



**PHILIPPINE INSTITUTE FOR PEACE, VIOLENCE & TERRORISM RESEARCH**  
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## **SUMMARY OF EVENT**

### **KALAYAAN ISLAND GROUP AND BASELINES CONTROVERSIES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA: FOREIGN POLICY, TERRITORIAL DEFENSE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVES**

To present the current security situation in the Kalayaan Island Group and to examine the foreign policy, defense and local government implications of the New Philippine Baselines Law (RA 9522), the Center for Intelligence and National Security Studies (CINSS) of the PIPVTR in cooperation with Yuchengco Center of De La Salle University and the Center for Archipelagic Maritime Security held a Round Table Discussion, "Kalayaan Island Group and Baselines Controversies in the South China Sea: Foreign Policy, Defense and Local Government Perspectives." This was held on 23 October 2009, 2-5 PM at the Aguinaldo Conference Room, Armed Forces of the Philippines Commissioned Officers Club, Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City.

Atty. Henry Bensurto, Secretary General of the Commission on Maritime and Ocean Affairs Commodore Orwen Cortez, Commander of the Naval Forces West of the Philippine Navy and Mayor Rosendo Mantes of the Kalayaan Municipality spoke on the topic. Ambassador Alberto A. Encomienda, former Secretary General of the Commission on Maritime Affairs, and Dr. Jose Antonio Socrates, Special Adviser to the Mayor of Puerto Princesa on Geological Matters, served as Reactors during the RTD. Former Undersecretary of National Defense, Feliciano Gacis and Former Ambassador Jose Romero, Jr, currently President of the Philippine Council for Foreign Relations, participated in the RTD.

Commodore Cortez was the first presenter. He described the security situation and Philippine territorial defense policy in the ICG. According to Commodore Cortez, compared with other claimants, the Philippines maintains very modest structures in its nine occupied territories demonstrating the Philippines does not have aggressive intent in the disputed waters in the South China Sea. The 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea provided a mechanism for all claimants to settle their disputes peacefully and to encourage claimants to further occupy unoccupied areas. Yet, facilities development in the occupied areas have continued. China, Taiwan, Vietnam and Malaysia have established solid and impressive structures in their occupied areas with new runways and helipads. Commodore Cortez showed some restricted photographic evidences to indicate that compared with other claimants, the Philippines has modest structures. The Philippines maintains a runway in the island of Pag-Asa, Commodore Cortez emphasized that this runway needs a desperate repair. A C-130 plane could no longer land in the runway because the cemented portion of the runway has been overtaken by grasses. Commodore Cortez also lamented that our naval equipment is limited compared with Malaysia, Vietnam and China, which have modern frigates, corvettes and ships.

The second speaker was Mayor Mantes who expressed worries that the size of Pag-Asa Island has been reduced because of erosion. He explained that the Municipality of Kalayaan is composed of nine occupied areas in the South China Sea. Because these areas are far from each other, local governance is very hard to pursue. But the Kalayaan Municipality is implementing the Balik Kalayaan Program to encourage the residents of the Municipality to settle in Pag-Asa, the lone barangay of the town. Mayor Mantes also discussed the Tourism Development Plan of Kalayaan, which is part of the Medium-Term Development Plan of the Municipality. Mayor Mantes also mentioned his plan to declare Lawak Island as bird sanctuary because of the thousands of seagulls living there. Mayor Mantes stressed the need to provide budgetary support to KIG in order to strengthen civilian presence in the area.

The last speaker was Atty Bensurto. During his presentation, Atty. Bensurto justified the need to pass RA 9522 to comply with the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Though RA 9522 declares the Kalayaan Island Group (KIG) as part of the "regimes of islands" of the Republic of the Philippines, , which has generated unease on the part of the Kalayaan Municipality, the new Philippine Baselines Law, according to Bensurto, is less controversial compared to other options. From the perspective of international relations, RA 9522 aims to avoid further controversies with claimants in the Spratlys like China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei. Though China, Taiwan and Vietnam protested the passage of RA 9522, their actions were done on the basis of their national positions. The law is truly mindful of its international implications and it intends to avoid further conflicts with other claimants. However, the law is not prejudice to Philippine foreign policy position in the Spratlys and in the Sabah issue.

After the presentation, Ambassador Encomienda and Dr. Socrates gave their reactions. In his reaction, Ambassador Encomienda emphasized that many studies have been made about the KIG to strengthen Philippine position on the disputed islands. But bureaucratic politics have hindered us to develop a sound policy that will strengthen Philippine position. Dr. Socrates, on the hand, stressed that there are enough geological and scientific evidences to strengthen Philippine ownership of the KIG and the Scarborough Shoal. Dr. Socrates even proposed the declaration of KIG as a national Geo Park because of its geological richness.

The open-forum raised issues on capability of the Philippine Navy to defend our territories in the KIG. Other concerns during the open forum revolved around foreign policy consistency and inter-agency cooperation to protect Philippine stakes in the South China Sea.

The RTD was attended by around 80 participants from different national government agencies, military, academe, non-governmental organizations and private sector.