

SCA Joint Project Workshop: “Security of Ocean in Asia”
5th SCA Conference in Hanoi, Vietnam, on 11 May 2005

Opening Remarks by the Chairman, Professor Tadao Kuribayashi

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Kuribayashi, a professor of international law in a Japanese university and also a member of the Joint Project Section of the Science Council of Japan (SCJ). It is a great honour for me to organize this workshop as a chairman, and I am very much pleased to meet many Vietnamese participants today, who are mostly scholars and government experts specialized in the field of ocean affairs or the law of the sea.

Before introducing three lecturers, let me explain briefly the background and objectives of this workshop, so that you may have some clear picture of today’s meeting.

Our joint project started two years ago at the Third Conference of the Science Council of Asia (SCA) held in Bali, Indonesia. We had another session at the Fourth Conference of SCA held in Seoul, Korea, last year. Then this year, we are at the Fifth Conference of SCA here in Hanoi. After the experience of the past two conferences, the theme of our project has been converged into the present one, namely, “the Security of Ocean in Asia”. Now I wish to explain the reason why this theme was finally chosen.

Mankind has depended on the ocean throughout history for its development and prosperity. In recent years, however, many tensions have escalated at sea, with various confrontations between states over the development and use of ocean resources, living or non-living. While science and technology in advanced nations increasingly orient their economies toward mass production, consumption and disposal, the North-South gap continues to grow and poverty increases in parts of the world. This is accompanied by water pollution, over-exploitation of resources, the rapid development of coastal area, and an increase in piracy, terrorism, and other unlawful acts at sea. As a result, degradation of the marine environment proceeds, and there is destruction of ocean and coastal ecosystems, depletion and sometimes exhaustion of ocean resources in areas around the world. All of these developments threaten the safety and sustainable development and use of the world’s oceans, not only compromising the progress and prosperity but threatening the very survival of the human race as well.

We should remember, however, that confrontations are also arising out of discontent with poverty and other living conditions. In today’s world, it is no longer sufficient to define “peace” as simply “the absence of war”; rather, new thought urges that peace should mean “that condition in which people can fulfill their various desires as human beings.” There is increasing support for a new “comprehensive security” or “human security” oriented approach, characterized by a more inclusive and proactive focus.

It is in this sense that we use the concept of “the security of ocean” in our project. This concept regards implementation of ocean governance (or management) as an integral part of comprehensive security and requires that all aspects of ocean management, including military activities, the peaceful use of the oceans, resource extraction, environmental management, and scientific research should be addressed in an integrated manner. Thus, the concept of security of oceans provides a comprehensive and

integrated approach to ocean problems as a whole.

The concept of “security of ocean” was a leading idea when, in collaboration with the Ship & Ocean Foundation (SOF) and the Institute for Ocean Policy, SOF, we held a three-year series of international conference on “Securing the Oceans” from 2002, advancing interaction among those involved with ocean policy in the Asian region, and striving to raise awareness of the issues and put together policy recommendations. Ocean policy and maritime law experts from Asian countries as well as Australia and U.S., and international organizations participated in the final conference in 2004. The conference under the chair of Kuribayashi adopted the Tokyo Declaration on Securing the Oceans. Professor Beckman and Mr. Terashima were key members in this conference. We owe the title of our project to this “Securing the Ocean” conference. Professor N.Okuwaki, who is a member of SCJ and one of the core persons of our joint project but unfortunately unable to attend this workshop owing to an urgent engagement, was also a key person of the above-said conference. Pointing out that the Asian seas have many complicated problems to be solved, he describes: “Looking at a map of the Asian region, we recognize that Asian seas have common geographical features, such as semi-enclosed or marginal seas (Japan Sea, Yellow Sea, East China Sea, South China Sea, Celebes Sea and the Sea of Indonesia) and they also closely relate to each other by rather narrow channels and strips of waters. As such, their ecological system is vulnerable to environmental harm. Politically, there are islands or group of islets, to which two or more states claim territorial title (Takeshima Islands, Senkaku Islands, Spratly Islands); for this and other reasons, maritime delimitations have not yet been settled in some areas. In addition, the Philippines and Indonesia declared themselves as Archipelagic States, thus sea areas within the archipelagos are put under the special regimes of archipelagic waters. Economically, these Asian seas constitute the most important sea lanes for world maritime trade, and over half the world’s shipping tonnage sails through South Asian seas. More than 80 percent of the oil for Japan, South Korea and Taiwan is transported through the South China Sea, thus it is called the Second Persian Gulf. At the same time, piracy, or marine armed robbery, is reported to occur rather frequently, and the sea is said to be one of the most dangerous sea lanes in the world. The political situation of the coastal states is not necessarily stable. In the region, we have the problem of the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait as well.”

Today, we will discuss about what and how we should think and act in order to ensure the security of the ocean in Asian region with those geographical, political, economic and historical backgrounds.

I do hope that we expand exchanges with ocean law and policy researchers and practitioners in Vietnam and those of the surrounding countries, share a common perception about Asian seas as a semi-enclosed sea area and promote the political will on the need for academic exchange and policy collaboration to maintain the peace and security of the ocean.

Those are the background and objectives of this workshop, including in particular our intention for a joint project on security of ocean in Asia. Thank you.

Closing Remarks by the Chairman, Professor Tadao Kuribayashi

It is difficult for me to sum up in a word what was discussed this afternoon, as so many issues and problems in the Asian seas were pointed out by the lectures and in discussions. Therefore, I wish to fulfill my responsibility as a chairman only by saying the followings:

The new ocean regime, the framework of which are embodied in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982, admitted the coastal states' sovereignty to extend their territorial sea up to 12nm from shorelines, and also their sovereign right to extend exclusive economic zones (EEZ) up to 200nm, thus bringing about the situation that management of some 40 percent of the high seas space came under the sovereignty, sovereign right and jurisdiction of coastal states. As a result, many state jurisdictional borders have been set up in the ocean, sometimes overlapping each other. However, ocean problems cannot be solved by merely setting up the jurisdictional borders, but in most cases their final solution requires multilateral or regional cooperation. Borders in the ocean are necessary for adequate ocean management, but they should by no means be the closed ones for the purpose of attaining a better ocean management. We have experienced unprecedented disasters of Tsunami in this region recently, and we learned a lesson from this sad happening that cooperation among nations is above exclusive national borders.

Finally, I would like to thank the speakers who have presented very interesting lectures for us and provided their valuable inputs into the debate. I would also like to thank the audience for their attendance and participation in today's discussion. Furthermore, I would like to extend my very warm gratitude to the staff members of the Ministry of Science and Technology of Vietnam and those who arranged this workshop. And finally I would like to extend my gratitude to the interpreter, Mr. Trinh Minh Manh who facilitated our discussions by so smoothly bridging the linguistic gap. Thank you.