



JNPC Press Conference

**Guest: H.E. Benigno S. Aquino III,
President of Republic of the Philippines**

**With the increasing militarization in the West Philippine
Sea, the Philippines and Japan should positively engage in
the region's maritime security**

Japan National Press Club (JNPC), Tokyo, Japan

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Philippine President Benigno Aquino, who was on a State Visit to Japan, held an official press conference for the domestic and international press. His mother, Corazon Aquino, on her State Visit to Japan in 1986, also addressed at the club. This is the first occasion for us to have received mother-son state guests. President Aquino stated that bilateral relations between the Philippines and Japan have entered a new phase including the military coordination. He answered questions, mostly related to security issues in the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea).

Moderator: Shuichi Habu, Secretary-General of JNPC

Japan National Press Club You-tube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vv1ciq0y0pM>

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Moderator, Shuichi Habu: [*speaks in Japanese*] Thank you for waiting ladies and gentlemen. We will start the press meeting with His Excellency President Benigno Aquino from the Philippines, who is in Japan as a state guest.

The President has met with Their Majesties and has met with Prime Minister Abe during this visit. Today we would like to hear about his achievements of the visit. There will be an initial speech of ten minutes, followed by questions from the floor. This will be concluded at 12:00.

His Excellency's mother, Former President Corazon Aquino, also was a state guest to Japan and a guest speaker at our press club in November 1986. This year we are celebrating the 46th anniversary of our National Press Club. We have welcomed some 6,000 guests, but this is the first-ever case of a parent and child state guest speaker.

Today we have leading Cabinet members of the Aquino government. Welcome to our club!

Let me introduce myself. I will serve as the moderator. I am Habu, Secretary General of the National Press Club. Your Excellency, could you start please?

H. E. Benigno S. Aquino III, President of the Republic of the Philippines: Mr. Yoshiaki Ito, Chairman of the Japanese National Press Club; Mr. Shuichi Habu, Secretary General, Japan National Press Club; Ambassador Kazuhide Ishikawa; Ambassador Jun Yamazaki; Ambassador Manuel Lopez; members of the Philippine delegation; friends from the media; all our guests; ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

Last November I had the opportunity to welcome and meet many of you in Manila in a productive exchange. Today, I wish to thank all of you in the JNPC for your kind invitation to again engage the members of the Japanese media, this time on your home turf.

A free and responsible media is necessary to any healthy democracy. My father, himself a journalist, as well as my mother, had valued media's role in the growth of our nation. Japanese media also has a special place in our recent history. It covered my father's return and subsequent assassination in Manila in 1983, and soon after was instrumental in providing intelligent analysis that helped shed light on the circumstances of his assassination.

The Philippines that you cover now is far different from that covered by your predecessors during those troubled times. Media is free to report the facts and to speak its mind. The Philippine government merely joins the chorus of voices in asking that media provide a true and fair accounting of events, and balance its roles in promoting vigilance and encouraging enlightened discourse for our citizens.

Allow me now to brief you on the events of this memorable and fruitful state visit, in which I retraced a lot of the steps my mother took when she came to Japan in November of 1986. In fact, back then, she spoke to the same institution, I believe in this very building.

My summit meeting with Prime Minister Abe has given additional impetus to our already very dynamic strategic partnership. The highlights of that meeting have found their way through the news desks and have been duly reported, and believe I need not cite them in great detail.

I would merely add today that I always value frank discussions with the Prime Minister, ever since our first meeting in 2013. It is a source of great encouragement to me and my countrymen that, on many issues and strategic interests, the views, stances, and sentiments of the Philippines and Japan greatly complement, if not mirror, each other.

The coming years will be interesting ones for the Philippines-Japan Strategic Partnership, which, as I told Prime Minister Abe, is from our perspective entering a new and more integrated chapter. We have our common appreciation of the synergies between our economies, on which we have agreed to build our future economic engagement. At the same time, both our governments are undertaking sweeping and critical reforms across various fronts, to facilitate and strengthen our own national responses to emerging challenges, and allow us to improve our bilateral cooperation.

In the sector of security, the Philippines and Japan's respective evaluation of ongoing developments in our region very closely adhere to each other. The Philippines follows with interest Japan's ongoing review of its security policy and legislation, with a view to allowing Japan to play a more proactive role in securing peace and security in our region and the world. I wish to again manifest what we have stated before: the Philippines does not view with any concern Japan's consideration of the question of reinterpreting its constitution. Japan is an ally and partner to many nations, and Japan should be able to cooperate in the fullest and most effective way to promote and protect peace. Countries of goodwill can only benefit if the Japanese government is empowered to assist others, and is allowed to come to the aid of those who need it, especially in the area of collective self-defense.

Being both island nations, our respective histories and the development of our economies and international relations have been contextualized, defined, and facilitated by our regional maritime environment, which for the past decades had enjoyed relative peace and stability.

Today, however, as you all know, our maritime environment and its resources, as well as the airspace above it, are now under threat. We are particularly gravely concerned by the land reclamation activities being undertaken in the West Philippine Sea. These activities prejudice and undermine arbitration that the Philippines has initiated to settle the dispute in a manner compatible with international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on

the Law of the Sea. It raises the specter of increasing militarization and threatens peace and stability in the region.

One of the important areas where this new era of positive engagement within the Philippines and Japan will be brought to bear will thus be in the area of maritime security. But by no means does this constitute and define the length and breadth of our dynamic partnership. Our engagement in trade, investments, ODA, tourism, people-to-people exchanges have also intensified. In tourism, in particular, the Philippines is one of the fastest-growing markets for Japan in Asia; in turn, Japan has been the Philippines' third-largest tourist market since 2005. I look forward to seeing the Japanese media accord due interest as well to these aspects of our partnership.

I would like to take this occasion to again convey our deepest thanks, through you the members of the media, to Their Majesties, The Emperor and Empress, to Prime Minister Abe, and to the government, and the people of Japan, for their hospitality and their commitment to the furtherance of Philippine-Japan relations.

Thank you. I am ready to take your questions. [*applause*]

Moderator: Your Excellency, thank you very much. We will start the questions and answers. If you have a question, please raise your hand. If I ask you to ask a question, please kindly move forward to the closest microphone. Please tell us who you are. There are many reporters; therefore, please try to be precise and concise. Yes, please. Please use the microphone.

Question: [*speaks in Japanese*] Your Excellency, thank you very much for coming to our press club. The hot topic, on the situation in the South China Sea. That is what I would like to ask a question.

US Secretary of Defense Carter has asked for an immediate halt of the reclamation to all the relevant countries. In the Spratlys, there is a plan for you to repair the airport. According to plan, would the repair be conducted?

A related question. Quite often a spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry of China calls themselves a major power in the world, and to the Philippines and to others, they often say that smaller countries like your country, which is very rude for you, should not meddle. What do you think about this comment?

Aquino: We shouldn't, I'm sorry, the last portion of the question... We shouldn't meddle...?

Question: [*speaks in Japanese*] The spokesperson of the Chinese foreign ministry said smaller countries should not cause messes or should not meddle in the situation. It is a very rude comment to smaller countries. What do you think?

Aquino: Well, perhaps we should utilize their own words. In 2002, in an attempt to come to manage tensions within this area of the world, ASEAN and its dialogue partner China came up with, we tried to come up with a code of conduct. Unfortunately, they were unsuccessful so they came up with the Declaration of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. This was signed by all parties concerned, and we assume that it is still binding on all parties concerned. And in fact, in all of the fora, all parties say they still adhere to the DOC and look forward to the formulation of the COC.

May I quote the declaration? Items, paragraphs 2, 4, and 5 in particular.

And may I quote paragraph 2: "The Parties are committed to exploring ways for building trust and confidence in accordance with the above-mentioned principles and on the basis of equality and mutual respect."

I assume even if we have a much smaller economy and a non-existent military entity in a smaller country, be it in land area and population, equality also refers to the Philippines.

Paragraph 4: "The parties concerned undertake to resolve their territorial and jurisdictional disputes by peaceful means, without resorting to the threat or use of force, through friendly consultations and negotiations by sovereign states directly concerned, in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 UN Convention of the Law of the Sea."

And fifth: "The parties undertake to exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability including, among others, refraining from action of inhabiting on the presently uninhabited islands, these shoals, cays, and other features and to handle their differences in a constructive manner."

So perhaps we should request the spokesperson to revisit the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea to refresh his memory to that which they pledged to.

And the other aspect is something that we have often stated perhaps in more private discussions. We were taught when we were younger that the ability to come to an agreement sometimes necessitates, or a lot of times necessitates, your putting yourself in the other's shoes. Look at it from the other perspective. If the situation were reversed, would they accept not meddling? If China's and the Philippines' positions were reversed, would they accept the advice that they are now telling countries as small as ours? Thank you.

I think we have delayed our repair of the landing strip that services our community within the Kalayaan Island Groups. The delay of the repair makes all the repairs even that much more expensive down the line. This facility existed before 2002, and that is important because there was an agreement to preserve the status quo starting from 2002.

Now when certain countries say everybody is reclaiming at this point in time, the Philippines vehemently denies that we are reclaiming anything at this point in time, nor are we even repairing that which already existed before these agreements were entered into.

Question: The agreement that you had yesterday with the Japanese prime minister, you talked about the transfer of defense technology. One of the things that wasn't in there that some people had expected was perhaps that you would start talks on a visiting forces agreement.

As Japan extends its defense footprint, there has been talk about them doing maritime patrols in the South China Sea, possibly air patrols, possibly more naval activity there. If they do that, one of the things that perhaps Japan would want would be to be able to refuel aircraft in the Philippines or perhaps use naval bases for supplies or refueling of naval vessels. Is that something that the Philippines would welcome and facilitate for Japan if Japan requested that? And do you need to have a visiting forces agreement for that to happen?

Aquino: It was discussed yesterday during our summit meeting with the Prime Minister that the relevant entities will start discussions leading up to a visiting forces agreement. The visiting forces agreement will have to be passed and approved by our Senate. But we will be starting discussions on all of the details embodied in this.

Currently the Philippines only has two visiting forces agreements, one with the United States of America, and then the most-recently passed has been the one with Australia. We welcome this development. We have only two strategic partners, the US and Japan. And again, as I have stated previously, it does not behoove a good partnership or relationship if you are not able to work at interoperability with the other. An agreement even for humanitarian concerns that exists only in paper will not be effective when there comes a time that you would need to be in coordination and in cooperation or in joint operation with your strategic partners.

So, yes, the Philippines does welcome this development and we will be initiating all of the diplomatic requirements to come up with a visiting forces agreement.

Question: [*speaks in Japanese*] In the case of the Philippines, US forces in the past had their bases at Clark and Subic. But in the 1990s they were removed. Partly because of that impact in the South China Sea, China is becoming extremely active. There are such analyses

by some experts. Your Excellency, you mentioned about strategic partner with regard to your relation with the United States.

Your relationship with the US, like in the past, a mutual defense alliance type of relationship, just like the US-Japan relationship as of now. Is there any possibility to upgrade your bilateral relationship with the US? Do you have any wish to upgrade to a stronger alliance-like relationship? As you know, in the case of Japan, we have the US-Japan alliance, the security alliance. The United States is obliged to defend the Senkaku Islands. The US president did make a public comment, and because of that, the defense policies have been made clear. But in the case of the Philippines, would you seek a stronger defense obligation of the United States and therefore might you wish to upgrade and strengthen your bilateral relationship with the US? Thank you.

Aquino: Precisely, we have this new agreement, the acronym is EDCA, for Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. Our constitution prohibits foreign bases in our country. But having said that, it does allow a rotational presence. So EDCA envisions an increase of rotational presence to foster, again, interoperability and transfer of knowledge and perhaps technology between America and the Philippines.

The Mutual Defense Treaty that exists between the Philippines and America started in 1951. There have been many clarifications as to exactly, for instance, the treaty talks about Pacific.

So recently I questioned whether Pacific refers to that portion of the body of water which is on the eastern coast of the Philippines and where the South China Sea or the West Philippine Sea, is that part of it? And I was told that at the point in 1951, when they referred to Pacific, that is what we now refer to as Asia-Pacific. And I understand exchanges of diplomatic notes throughout the decades have clarified all of these questions.

So I guess EDCA is just a further refinement of a very strong and very long-lasting relationship between the Philippines and America, and we see this as an improvement in making those agreed-upon terms in the various treaties and agreements that much more real. It doesn't exist just in paper but it is an actual ability, again, to render support to each other. And we have to emphasize that EDCA is not directed at any entity. It is just a refinement of a longstanding defense treaty between America and the Philippines. Thank you.

Question: [*speaks in Japanese*] I had one question on your domestic issue. Next year you will have a presidential election and when the president changes in the Philippines it seems that in many cases the policies will dramatically change. For the government of Japan, the Aquino government is a very friendly government for us, so we have a very good relationship, but when the government changes, there could be changes in policy vis-à-vis the economy, as well as vis-à-vis China.

Now for the ruling party, the candidate, Secretary Mar Roxas, according to the private sector survey, the popularity is not that high. The presidential election will occur in one year. At what timing would you designate your successor? Would you be designating your successor other than Secretary Roxas?

On the revision of your Constitution, I understand that they are mostly directed to economic clauses. Would you also be changing political clauses? By doing so, is there a possibility that you will be able to once again run for presidency

Aquino: Thank you for your very, very interesting questions. First things first. Regardless of who replaces me as president next year, Japan is our biggest trading partner. It is always within the top two or top three sources for official development assistance.

Yesterday we agreed with Prime Minister Abe, through JICA, very, very large projects, amongst them the revitalization of a train system that will cover the first province north of Metro Manila all the way to the southern-most portion of Luzon. This undoubtedly will spur quite a lot of economic activity and ease transportation for these communities. So the point I'm trying to raise is that I don't think our people will elect a foolhardy replacement that will suddenly throw away all of these very good economic partnerships that we have with Japan.

Second, when will I endorse? I promised our people that I was hoping the end of June but now it seems that I have to by law deliver a State of the Nation Address which is the last Monday of July, and it will be shortly after that that I will endorse the person to our electorate, our people, as the person I believe who can carry out the continuity.

Now changes in the constitution to allow for a further term. In our history we had a period of martial law. We had Mr. Marcos who first got elected in 1965. He was authorized to have two terms, that would have ended in 1973, and at the point in time when it was about to end, he imposed martial law wherein he proceeded to rule our country up to 1986 when he was ejected by the EDSA revolution.

Certain countries like the South American countries also went through a similar period. In their constitutions, a sitting president has to step down but can rerun after an intervention of a different administration. Perhaps that is something that the Philippines can consider.

So my answer to those who were espousing an extension of terms was, we will undoubtedly have benefits for having a government that will not have to relearn how to govern, but at the same time we open the doors to somebody who might emulate Mr. Marcos and decide not to leave office forever, and I think that is a very serious risk that my country has to avoid. So I ask that we not consider reopening the constitution for term limits. The present joint resolution being worked through by Congress and the Senate deals with economic provisions,

and I have yet to see the contents of the same to see if I can join them in their proposal. I have to study that particular proposal. Thank you.

Question: I have two questions. The first one is, as you mentioned in the Diet, that Japan has gone beyond fulfilling its obligation to heal the wounds of the past, but we know that in your country there are still plenty of comfort women who are waiting for justice and compensation from Japan. As one of them who has been to Tokyo told us that you were very aware of the issue when you were a congressman. How do you view this problem currently?

The second one is regarding your speech in Nikkei. You mentioned that, how do you think your words about Nazi for China? Do you think it hurts Chinese people's feelings? Thank you.

Aquino: Thank you. May I answer the first question? When I was a congressman, and I think it was here that I first heard of the issue of comfort women, our then-foreign secretary, or minister for foreign affairs, I asked him about this particular issue. His response to me was that in an agreement with Japan covering reparations, this issue was supposed to have been tackled as far as the obligations of Japan relative to the Philippines.

Now last night I was asked by our own media and I promised our media to find out all of the efforts that have been done to address the issue of the comfort women. As far as I'm concerned, they are our people and it is our responsibility to care for all of these comfort women, so I would want the review, and as soon as I get home I want the report on all of the efforts that have been done for these compatriots of ours who suffered so unnecessarily during the war.

With regards to hurting the Chinese feelings, we have no intentions of hurting anybody's feelings. In 2011 when I had a state visit to China, we did point out that the relationships between our countries, if you look at it from an economic perspective, we are very, very much in favor of China. For instance, in 2011, if I remember the figures correctly, China would send us 200,000 tourists a year; we sent China 800,000. The Philippines population has just reached 100 million; China's population is 1.3 billion at least. In terms of indirect investment, China provided about 600 billion indirect investment in our economy. The Philippine corporations put in about two-and-a-half billion dollars into the Chinese economy.

And we proposed that stability is a very necessary component for prosperity, and prosperity seems to be the primary need or the primary mission of every government that exists in the world. And the response by then-President Hu Jintao was the disputes in the South China Sea should not be the be-all and end-all of our relationships.

So throughout the years we have not answered, for instance, all of the attacks on the Philippines by the media. We have tried to do our best to de-escalate the situation. We have

promised to abide by international law and that's why we went to arbitration which is found as a means of resolving disputes in UNCLOS.

Scarborough Shoal, which is where one of the major incidents happened between the Philippines and China, is within 120 miles of our coastline and therefore within our exclusive economic zone. Our fishermen today complain that they are no longer being allowed to fish in this particular area. They are not allowed to even shelter in the cays during times of inclement weather and have had to modify their feelings and I have had to ask them to exert more patience because we do not want to escalate the situation. We keep saying in various fora, hopefully we can concentrate our energies and efforts in growing our economies and making our people more prosperous.

So one only has to look at the map, and if, I guess one of the questions we would like to ask the Chinese people were, if you were the Philippines and suddenly you would have one coastline, in effect, your whole west coast is gone, you will be retained with the east coast, would you say, "Yes, please, take half of our waterways"? I don't think any country would willingly do that.

So we are just standing up for our rights. We respect everybody else's rights. We ask that our rights also be respected. Thank you.

Question: Following up from a previous question, could you categorically state whether you would welcome Japanese patrols in the South China Sea?

And a second question. Given Washington's seemingly tougher stance on China in the South China Sea, do you think this is enough? And does this also bring with it a danger of a greater conflict in the region?

Aquino: I would hope that all of us are students of history, and I don't think anybody has been espousing going into violent actions with anybody. All of these comments by various entities, the G7 amongst them, ASEAN, and the European Union, and so on and so forth, gives us in a sense tremendous comfort in that this issue is not being ignored and it's being consciously striven to resolve. That again is I think a very helpful development.

Do we welcome Japanese patrols or joint patrols? These are international waters and beyond the 200 mile – well even the 200-mile economic zone guarantees our rights of transit.

Recently we concluded a delimitation of maritime boundaries with Indonesia. And amongst the things that are now possible with Indonesia is that in the issue of protecting the environment or even anti-piracy operations, the Indonesian navy and the Philippine navy can patrol this very extensive area more thoroughly in the sense that now that we know

precisely where the boundaries are, we can take alternate patrols that will cover these areas closer to 24/7 than what is now possible.

So again, perhaps at some point in time the issues in the South China Sea, West Philippine Sea, and East Sea will be resolved and that will enable everybody to be even more cooperative in addressing humanitarian disaster assistance needs, anti-piracy efforts, and so on and so forth.

So we are hoping that perhaps the model that Indonesia and the Philippines are now doing in this part of the world can serve as an example of what is possible. Thank you.

Aquino: The US's statements.

Question: The US and its tougher stance on China...

Aquino: A tougher stance? I think they have been stating the same position from the get-go. They do not take sides, but at the same time they are calling on all parties to respond, to be responsible, and they are doing their efforts I think to try and de-escalate any potential sources of conflict. They are also perhaps also reminding everybody that there are norms of international behavior agreed upon by all parties or all nations of goodwill. Thank you.

Question: [*speaks in Japanese*] Peace and stability of the Philippines is what I would like to ask about. The Mindanao peace process. Initially there were plans but it seems that there are some problems. The peace process going forward with the MILF, what is your observation, sir?

Related to Mindanao in the Philippines, the extremist Islamic state, what is the threat level, if any, for foreigners, including Japanese nationals. If there is a threat, what might be the countermeasures, please? Thank you.

Aquino: Thank you. If I can answer the last portion of the question first. If you go to the Internet you will find pictures of Filipinos who claim to be members of IS. Our intelligence tells us that a lot of these people who (are real) terrorists were at one point in time claiming to be affiliates of Jemaah Islamiyah and therefore affiliates of Al-Qaeda. If there is a next group next year or two years from now, we think they will claim to be members of that.

Now having said that, there are certain areas that we discourage people from being tourists, but in general the Philippines is safe. We cannot rule out the possibility of lone wolf terrorists. Lone wolf terrorists by definition do not exist in anybody's database. They may be radicalized by the Internet and it's only the person radicalizing them and themselves who know that they have been radicalized. Their knowledge on how to construct bombs also exists in the Internet.

So the Philippines has no greater threat than any other country when it comes to lone wolf terrorists. But having said that, our intelligence services, our law enforcement entities are constantly upgrading their skills, are constantly exchanging information with relevant countries, to be able to minimize further the threat that exists.

So I have to restate: claiming to be IS and being IS are two different things. We think that largely this is more an attempt to gain resources rather to being followers of that ideology.

In the peace process, our House of Representatives, where the current law, the basic law on the Bangsamoro is being tackled, promised us even before the incident in Mamasapano that they expected to pass the measure by June, and they are on schedule. They are now actively engaged in plenary debates. The Senate will follow soon. So we are, as far as I am concerned, and as far as our people are concerned, we still are experiencing what was promised by our legislature as far as their ability to pass this particular measure.

The incident was a bump. It was tragic. But it hasn't stopped the process because at the end of the day all of us Filipinos want peace in Mindanao. Once peace is achieved, and even now that we are just talking about the attainment of this basic law, there is already a growth in economic activity which brings about a lot more opportunities for those who are so disenchanted that made them decide to secede. Now they see the fruits of peace. Once the law is signed, once the new governance is in place, that will accelerate. More and more will rejoin society and will shun away those who are espousing secession or rebellion or brigandry.

So I am pushing both the lower and the upper houses of our legislature to pass the law as soon as possible because this has to be ratified in a plebiscite by our people and to maximize the effects of the new governance prior to our elections next year. Thank you.

Question: [*speaks in Japanese*] I understand that you have left TPP and joined AIIB. What is your rationale behind this?

Aquino: ...the AIIB. I think, I understand from June to December this year, we are being invited, we are considering, we are studying whether or not to join the AIIB, but at this point in time we haven't joined the AIIB.

Question: [*speaks in Japanese*] This year we are celebrating the 70th anniversary of the ending of World War II, so soon Prime Minister Abe will come up with his statement. Whether or not it includes an apology becomes the focus of attention these days.

So President Aquino, do you also expect to have those kinds of expressions be included in Prime Minister Abe's statement? And if an apology is not included, the Filipino people who have been victims in many cases of World War II, what may be their reaction?

Aquino: I would not want to presume as to what the Prime Minister will be doing. My mother had a phrase before, or rather a statement before, one thing she said: she is not soliciting or she does not favor unsolicited advice. So the Prime Minister did not ask me what should be in his statement and perhaps I shouldn't be talking about what his statement should be. Having said that, he has done right in so many instances, in so many different fora, we expect that he will do right again by this statement on the commemoration of the ending of the war, of the 70th commemoration of the ending of World War II.

Question: [*speaks in Japanese*] It is a follow-up question on AIIB. ASEAN, including the Philippines, it seems that it intends to join, but has not yet decided, because matters like governance and structure of AIIB need to be considered. Regarding the format of AIIB, what are the concerns or expectations?

Aquino: The Philippines, like many other countries, needs a lot of infrastructure, and having access to a facility that will accelerate our attainment of the infrastructure is desirable.

Having said that, shall we say that there has been an experience between China and the Philippines with regards to a loan that did not produce anticipated results. So we are very, we are very curious about the governance issue. We would like to see certainty that the decisions in evaluating projects and the conditions of undertaking loans will be insulated from politics. That I think is very essential because, at the end of the day, if we enter into an agreement it should be clearly done to the benefit of our people and not put them in a situation that might make the situation worse.

So given our recent past experience, we really have to be very thorough in our study so as to ensure that our people are getting the best possible service that we pledge to them.

Question: [*speaks in Japanese*] I have a question on the public security issue. Japan and the Philippines now have deepened exchanges, but for the last year, in 12 months, seven Japanese have been killed in the Philippines. Do you have any policy to drastically change your public security? Do you have any plan to strengthen your gun regulations?

Aquino: That is news to me that seven Japanese were killed last year. I am not aware of this particular situation. I will have to consult my Secretary of the Interior and Local Government and the Chief of the Philippine National Police. I am supposed to have been apprised of all important developments within the country. If we can secure your card and we will give you an answer by tomorrow as to exactly what the developments are.

But having said that, the Secretary of the Interior and Local Government has just shown me statistics wherein there is a very dramatic reduction in crime statistics for the Philippines, especially in the national capital region. There is a new law in place with regards to gun ownership that is supposed to address all of the deficiencies of the older law. It's supposed to

make penalties even harder. It's supposed to ensure that enforcement of the relevant gun laws is more efficient so as to prevent them from going into the hands of people who are not authorized to do so.

We admit that there are kidnapping problems, for instance, for some Europeans, some Koreans, some Malaysians. That is in my knowledge base right now. I am curious as to the Japanese, and I will, hopefully I will even have information before I leave Japan because this is something really new to me. And again, if we can have your business card so we can give you a reply at the latest by tomorrow.

Question: My question is related to the history of war. You have been quite forgiving towards Japan, towards what it was doing in World War II, but Japan's relations with East Asian neighbors are not still very good, 70 years after the war. Is there any advice you can give to Japan to resolve this rift? Thank you.

Aquino: Thank you. I guess I am middle aged. We Asians are normally reserved giving advice to those who are lot elder than us. But having said that, there is a movie I saw as a young man, starring Richard Burton and Richard Harris, called *The Wild Geese*, and in this story there is a band of mercenaries who were rescuing a deposed popular president in an African country. And in one scene an actor by the name of Hardy Krüger, who portrayed a South African citizen, was tasked to carry this black deposed popular African president. And he used the term that was nothing to him but symptomatic of the apartheid regime, and at the post they had the discussion. The deposed African president said to him, "We have to forgive you about the past, you have to forgive us about the present, or together we have no future." And that made a mark on me when I was in my teens.

And of course I viewed all of the films with regard to Japan's atrocities in World War II, especially those made during the war where they got really, a lot of bias happened. As we grow older we get to see the other side of the coin, and perhaps they were not as – how shall I put it – perhaps the portrayal was too extreme in certain instances and unwarranted. Perhaps they are not the absolute villains that were portrayed right after the war. And perhaps we abused them in a sense after the war, being victors.

Now having said that, I think everybody wants to in a sense move forward. And all I'm saying is in the Philippine example, they had obligations to us in the form of reparations, which they paid, if I understand correctly, have paid completely.

Beyond the reparations, they have constantly helped us to address our concerns, whether it's disaster preparedness, whether it's risk reduction for disasters, whether it's helping our countrymen in the Bangsamoro prepare, since 2006, to prepare for more economic opportunities coming their way. Currently, after the Great Eastern Earthquake here, we had an earthquake inventory in the Philippines. We found out that some our infrastructure or a

lot of our infrastructure were no longer compliant with the building code. Two major bridges in the national capital region are going to be funded with Japanese assistance, so the safety of our people is enhanced. It has been done without too much fanfare. It has been done consistently. It has been done even when their partners in our government were less than scrupulous and honest.

So there were atrocities done in the Philippines, and at the same time, after that there is a lot of kindness also done. And we want to foster even more of this kindness and this good relationship between the countries because we really believe that if we partner towards the good, then we can advance to the state that we want to get to sooner rather than later. And that seems to be my duty to my people. And I think a lot of our people also see that.

So for 59 years since we established or reestablished the relationship, since we established relations with Japan, they have been improving as their capacities have been improving, as their ability to be friends or to demonstrate their friendship and support, and regardless of the conditions emanating at home. When Haiyan struck, I am sure they were in the first five to declare and send assistance. About 1,000 of their Self Defense Forces were sent right away. America of course was also there. Indonesia. In fact, I think they were the first three. Probably the first five would include New Zealand and Australia. And I apologize if I made a mistake in the chronology but there was so much help.

So again, going back, it's good to remember the past, good to remember what it was when the relationships were not positive. Then perhaps we should also remember that we should do everything we can to avoid having a repeat of that tragedy, and if the relationship has transformed into one of support and friendship, doesn't it behoove us to make sure that it continues on that track and betters everybody's lives? Thank you.

Moderator: [*speaks in Japanese*] Thank you very much. I believe we have run out of time so I would like to have to do away with all the other questions.

His Excellency has given his signature and the message whilst he was in the waiting room, so let me introduce what he has written.

[*speaks in English*]...The difficulties of life evaporates amidst the support of true, loyal, and dependable friends. So this is the message from His Excellency.

Now, 29 years ago, let me show you the message from his mother, President Corazon Aquino. This was her message when she was here at the Press Club.

In pain and sorrow
I have never been alone
Many thanks, dear Lord