

# ROCKS, PAPERS, DRAGONS

MOVING FORWARD IN  
THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

LUIS GABRIEL ALFONSO ESTRADA



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Asia Pacific  
Pathways to Progress  
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# Rocks, Papers, Dragons: Moving Forward in the South China Sea

Luis Gabriel Alfonso Estrada

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called on the Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to resume discussions on the South China Sea Code of Conduct (COC) at the start of September 2020, months after a lull in negotiations due to the global coronavirus pandemic.<sup>1</sup> With the People's Republic of China's (PRC) imposed 2021 deadline for the COC looming, ASEAN Member States are under pressure to have substantial progress towards finalizing the COC, while still grappling with the health crisis within their borders.

The Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress, with the support of the Philippine Office of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, organized a Track Two Observer Discussion Forum to look back at the recent developments in the South China Sea (SCS) and how other claimant states, specifically Vietnam and Malaysia, have responded to thorny issues with other states, as well as their perspectives and expectations in the ongoing discussions for the COC. This policy brief highlights the developments in the SCS, focusing on friction incidents between claimant states, the long process towards the creation of a SCS COC, and the myriad issues that continue to plague the process.

## Background

Although the origins of the current disputes in the SCS can be traced to the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ASEAN involvement in the disputes only began in the 1990s when the organization initiated diplomatic discussions to reduce tensions, avoid incidents, and possibly resolve the disputes peacefully. After years with minimal progress, the Philippines formally commenced arbitration against PRC under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which both states ratified. Despite the PRC's non-participation, the Arbitral Tribunal issued its Award in 2016, which catalyzed the current negotiations for the COC.

## Rocks

After the defeat of Imperial Japan in the Second World War and the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1951, Japan was forced to relinquish its claims to the Spratlys and the Paracels without mentioning to whom sovereignty is transferred or recognizing any extant claims at the time.<sup>2</sup> This started a new round of claiming and occupation in the features of the SCS.

Vietnamese claims to the Paracels originate from the 1954 Geneva Accords signed at the end of the First Indochina War, which gave the South Vietnam control over France's Vietnamese territories south of the 17<sup>th</sup> Parallel. The PRC established de facto control and occupation over the features after it won the Battle of the Paracel Islands against South Vietnam in 1974. After Vietnamese reunification in 1975, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam adopted South Vietnam's claims to the Paracels and other features in the SCS.<sup>3</sup>

Reoccupation of the Spratlys after the Second World War began when the Republic of China (Taiwan) occupied Itu Aba Island in the 1950s.<sup>4</sup> Philippine claims over the Spratlys were announced by President Ferdinand Marcos in 1971 and formalized in 1978 through Presidential Decree No. 1596 regarding the administration of Kalayaan Island Group. This resulted in intensified settling and occupation in the Spratlys by

Vietnam and the Philippines, with most of their current occupied features being first held during the 1970s to the 1980s. The PRC also became involved in occupying Spratlys features in the late 1980s, mostly wrested from the Vietnamese.

Increasing tensions between the PRC and Vietnam, especially regarding oil exploration activities around Vanguard Bank, prompted ASEAN to release the Manila Declaration in 1992, calling for all claimant parties to exercise restraint and for the establishment of a code of conduct in the SCS.

## Papers

The call of the then six nations of ASEAN, all of which are situated around the basin of the SCS, fell on deaf ears. In 1995, the PRC occupied Mischief Reef, a part of the Spratlys that the Philippines claimed, jeopardizing its erstwhile friendly bilateral relations with the Philippines. Manila sought to internationalize the issue and bring attention to Chinese aggression in the SCS, while Beijing made moves to prevent this by appeasing the Philippines through increased bilateral engagement and diplomacy.<sup>5</sup>

Bilateral talks between the two countries regarding the SCS began that same year, focusing on developing confidence-building measures and joint cooperative arrangements. Diplomatic relations were also upgraded with the exchange of defense and armed forces attachés. But while the active and reciprocal diplomacy helped develop a level of understanding of the other side's positions, it has neither led to the softening of each side's position nor to a possible resolution. In fact, the PRC instead reinforced its hold on Mischief Reef through the creation of permanent structures.

In 2002, ASEAN, which by then was now composed of 10 member states, and the PRC, signed the non-binding Declaration on Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), a compromise document that resulted from more than two years of exchanging drafts on a possible

SCS COC. The PRC's foot-dragging and insistence on its stand on contentious issues continued, and ASEAN eventually relented in order to move the process forward, adopting the Guidelines to Implement the DOC in 2011, six years after the Joint ASEAN-China Working Group for the DOC first convened.

In 2012, tensions flared once more when an operation by the Philippine Navy to intercept and expel Chinese fishermen in Scarborough Shoal escalated into a two-month stand-off that ended with the PRC effectively taking control of Scarborough shoal. Though initially the Philippines engaged in bilateral diplomacy with the PRC, the lack of any progress or commitment from the PRC to de-escalate frustrated Manila to the point that it had decided to internationalize the issue and call on the United States (US) as a treaty ally. The Philippines also called on ASEAN to take a stand on the PRC's aggressiveness, to no effect.<sup>6</sup>

Whether the US overstated a supposed deescalating deal with Beijing to Manila or the PRC reneged on the agreement at the last minute, the PRC was effectively able to deny Philippine vessels access to the shoal since.<sup>7</sup> Lingering tensions over the incident cast a shadow over the 45<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Ministers' Meeting when a lack of consensus in addressing the Scarborough Shoal issue led to the non-release of a Joint Communiqué for the meeting, a first in ASEAN's decades-long history. While there are several accounts of what had led to the impasse, it was clear that ASEAN at the time was unable to unite and defend one of its own against external aggression within its own backyard.<sup>8</sup>

In January 2013, the Philippines filed a Notification and Statement of Claim to Establish an Arbitral Tribunal under UNCLOS without consulting ASEAN, changing the dynamics between ASEAN Member States and the PRC as well as the tone for the already dragged-out negotiations for the COC. China refused to participate in the Arbitral Tribunal's proceedings, but has publicized its own stand on the issues through the publications of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and sent communications from the Chinese Embassy in the Netherlands to the Permanent Court of Arbitration or directly to the members of the Tribunal.<sup>9</sup>



Between the Philippines' initial filing and the conclusion of the Tribunal's proceedings, ASEAN's discussions with the PRC regarding the COC moved at a glacial pace, with meetings usually only resulting in statements of commitment to continue dialogue.

The Tribunal's July 2016 Award overwhelmingly favored the Philippines, which ruled that the PRC had violated UNCLOS' environmental protection and maritime safety obligations, interfered with Philippine sovereign rights within the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and had aggravated the dispute through its land reclamation and artificial island construction. Perhaps most importantly, the Tribunal stated that the Chinese "nine-dash line" has no legal basis as claim to historic rights in the waters of the SCS, and that with the PRC's ratification of UNCLOS in 1996, the Convention superseded any historic rights or other sovereign rights the PRC had in excess of the limits imposed by the Convention.<sup>10</sup>

## Dragons

The PRC immediately attacked the Award as biased, unfair, and void using the Communist Party's different mouthpieces and media outfits.<sup>11</sup> The new Duterte administration, which came into power less than a month before the Tribunal released the award, welcomed the award lukewarmly, reflecting the administration's departure from the previous Aquino administration's approach towards China that initiated the arbitration.<sup>12</sup>

The Duterte administration's new China policy was apparent in its chairmanship of ASEAN in 2017 when tensions with the PRC and in the SCS were downplayed.<sup>13</sup> There was also a change of pace from the PRC, when, in August of that year, and after more than a decade of discussions, ASEAN and the PRC finally adopted the Framework for the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea. While the PRC's new enthusiasm in discussions with ASEAN could be understood as a way of deflecting the negative image resulting from its vocal rejection of a binding tribunal award, it is also undeniable that the Duterte administration's approach to relations

with the PRC, from its setting aside of the tribunal ruling,<sup>14</sup> to the Philippines being the current ASEAN chair and the incoming country coordinator for ASEAN-China Dialogue, led to Beijing recalibrating its own approach to the discussions.<sup>15</sup>

By August 2018 and just before Singapore turned over coordinatorship to the Philippines, ASEAN and PRC foreign ministers have agreed on a Single Draft Negotiating Text (SDNT) for the COC—a significant milestone in the negotiations.<sup>16</sup> Merely months later, PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi mentioned during his visit to the Philippines that they wished to accelerate negotiations and hoped that the COC would be finished during the Philippines' term as country coordinator.<sup>17</sup>

A leaked copy of the SDNT showed that there were several contentious issues that had to be resolved before a COC could be finalized and were potential areas where negotiations could snag.<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that most of these issues have been part of the negotiations since the late 1990s; same issues that surrounded the discussions for what became the DOC. Nevertheless, discussions and negotiations on the COC proceeded, finishing the first reading of the draft in mid-2019 and beginning discussions for the second reading in early 2020,<sup>19</sup> before the coronavirus pandemic became more widespread in Southeast Asia.

## Challenges

### ASEAN Disunity

When the Manila Declaration was released by ASEAN in 1992, it had six members, with four directly involved in the issue: the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei are claimant states, while Indonesia's EEZ around the Natuna Islands is encroached by the PRC's nine-dash line. By the signing of the DOC, four other countries have joined ASEAN: Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia.

This, combined with ASEAN's norm of consensus, would eventually pose some problems. While the claimant states, Indonesia, and Singapore (whose trade port economy will be severely affected by instability in the SCS) would

have inherent interests at stake in the COC negotiations, the same cannot be said about the other members. Myanmar has no coasts facing the SCS, Laos is a landlocked country in mainland Southeast Asia, and Cambodia's coast faces inward towards the Gulf of Thailand. It is also important to note that these three countries are heavily economically reliant on the PRC, allowing it to have some leverage.<sup>20</sup>

The ability of this combination of factors to wreak havoc in ASEAN's mechanisms and its potential to be taken advantage of by external parties was in full show during the 45<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Ministers' Meeting in Phnom Penh, where disagreements regarding the mentioning of discussions regarding the Scarborough Shoal incident between the Philippines and the PRC and other incidents in claimant countries' EEZs resulted in the failure to release a joint communiqué. This was also at play in 2016, where ASEAN representatives supposedly had intended to release a joint statement regarding the ASEAN-China Special Meeting in Kunming, only for the meeting to end with no joint press statement or joint press conference with the PRC. The PRC had sought to prevent ASEAN from releasing its own statement—supposedly containing reference to the SCS disputes—and instead have them adopt Beijing's preferred statement.<sup>21</sup>

### **PRC Aggression**

Fracturing ASEAN unity is merely one of the many tactics used by the PRC to forward its own agenda in the SCS to the detriment of its neighbors. The PRC also pursues aggressive and destabilizing activities in the SCS to undermine rival claimants' positions even after signing the DOC, intentionally violating the declaration's provisions for self-restraint.<sup>22</sup>

Among the activities that the PRC has done that increased tensions in the region include its land reclamation and island-building in the Spratlys, harassment of oil exploration and drilling activities of claimant states within their EEZs,<sup>22</sup> and endangering the lives of fishermen.<sup>23</sup> Even more destabilizing for the region are the dangerous maneuvers of the PRC's white- and grey-hull vessels, such as the near-collision of a PRC destroyer

and an American warship in 2018,<sup>24</sup> putting the region perilously close to potential armed conflict. Most recently, PRC vessels harassed the oil exploration project of Vietnam in Vanguard Bank, and that of Malaysia's near the Luconia Shoals and further off in Malaysia's EEZ.

Southeast Asia's navies and coast guards are hardly able to enforce the law in their maritime domains, let alone face the PRC's official vessels head to head. This makes the PRC's employment of grey zone tactics particularly heinous and destabilizing to the region. Most notorious among the grey zone measures that the PRC employs are the supposed fishing vessels that do paramilitary activities in the SCS and coordinate with PRC coast guard and navy vessels to implement the cabbage strategy of denying access and maintaining surveillance over features in disputed waters.<sup>25</sup> This is particularly troubling as it takes advantage of international legal protections for civilian vessels and the weakness of maritime law enforcement agencies in other claimant states, eroding safety and the rule of law in the SCS.

### **Issues with the Code of Conduct**

Contentious issues plague the details of the COC, with some of these issues dating back to when discussions first started in the 1990s. Among these issues is the legal standing of the resulting document, and if the new COC will be legally binding to all parties. This was also a main issue during the earlier negotiations in the early 2000s for a similar code, but PRC recalcitrance to having a legally binding document led ASEAN to compromise with a non-binding DOC in 2002. Based on the SDNT, Vietnam and Brunei are the biggest proponents for a legally binding COC, though most ASEAN states seem to be interested in having the COC be binding. That said, ASEAN must also be cautious of the implications of having a legally binding instrument with the PRC, given its recent record of cherry-picking of agreements to comply with, from the previously mentioned disregard for self-restraint as mentioned in the DOC, to its refusal to acknowledge the 2016 Arbitral Ruling that it is obliged to abide by under UNCLOS. The COC, if badly managed and strong-armed by the PRC, might

as well bind ASEAN to the PRC instead of restricting any party state's most inflammatory actions in the SCS.

Another major issue that can also be traced back to the early 2000s attempt at a code is the geographical scope where the COC will be applied. The PRC's "nine-dash line" covers four different clusters of disputed territories: the Spratly; the Paracels; Scarborough Shoal; and Pratas Island at the northern end of the SCS. In the discussions for the DOC, the PRC sought to limit the applicability of the document to the Spratlys, while ASEAN wanted the inclusion of the Paracels. Scarborough Shoal's status vis-à-vis the DOC was unclear during the discussions, while Pratas Island was not disputed by any ASEAN member state. This non-agreement in the geographical scope led to the lack of any such references in the DOC.<sup>26</sup> During the current negotiations, there does not seem to be any question regarding the inclusion of the Paracels considering the several flashpoints that have occurred in the area in recent years, with Vietnam proposing that the COC cover all disputed features and maritime entitlements under UNCLOS. Indonesia proposed provisions to ensure respect for EEZ and continental shelf entitlements under UNCLOS, understandable as the PRC contests Indonesia's EEZ under its "nine-dash line" claim.

Perhaps the most contentious issue found in the SDNT is the PRC's proposals regarding the duty to cooperate, where the PRC called for the exclusion of companies outside the region from being included in the development of marine economy, and another provision where joint military exercises with states outside the region without notifying COC party states and their approval. Though the PRC has reportedly softened its insistence in these provisions during subsequent meetings,<sup>27</sup> they do illustrate part of what the PRC has been trying to achieve in engaging ASEAN throughout these decades: exclude states outside the region and dominate the SCS basin area by monopolizing the extant mechanisms. This can be seen in the PRC engagement with the Philippines and ASEAN in the aftermath of its occupation of Mischief Reef, leading to the DOC, and its reinvigorated engagement after the release of the 2016 Arbitral Ruling.

## Recommendations

**Exercise narrative control over the Philippine claim and incidents occurring in or affecting waters within Philippine jurisdiction.** By persistently publicizing our stances and claims in the SCS, we build awareness within the international community and establish that our legitimate claims are based on international law. This can be enhanced through the following:

1. *Publicize illegal and unacceptable behavior within our waters with appropriate attribution.* By establishing actual and official narrative in incidents within our waters, we are exercising our jurisdiction over the waters as well as pre-empting and countering any revisionist narratives intended to sow disinformation. Proper identification and attribution of relevant parties is key to holding them accountable and establish facts on the ground. Vietnam frequently employs this strategy when PRC ships harass its oil exploration activities within its EEZ.

These measures can also be a step towards addressing grey zone tactics employed within the SCS, at it highlights a state's pattern of abetting behavior deemed illegal under international law by supposedly civilian vessels. This can lead to holding these states accountable for the actions of their militia vessels, which could then discourage future use of grey zone tactics. In 2019, the former Chief of Naval Operations of the US, Admiral John Richards, warned his Chinese counterpart that aggressive action by Chinese militia fishing vessels will be responded to as if they were part of the armed forces, countering Beijing's attempts to normalize such behavior.

2. *Actively send out diplomatic protests and notes verbales to counteract disinformation and revisionist narratives.* In recent years, UN mechanisms and institutions like the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf have become new fronts in establishing claim legitimacy in the SCS. This can be seen in the flurry of notes verbales that have been sent by states in response to the joint

submission of Malaysia and Vietnam for an extended continental shelf in 2009 and more recently Malaysia's unilateral submission in 2019.

Actively participating in these exchanges embeds our claim in the discussions regarding features and entitlements in the SCS, while reiterating the rulings made in the 2016 Arbitration won by the Philippines reinforces it as a valid interpretation and application of the UNCLOS, paints claims that run against it as having no recognized legal basis and delegitimizes attempts to disregard the ruling.

**Maximize cooperation and coordination with other states.** Increased strategic interaction with neighbors and partners can help promote recognition of our claim, develop common understanding of issues and identify mutual interests, and establish mutually beneficial relations with other countries for assistance during incidents and conflicts at sea.

1. *Increase dialogue with other ASEAN Member States regarding SCS issues.* With several other ASEAN claimant states also facing similar issues in the SCS, discussions on perspectives and issues can help reduce tensions, increase trust, and establish norms and common understanding on issues. This can become a precursor for coordinated policies within the SCS, and possibly a jump-off point for future minilateral cooperation.

Dialogue with non-claimant ASEAN Member States is also important in order to highlight the region-wide effects of instability and insecurity to ASEAN. Emphasizing regional interest in upholding the rule of law, maintaining stability within the SCS, and facilitating convergences in the understanding of the application of UNCLOS, including the rulings from the 2016 Arbitration, can lead to a more cohesive ASEAN position during COC negotiations.

2. *Enhance bilateral relations with other interested states.* While the COC negotiation is the only extant mechanism directly addressing issues and tensions within the SCS, not all states with interests in the

waters are included in this mechanism. Because of excessive maritime claims in the SCS, freedom of the seas, navigation, and overflight in the region, among others, is threatened, affecting security and economic interests of non-claimant states. Incidents illustrate how these freedoms have been undermined in the last few years.

Discussions with other interested states would allow us to share information, build trust and understanding, as well as help promote the recognition of our claims and the acknowledgement of the 2016 Arbitral Ruling. Better relations with these states can also help develop military cooperation, facilitating joint exercises and assistance in military modernization. These actions can counter attempts at excluding these states in the SCS.

**Recalibrate approach towards the PRC and related issues to be more strategic.** Despite the cordial relations and goodwill extended to the PRC due to the Duterte administration's foreign policy direction and the magnanimity and impartiality that the Philippines has shown as ASEAN's Country Coordinator for the PRC, the Philippines remained a target of Chinese harassment in the SCS, from the poaching of endangered giant clams around Scarborough Shoal to the Gem-Ver collision near Reed Bank.

1. *Make use of the Bilateral Consultation Mechanism (BCM) to insist on compliance with international law, including UNCLOS 1982 and acceptance of the 2016 Arbitral Ruling.* Though the BCM, established in 2017, has been an effective release valve for tensions between the two countries in the SCS, it has not achieved anything concrete nor has made any impact on contentious issues between the two countries. It remains to be seen whether the mechanism will be anything more constructive than it currently is, though as an avenue of communication with the PRC, it should be maximized to forward Philippine interests, such as in having the 2016 Arbitral Ruling acknowledged and accepted.



2. *Prepare for contingencies that could occur post-2021.* Despite the difficulties faced by the countries in proceeding with negotiations because of the pandemic, there doesn't seem to be any indication that the PRC is revoking its imposed 2021 deadline that would coincide with the end of the Philippines' term as country coordinator. It remains to be seen if the PRC will proceed with the negotiations with ASEAN after the Philippines turns over coordinatorship to Myanmar.

Should the PRC choose to leave the negotiating table, the Philippines must be ready to proceed with discussions on alternative mechanisms to ensure safety and security within the SCS. This could be under the ambit of ASEAN, as ASEAN would be keen on retaining centrality in the region or could be limited to only involve ASEAN Member States around the basin of the SCS. Discussions could also formally include states outside Southeast Asia that have key interests in the waterways, such as Japan, Korea, the US, and Australia.

## Conclusion

Looking back at the history and development of the issues in the SCS gives us a clearer view of the issues at hand, the trends in tactics that states have come to employ to achieve their goals and react to maneuvers made by rival claimants, and the interests and desired state of affairs that they pursue. This also allows us to see the weaknesses that can and have been exploited over the decades that these issues have been discussed, negotiated, and agreed upon.

This hindsight would allow the Philippines to recalibrate its approach towards the negotiations and the parties involved to pursue its own national interests and at the same time achieve the best outcomes for the region. Occupying a key position in the discussions as coordinator for ASEAN-China Dialogue, the Philippines can and must adjust its strategy and approach based on how states have previously acted, not just on how it wishes states to act moving forward. This is especially important as we

have seen, based on the long history of negotiations and developments that have led us to where we are now, that some parties enter into discussions in bad faith and selectively abide by agreements as they see fit. Some red-tinted glasses must come off.

Looking at this whole process highlights the importance of ASEAN as a platform in the region, and how it has in ways lived up to its lofty aspiration of centrality. At the same time, its weaknesses and flaws have also been placed in full view, and as we have also seen, can be easily taken advantage of by those outside the region. From the discussions on the DOC and the years since, we have seen that ASEAN is not above keeping quiet and conceding some of its or its members interests in order to maintain a pretense of centrality and achievement; there is no indication that ASEAN has grown resilient against this tendency. With the deadline on the COC looming for next year, it remains to be seen if ASEAN, pushed to the corner, will stand for its members interests at the risk of not having a COC, or if it would rather claim a hollow victory of having a COC that ensures little of what its members want.

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Established in 2014, Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation, Inc. (APPPFI) is an independent policy think tank that aims to promote peace, development, and cultural understanding for peoples of the Philippines and the Asia Pacific through research, international dialogue, and cooperation. It is the Philippine member of the regional network ASEAN Institutes for Strategic and International Studies.

The organization's work focuses on the implications of international and regional developments for the Philippines and its foreign relations. It has dedicated programs which cover international security developments, maritime affairs, connectivity and integration, and China.

Principally, APPFI undertakes three major activities. First, it conducts and publishes policy-oriented research, disseminates the same to relevant stakeholders, and provides quarterly analyses of regional developments. Second, it organizes roundtable discussions and national as well as international conferences, solely or in partnership with other institutions. Third, it hosts exchanges and develops issue-based partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and the private sector in the Philippines and the Asia Pacific.

## RESEARCH PROGRAMS

- CHINA PROGRAM

APPPFI's original flagship program focuses on China and Philippines-China relations. The China Program stands on two pillars: (1) promoting better understanding among Philippine stakeholders of the implications of China's emerging role in East Asia and the world, and (2) strengthening linkages and engaging in Track Two diplomacy between these two neighboring countries.

- MARITIME DEVELOPMENT & SECURITY PROGRAM (MDSP)

This multidisciplinary program explores how the Philippines can enhance advantages and minimize threats and risks arising from its maritime strategic environment, looking toward both the internal and external dimensions. MDSP aims to generate timely discussions and appropriate recommendations regarding the strategic implications of Philippine maritime security, marine economic resources, and coastal development.

- REGIONAL INTEGRATION & CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM (RICP)

The RICP promotes a critical understanding of the political economy of regional development, and of economic trends and issues that affect Philippine national and regional interests. It seeks to generate insights and research that will enable the Philippines to strategically navigate through its international economic engagements, and interact beneficially with regional states and multilateral institutions.

- REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM (RSAP)

The RSAP examines the evolving security environment, the role of multilateral and other forms of security associations, and institutional developments that affect Philippine and regional security. RSAP will be a hub producing research, intelligent commentary, and policy briefs from leading experts and specialists in the Philippines and the wider Asia-Pacific region.



Closely linked to, but independent from the Christian Democratic Union of Germany, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Philippines is a German political foundation. Established in 1964, KAS Philippines was the first ever KAS office in Asia. Ever since its inception, KAS has been actively working in the Philippines under the principles of freedom, justice, and solidarity.


With the main purpose of developing programs that boost the country's democratic institutions and processes, KAS strongly believes that human dignity and human rights are at the very heart of their work. Thus, KAS regards people as the starting point of its initiatives towards social justice, democratic freedom, and sustainable economic activity. KAS Philippines creates, develops, and sustains networks within the political and economic arenas by bringing people together who take their mandates seriously in society.

Given that KAS provides, not just research, but also robust and dynamic activities, the foundation considers itself not just as a think tank, but a think-and-do tank that works along socially equitable, economically efficient, and ecologically sustainable lines. KAS Philippines' country foci are institutional and political reform, the social market economy, and peace and development in Mindanao. The foundation works with civil society organizations, the academe, governmental institutions, political parties, think-tanks, the media, and decision-makers, creating strong partnerships along the way. Particularly, KAS Philippines aims to increase political cooperation in development cooperation at the national and international levels.



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