

# Joint Vision for a 21st Century United States-Philippines Partnership

Media Note

Office of the Spokesperson

November 16, 2021

*On the occasion of the 9th United States-Philippines Bilateral Strategic Dialogue co-hosted by Assistant Secretary of State Daniel J. Kritenbrink and Assistant Secretary of Defense Ely S. Ratner, the United States and the Philippines issued the following statement:*

*Begin text:*

1. The United States and the Philippines reaffirm our commitment to a partnership of sovereign equals. We resolve to uphold and reinforce our special relationship by holding steadfast to our shared democratic values, enhancing our mutual security and defense capabilities, and working together to meet the common challenges that we will face in the future. We resolve to further fortify our mutual trust and respect, ensuring that the relationship remains relevant and mutually beneficial in the face of the changing geopolitical landscape and the emergence of new challenges and opportunities, especially those brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. **A STRONGER PARTNERSHIP**: As we mark the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, the United States and the Philippines pay tribute to a relationship that was forged by a shared history and common values, anchored by our collective commitment to democracy and human rights, tested in both clement and cruel circumstances, and made firm and resilient by the strong and abiding friendship between its peoples. We recognize the important role of our bilateral ties in enhancing the well-being and prosperity of our peoples and in promoting peace, security and stability in the region and beyond. We commit to further deepen, expand and strengthen this relationship through sustained engagement in all fields so that our countries are better equipped to address current geopolitical tensions, exacerbated by the prevailing pandemic, and contribute to regional and global peace and stability. We resolve to review, update and follow up on our

action plans across key areas of cooperation, taking into account both existing and emerging challenges, through regular and sustained high-level visits and dialogue, including the Bilateral Strategic Dialogue, the United States-Philippines Two-Plus-Two Ministerial Dialogue, the Mutual Defense Board-Security Engagement Board (MDB-SEB) and the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) Meetings.

3. **AN ENDURING ALLIANCE**: The Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) signed in 1951, later enhanced by the 1998 Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), remains a key pillar in our bilateral defense and security relations. The Treaty supports regional and global security by enabling our readiness and providing flexibility. Through enhanced reciprocal access and security cooperation, this alliance also facilitates an open, interconnected, resilient, and secure Indo-Pacific region.
4. For the past seventy years, our two nations have worked collaboratively to address complex security challenges across the Indo-Pacific region, consistently demonstrating that we are stronger together. As we celebrate 70 years of the alliance, we reaffirm our treaty commitments, including our MDT Article IV obligations to respond to an armed attack in the Pacific Area on either the United States or the Philippines. The Philippines welcomes the United States position in its July 13, 2020 statement that the Pacific Area includes the South China Sea.
5. Looking ahead, we seek to enhance the posture of our alliance to address new and emerging challenges. We intend to ensure the MDT's continued relevance to addressing current and emerging threats. To strengthen our combined deterrence capabilities, we plan to develop new bilateral defense guidelines that support a mutual understanding of roles, missions, and capabilities within the framework of the alliance. We also intend to enhance bilateral coordination and communication processes to facilitate more effective operationalization of alliance priorities and promote mutual understanding of the provisions of the Treaty. We intend to continue to implement infrastructure projects at current EDCA locations and explore additional sites for further development.
6. We remain intent on enhancing the defense capabilities of the Armed Forces of the Philippines more so given the prevailing geopolitical tensions, especially in the maritime areas of the Philippines, and plan to pursue avenues, including funding arrangements, towards this end, demonstrating our mutual, unshakeable commitment to the alliance,

assuring each other that it is strong as it can be, and will remain so for many decades to come.

7. The United States and the Philippines resolve to sustain defense and security cooperation by conducting regular high-level visits and dialogues. Through these engagements, we intend to promote interoperability of the U.S. and Philippine armed forces. We plan to update bilateral planning documents, establish a coordination center to improve bilateral information sharing and planning, develop joint command and control capability for operations, and complete a bilateral maritime framework to enable more comprehensive and timely execution of activities. We seek to strengthen this cooperation through education and training, capacity-building, interoperability, and modernization of defense and security institutions. We intend to continue to build the capacity of the Philippine security forces, and prioritize concluding a General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in the next year to complement information-sharing and equipment modernization efforts. We seek to ensure that joint activities under the MDB-SEB are of high impact and great value to deepen cooperation in priority areas.

8. **AN INTERNATIONAL LAW-BASED MARITIME ORDER:** The United States and the Philippines seek to further coordinate diplomatic efforts in building an international coalition that supports the international law-based maritime order. We share the view that the People's Republic of China's (PRC) expansive maritime claims in the South China Sea are inconsistent with the international law of the sea as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and with the unanimous July 12, 2016 Award in the South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of Philippines v. The People's Republic of China), a decision that, pursuant to the Convention, is legally binding on the Philippines and the PRC. The United States fully stands by its "Position on Maritime Claims in the South China Sea", released on July 13, 2020. The United States and the Philippines affirm that the PRC cannot lawfully assert a maritime claim – including any Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) claims derived from Scarborough Reef and the Spratly Islands – vis-a-vis the Philippines in areas that the Tribunal found to be in the Philippines' EEZ or on its continental shelf. Additionally, the PRC's harassment of Philippine fisheries and offshore energy development within those areas is unlawful, as are any unilateral PRC actions to exploit those resources. The United States and the Philippines express their support for

compliance with the international law of the sea and are continuing activities and cooperation to exercise and support safety and freedoms of navigation, overflight, and other lawful uses of the sea in the South China Sea and around the world. Towards this end, we decided to launch a Maritime Dialogue in 2022.

9. **REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE:**The United States and the Philippines recognize and uphold the central role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the Indo-Pacific region. We affirm that a strong and unified ASEAN is vital to regional security and prosperity. The United States supports the Philippines' important role within ASEAN and in other international fora that contribute to the peace and security of the Indo-Pacific region and promote the international law-based order. We support efforts to strengthen ASEAN-based institutions, including the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus and the East Asia Summit, to enhance their ability to promote mutual trust and confidence.
10. **EMERGING THREATS AND ABIDING PRINCIPLES:**The United States and the Philippines intend to enhance cooperation in the face of new and emerging threats to both countries' common welfare, including but not limited to diseases, cyber threats, and transnational criminal and terrorist networks. To this end, we commit to maintaining open channels of communication, to discussing the application of the MDT to new and emerging threats, while respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, and tirelessly pursuing our commitment to shared principles of democratic governance. In this regard, we plan to hold regular, candid dialogue and to explore and develop new areas of cooperation to strengthen the protection of human rights and revitalize democracy at home and abroad. The United States supports the recently launched Philippines-UN Joint Program on Human Rights (UNJP), acknowledging that it can be a model of meaningful cooperation on human rights promotion and protection between a sovereign Member State and the UN, and the international community, and that it could strengthen Philippine domestic institutions and support domestic processes through technical cooperation with the UN and other partners.
11. Recognizing our mutual dedication to combating trafficking in persons, the United States and the Philippines commit to strengthening efforts to protect workers' rights in both our countries and around the world. We are working to strengthen our cooperation and collaboration to counter terrorism financing, money laundering, and its

predicate offenses to strike such criminals at the root of their operations: their sources of funding, illegal assets and financial transactions, and thereby maintain the integrity of the global financial system. We also recognize the threat posed by terrorist travel and intend to strengthen cooperation on using national watchlists and other databases to detect and deter terrorist travel. In an environment of evolving violent extremist threats, both sides recognized the need to continue to address the drivers of violent extremism and counter violent extremist ideology.

12. **SHARED PROSPERITY, SHARED**

**PLANET:** The Philippines recognizes and thanks the United States for its leadership role providing vaccines for COVID-19, including as the largest contributor to the COVAX Facility. We are convinced that COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics should be accessible and affordable for all as they are pivotal in the global pandemic recovery.

13. With the pandemic still very much upon us, the United States and the Philippines seek to identify areas for broader engagement in the economic sphere to help pave the way for swift recovery. We acknowledge that a steady and equitable supply of COVID-19 vaccines as well as boosters will be crucial in this regard. The Philippines thus welcomes the United States' support for the Philippines' complementary efforts to develop domestic vaccine, therapeutics, and diagnostics manufacturing capabilities.

14. The United States and the Philippines recognize the existential threat that the climate crisis poses to the world today and the critical need, as affirmed by all Parties to the Paris Agreement at the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, for all countries to act on climate mitigation and adaptation with urgency and ambition in this decisive decade for action. Our two governments intend to take the required steps to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and to ensure that our emission reduction targets reflect this goal. Jointly and in concert with the private sector, we are working to pursue financing of climate-related initiatives and programs to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, including through enhanced (clean) energy cooperation to accelerate renewable energy deployment, phase out high-carbon sources of power and achieve a just and sustainable energy transition.

15. We are also working to support the sustainability of marine resources, such as rehabilitating coastal marine and terrestrial ecosystems, adopting transformative ocean

science solutions, and employing technological innovations for cutting edge monitoring, control and surveillance systems, as well as supporting the long-term sustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture.

16. We intend to continue to address pollution, combat wildlife and timber trafficking, prevent seafood fraud, and secure sustainable financing for the conservation and protection of natural resources with significant support for the growing number of biodiversity-friendly enterprises. We likewise resolve to utilize market-related measures in line with our commitments under the Port State Measures Agreement to ensure that seafood obtained via IUU fishing are denied access to global commerce.
17. Recognizing that science, technology and innovation are crucial drivers of development, the United States and the Philippines plan to pursue the implementation of the 2019 Science and Technology Agreement to advance these initiatives and address emerging challenges.
18. The United States and the Philippines endeavor to accelerate, advance and increase trade and investments, while upholding our mutual non-proliferation obligations and capabilities. We are working to strengthen the resiliency of regional supply chains, in consultation with the private sector where appropriate, and explore bilateral platforms for closer economic engagement.
19. Acutely aware of the strain on our economies and our shared planet that was magnified and exacerbated by COVID-19 and the climate crisis, the United States and the Philippines commit to pursue initiatives that foster the resilience of our infrastructure, peoples, ecosystems and economies, especially in support of pandemic and economic recovery efforts.