

A CALL FOR A SOUTH CHINA SEA TRUTH MOVEMENT

Commencement Speech

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In a world connected by the internet, communications has become a powerful tool in the foreign policy and national security of a state, in particular in disputes between states over territory or maritime space. The global and instantaneous reach of the internet has made communications the decisive weapon in winning the hearts and minds of the peoples of the world to support the cause of a state in international disputes. The Philippines must harness the power of communications through the internet in protecting its sovereign rights in the West Philippine Sea.

In the arbitration at The Hague on the West Philippine Sea, the tribunal ruled that based on the historical evidence presented by the Philippines, China never had historic rights to the South China Sea. The tribunal held that China's claim of ownership to over 85.7 percent of the waters enclosed by the China's so-called nine-dashed line has no factual or legal basis.

At the proceedings at The Hague, the Philippines submitted China's own ancient maps, official documents, and laws to debunk China's nine-dashed line claim. All this

evidence established beyond any shadow of doubt that China's nine-dashed line claim is a gigantic fraud on the entire human race, an outrageous fraud based on fake history and fake news. I call China's nine-dashed line claim the fake history of the millennium and the fake news of the century.

The legal issue on who has sovereign rights in the West Philippine Sea is now settled with finality. Based on the final ruling of the tribunal, the Philippines owns exclusively all the resources within 200 nautical miles from its coastline facing the West Philippine Sea. All the fish, oil, gas, and mineral resources in this huge maritime space, larger than the total land area of the Philippines, belong exclusively to the Filipino people.

China, however, refuses to comply with the ruling because to do so would de-legitimize the Chinese government in the eyes of the Chinese people. Since 1949 when the communists took over China, the Chinese government has taught every Chinese citizen, from grade school to college, that China owned the South China Sea since 2,000 years ago. Every Chinese General, Admiral, Politburo Member, Diplomat, Government Bureaucrat and every ordinary Chinese citizen sincerely believe today that China owned the South China Sea since 2,000 years ago.

If the Chinese government today complies with the arbitral ruling, the Chinese people will see this as a betrayal of the

sacred territory bequeathed to them by their ancestors through the ages. The Chinese people may even overthrow the Chinese government.

It is clear that before the Chinese government can comply with the arbitral ruling, the Chinese people must first understand and realize that the historical narrative of the nine-dashed line is utterly false, and they should be terribly ashamed before the entire world to insist on the nine-dashed line as basis to seize the Exclusive Economic Zones of Southeast Asian coastal states. We cannot, of course, expect the Chinese government and Chinese officials to admit to the Chinese people that the historical narrative that they have been teaching to the Chinese people for more than half a century is a total falsehood.

It falls then on Filipinos to educate the Chinese people on the true history of the South China Sea – that as authoritatively ruled by the The Hague tribunal there is no historical evidence whatsoever that China owned, possessed or controlled the South China Sea at any time in China's history. This is where your skills, dear graduates, as communications experts are desperately needed by our country.

The lawyers have done their part by gathering and submitting voluminous evidence, and securing a final ruling, that China has no historic rights to the South China Sea. The voluminous evidence and pleadings can be

downloaded for free from the website of the Permanent Court of Arbitration. My ebook on the South China Sea dispute, which discusses the dispute from A to Z, can also be downloaded for free from the website of the Institute of Maritime and Ocean Affairs, which also contains many other materials on the South China Sea dispute.

It is now the task of Filipino communications experts like you to fashion all these evidence and documents into an easily understandable format for dissemination, through the internet, to the peoples of the world, especially to the Chinese people. This task is obviously beyond the pay grade of lawyers. This task is tailor-made for communications experts like you. This is your moment in history to serve our country to the best of your ability. This is where you will take over from the legal work of lawyers to bring to the next level in an information campaign our epic national endeavor to protect our Exclusive Economic Zone in the West Philippine Sea.

In the late 1800s our forebears launched the Propaganda Movement under Marcelo H. Del Pilar as an information campaign to win the support of Spaniards in Spain to institute reforms in the Philippines. The modern day equivalent of the Propaganda Movement is the information campaign to win the support of the peoples of the world, and to convince the people of China, of the true history of the South China Sea.

This true history is clear, obvious and simple: China never owned the South China Sea in the past, and there are high seas in the South China Sea that belong to all mankind, as there are Exclusive Economic Zones in the South China Sea that belong solely to the adjacent coastal states.

We can call this present-day information campaign the *South China Sea Truth Movement*, a people's movement using freedom of expression to explain the historical truth about the South China Sea. We can invite the peoples of Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei, countries whose Exclusive Economic Zones are also encroached by China's nine-dashed line, to join us in this Movement.

Like all the other peoples of the world, the Chinese people are inherently good people. They have, however, been taught by their government only one historical narrative that happens to be totally false. I am sure that once informed of the true history of the South China Sea, and confronted with their own historical maps and official records, the Chinese people will accept the truth about the South China Sea.

We are aware, of course, that there is a Great Firewall of China that prevents the Chinese people from accessing foreign websites banned by the Chinese Government. However, there are 100 million Chinese who travel abroad every year who can access freely the internet while abroad. This is a huge audience that Filipino

communications experts can address. These Chinese tourists will eventually spread the truth about the South China Sea to their compatriots at home. And the truth will set the Chinese people on a reconciliation path with the peoples of the Asean coastal states, and with the peoples of the rest of the world.

In this battle for the hearts and minds of the peoples of the world, and of the Chinese people, Filipino communications experts must work doubly hard. Our democratic principles allow Chinese propagandists and trolls to operate freely in Philippine social media, to comment freely in Philippine online newspapers, and even to take out political advertisements in Philippine print newspapers. These Chinese propagandists and trolls spread with impunity fake history and fake news within our country.

In contrast, Filipinos cannot comment in Chinese social media or Chinese online newspapers and cannot buy political advertisements in Chinese print newspapers. The Philippines is like David, with one arm tied to his back, fighting China the Goliath. That is why Filipino communications experts must work doubly hard in this uneven media battlefield field.

When President Xi Jinping visited Manila in November 2018, he took out full page advertisements to publish his opinion piece in two major Philippine dailies. In his opinion piece, President Xi claimed that Chinese Admiral Zheng He

visited Manila multiple times 600 years ago. That would mean Zheng He arrived in the Philippines more than 100 years before the arrival of Magellan in 1521. We are celebrating two years from now, in 2021, the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Magellan in the Philippines.

In his opinion piece, President Xi pointed out that China and the Philippines have been very close neighbors for centuries, separated only by a narrow body water, since the time of Zheng He. That would mean that China owns the West Philippine Sea, and we are left with just a sliver of water between China's nine-dashed line and our coastlines facing the South China Sea. Unfortunately, no one in the Duterte Administration contradicted President Xi for this blatant distortion of history that gravely undermines our sovereign rights in the West Philippine Sea.

Of course, the historical truth is Zheng He never visited the Philippines. All the Zheng He scholars all over the world, including Chinese Zheng He scholars, are unanimous that Zheng He never even came close to the Philippines. Charts of the maritime route of the seven voyages of Zheng He, published in many scholarly journals, clearly show that Zheng He never came close to Philippine shores. That is an established historical fact that cannot be denied.

We need communications experts like you to expose to the world, and to the Chinese people themselves, the falsity of

the historical claim of the Chinese government to the South China Sea. You can do this, on your own individual private initiative, even without the support of the current Philippine administration, which seems reluctant to expose to the world, and to the Chinese people, the falsity of China's nine-dashed line claim.

Certainly, every Filipino has the inherent right and civic duty to defend Philippine territory and maritime zones, in a peaceful manner through freedom of expression in accordance with the Constitution and international law, even if the current Philippine administration refuses to assert the arbitral ruling.

So, dear graduates, our country and people look forward to your invaluable service in this rare moment in our history when your skills and expertise are most desperately needed by our country. I am sure you will all rise to this historic challenge to disseminate to the peoples of the world, and to the people of China, the historical truth about the South China Sea.

The truth will reconcile the Chinese people with the Filipino people, with the peoples of other Asean coastal states, and with the peoples of the rest of the world. The truth will bring peace and stability to the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific region. The truth will render useless resort to armed force in the resolution of the South China Sea dispute.

More importantly, the truth will secure forever our sovereign rights in the West Philippine Sea, to be enjoyed by generations of Filipinos to come. This will be the ultimate reward for your efforts in taking up this historic challenge to be part of the *South China Sea Truth Movement*.
