable of making sensible responses to challenges they are facing today.

The guidelines will give new impetus to the implementation of the DOC. The parties concerned should focus on conducting practical cooperation within the framework of the DOC.

China has made several proposals for further cooperation, including the convening of a symposium on free navigation in the South China Sea, establishing three special committees covering research and environmental protection, navigational safety and search and rescue operations, and combating transnational crimes at sea.

### Fourth, my conclusion

1, the South China Sea issue is very complicated. Bilateral negotiations are the only way forward. the countries concerned have different claims and interests. Maybe it's not good to argue with each other for a long time. Maybe it's good to stopping arguing with each

other for exploring joint development and cooperation in the South China Sea.

The South China Sea provides huge room for cooperation. China has put forward the policy of "shelving disputes for joint development" which reflects its sincerity and goodwill to resolve maritime disputes with other countries concerned, which needs positive response from the countries concerned.

The countries surrounding the South China Sea have the wisdom and ability to maintain stability in the South China Sea, and to make it "a sea of peace, friendship, and cooperation" .