



“Just a Piece of Paper? The Philippines and Its West Philippine Sea Claim” (Recorded Live)

Summary

Rights Corridor Dialogues’ latest episode (May 23), attempted to tackle the controversial issue on the Philippines’ legal claim on the West Philippine Sea as against China’s “historical claim”. Watch full video

The episode featured Atty. Howard M. Calleja, a well-respected professor of law in various notable law schools in the Philippines and one of the conveners of the recently launched 1sambayan (one nation) a pro-democracy coalition put together by retired Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio, a staunch advocate of the protection and preservation of the West Philippine Sea, who also previously discussed the topic with Rights Corridor Dialogues (*Understanding the West Philippine Sea, Oct. 17, 2020*).

*The virtual discussion with Prof. Calleja was joined by Philippine Consul General in Dubai and the Northern Emirates, Paul Raymund Cortes and some members of OFW Watch Italy, RC Dialogues partner for the episode.

The May 23 episode aims to have a deeper understanding on the domestic and international politics surrounding the West Philippine Sea, after the recent report on the incursions of China in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) has further increased the tension between Philippine government officials and Chinese authorities.

The discussion with Atty. Calleja also attempted to understand Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s policies on the West Philippine Sea and why he refuses to make a strong stance against Chinese incursions.

Overall, RC Dialogues intended to seek probable solutions to the simmering tension between the two Asian countries.

At the onset of the virtual discussion, Prof. Calleja has pointed out Duterte’s weak stance on the Philippines’ claim of the WPS that has become more pronounced after reports of the recent Chinese military incursions in the area.

“In my personal assessment, this has been an issue that has hounded the president from day one since he took office in 2016 because remember from day one he already started his ‘China pivot’ and he was not strong in enforcing the arbitral award. But in these past few months, with the incursions of the Chinese militia, it has been more evident,” Prof. Calleja said.

“The problem with this president is that he makes us think that everything is dependent on China which we feel is not the case,” added Prof. Calleja.

“At this point in time, China is not even the biggest benefactor of the Philippines. Data would show that Japan has given more loans and more aid to the Philippines than China. And we have to remember that Chinese loans, especially the (Belt and Road Initiative) are more onerous to the Filipino people. Not only that it takes away Filipino jobs and gives more preference to Chinese jobs using those loans.”

The professor stressed that “going to war” is not the only solution to resolve the WPS dispute between the Philippines and China.

“We are saying that war is not the answer. The real path is for peaceful settlement of disputes with multilateral efforts; not bilateral only with China,” he said.

“Recently we have seen the US, UK, Italy, France Japan, Australia and EU countries enforcing the right of navigation. So the point is, everybody has recognised this arbitral award. Everybody is pursuing the action to protect the open seas and the right of navigation in the South China Sea and the West Philippine Sea.”

The law professor reiterated that it is incumbent to the Philippines to take the lead and “ask the help of other countries fight our battle”.

Calleja then urged Filipinos if we can mobilise, it is doing the proper massaging; for the people to be educated enough and should no longer fall for empty promises of politicians and jokes (citing Duterte’s jetski joke) and to choose their candidates wisely in the upcoming elections.

He further stressed that the Chinese historical and legal claim of the nine-dash line that goes beyond the our EEZ is without legal and historical basis. Therefore, (China) should not be there.

“It is therefore incumbent for the government to protect this sovereign right not only for this generation and for the next generations to come. It is not the right for a president or for any president to give this right to China, because this right is exclusively reserved for the Filipino people,” he said.

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*Participants:

NAME	TITLE
Paul Raymund Cortes	Philippine Consul General in Dubai and Northern Emirates
Rhoderick Ople	OFW Watch Italy
Dittz Centeno De Jesus	OFW Watch Italy
Nonieta Adena	OFW Watch Italy
Rodel de Chavez	OFW Watch Italy
Baby Brazil	OFW Watch Italy

