



**Plenary Keynote 1**

**and the**

**Keynote on Coastal and Ocean Governance**

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by

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Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join you this morning for the third East Asian Seas Congress organised by PEMSEA and the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources, Philippines. I would like to thank the Government of the Philippines for hosting this conference and PEMSEA for inviting me to deliver the keynote address.

Challenges of Climate Change

We live in challenging times. We are reminded every day of the impact of climate change, through reports about the melting of the Polar ice-caps and extreme weather phenomena such as floods, heat waves and tropical storms in different parts of the world. Earlier this year, several countries in our region were gravely affected by Typhoon Morakot with some communities still recovering from it.

Although the scientific community may be divided on the exact causes and the pace of climate change, few would question that global warming is a fact and has the potential to become the greatest security threat to humanity. Rising sea levels could wipe entire countries off the map and generate millions of environmental refugees, while rising sea temperatures could destroy or disrupt marine ecosystems, which could in turn further devastate world fish stocks. It is estimated that almost 50% of the world's coasts are threatened by development-related activities. With one billion of the world's population living in coastal urban areas, the potential socio-economic disruption could reach catastrophic levels if the intense pressures being placed on coastal systems are not alleviated.

The world is also faced by another crisis: the crisis of unsustainable fishery. Ocean governance in the field of fishery is one of the weak pillars of global governance. I think one of the solutions is to strengthen ocean governance at the regional level.

It is therefore timely that PEMSEA has organised this conference to look at various aspects of sustainable coastal and ocean development.

### Role of UNCLOS

It has been 27 years since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982. Hailed as a "constitution for the oceans", UNCLOS was a groundbreaking treaty. It was designed to be the international legal framework for the governance of the world's oceans. As its preamble stated, it was intended to establish a legal order for the seas and oceans which will facilitate international communication, promote the peaceful uses of the oceans, the equitable and efficient utilisation of their resources, the conservation of their living resources, and the study, protection and preservation of the marine environment.

For those of us who were involved with negotiating UNCLOS, it was an extremely challenging task. We had to balance a diverse array of interests, such as, the aspiration by coastal states to extend their territorial sea limits, safeguarding the freedom of navigation,

protection of the marine environment, management of the oceans' resources etc. It was therefore not surprising that the treaty took ten arduous years to conclude given its broad scope and the complexity of the challenges involved.

The Convention which emerged from those negotiations is a finely balanced package. UNCLOS, which introduced the new legal concepts of inter alia: Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and Straits Used For International Navigation, has played a crucial role by providing a stable legal framework for navigational rights, while respecting the rights of States to exercise lawful jurisdiction over their territorial waters and exploit the resources in their exclusive economic zones. UNCLOS was also notable for establishing a compulsory dispute settlement system for States to resolve their disputes in a peaceful manner.

Today, UNCLOS has gained almost universal acceptance, with 159 State Parties, the latest being the Dominican Republic. The Obama Administration has declared the ratification of UNCLOS as a top priority.

UNCLOS is the only international legal framework in place which has provisions for the protection of the marine environment alongside provisions for the sovereign rights of States to exploit their marine resources and the rights of States to use the high seas for trade and transportation. For example, as stated in Article 193: "States have the sovereign right to exploit their natural resources pursuant to their environmental policies and in accordance with their duty to protect and preserve the marine environment." Indeed, the range of environmental issues covered in UNCLOS has led some to declare that UNCLOS "probably contains the most comprehensive and progressive international environmental law of any modern international agreement."

#### Singapore's Experience & ICM

As some of you may know, Singapore was first founded by the British as a free port in 1819. Today, maritime trade remains the vital lifeline of the global economy. Singapore continues to be one of the busiest ports in the world. At the same time, as a small island city-state, we have also been keenly aware of the need to manage our coastal and marine

environment in a sustainable and responsible manner, not only for the current population living and working in Singapore but also for future generations to come.

In recent years, we have also become more sensitive to the need to adopt a holistic approach towards managing coastal and marine pollution. According to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), about 80% of the pollution load in the oceans originates from land-based sources and activities such as municipal, industrial and agricultural wastes and run-off as well as atmospheric deposition. It is therefore not sufficient to look only at ship-based sources of pollution, but also important to address land-based sources of pollution as well.

Singapore's advantage has been the fact that our small size has facilitated the close coordination between different agencies in government policymaking. Singapore's agencies have always maintained a high degree of coordination in the management of Singapore's marine environment, despite lacking a formal integrated framework for coastal management.

For example, from the project to clean up the Singapore River started in 1977 to the current Pasir Panjang port development, cooperation and consultation between agencies and stakeholders have been vital. Singapore implements Environmental Monitoring and Management Plans (EMMPs) for all coastal developments. Amongst other proactive measures, EMMPs provide real time monitoring of and immediate feedback response to sediment levels in the water that approach environmental tolerance limits. This has allowed Singapore to balance coastal development with environmental protection.

However, Singapore recognizes the need to further enhance the management of her coastal and marine environment. In view of this, Singapore has adopted an Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) strategy this year. Our ICM strategy will not be developed from ground zero. We intend to stand on the shoulders of giants - the Sustainable Coastal Development Framework, developed by PEMSEA and implemented successfully in the region (including here in the Philippines), will be adapted and applied to Singapore.

There are other advantages to adapting PEMSEA's framework for Singapore's ICM strategy. Although Singapore has made some strides in integrating our coastal policies and plans, we still have some way to go before achieving a full top-to-bottom integration. The application of a regionally accepted common framework will allow us to better learn from other states and apply solutions based on common experiences. Demographic studies show that the world's population is predominantly found in cities, and most of these cities are coastal. As a coastal city, this common framework will also better allow Singapore to share our own successes and challenges in integrated urban coastal management with other similar coastal cities within and beyond the PEMSEA network of countries with ICM strategies. This will subsequently contribute to the knowledge-base of urban environmental management and biodiversity conservation.

With the increasing importance of coastal cities in supporting their growing populations, Singapore will be sensitive towards the changing needs of our domestic stakeholders and regional and global interests. We believe that Singapore's adoption of an Integrated Coastal Management strategy will not only help us do this at the national level, but also bring us all closer to achieving the Sustainable Development Strategy of the Seas of East Asia (SDS SEA) for the region.

Singapore's own experience has shown that it is possible to conserve our marine biodiversity and protect our coastal and marine environment while at the same time becoming the world's busiest transshipment port. We have achieved this by strictly controlling both land and sea-based sources of marine pollution.

Singapore's waters harbour some 250 species of hard corals, or about 32% of the world's 800 species. Of the 106 coral genera existing worldwide, 55 genera have been found in Singapore waters. Although the Great Barrier Reef is much larger in size than Singapore, there are likely to be more coral species and genera per hectare of reef in Singapore's waters than there are in an equivalent area of the Great Barrier Reef. In July 2007, we initiated a Coral Nursery programme. Its objective is to enhance our coral reefs using fragments of corals that have already broken off from their parent colonies and are lying on the reef bottoms – these coral fragments, if left where they are, would most probably

die. The Coral Nursery rehabilitates these fragments and transplants them back onto our coral reefs. Such active but sustainable methods make sense in an urban marine conservation scenario.

Singapore's experience, and indeed, the experience of our region, all show that protecting the marine environment, maintaining navigational freedoms as well as pursuing economic development are not mutually exclusive. Each of these activities needs not be pursued at the expense of the others as long as a careful balance is struck as has been done in the comprehensive framework which UNCLOS represents. I hope that over the next four days of this conference, more ideas can be exchanged and concrete strategies identified on improving coastal and ocean governance while preserving the integrity of UNCLOS.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, I wish to leave you with the following thoughts. First, I believe that UNCLOS has served us well and we should respect its provisions in our activities. Second, I see great value in the Integrated Coastal Management approach for the sustainable development of our coastal regions. Third, I would urge PEMSEA to strengthen our regional governance in dealing with the challenges of land-based pollution, unsustainable fisheries and climate change.

Thank you very much.

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