



Chapter 17

CHINA AND THE PHILIPPINES: JOINING HANDS TO OVERCOME DISRUPTIONS AND CHALLENGES IN THE FAST CHANGING WORLD*

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It is my delight to join you online to talk about building China-Philippines relations against the backdrop of COVID-19.

First and foremost, I would like to congratulate you on convening this very timely and meaningful webinar under the current situation. I would also take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the experts and scholars who have long been dedicated to the China-Philippines relations.

China and the Philippines are close neighbors across the sea, sharing time-honored bonds of kinship and friendship. Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping and President Duterte, China-Philippines relations have been moving along the upward trajectory and ushering in the New Golden Age. Facing the

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common challenge of the COVID-19, both countries have spared no efforts to support and assist each other, nurturing a closer partnership in the new era.

Last month, our two leaders spoke on the phone to celebrate the 45th anniversary of our diplomatic relations, providing renewed strategic guidance and political impetus to the growth of bilateral relations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has become a global crisis with far reaching impact. The people's health and lives are under grave threat and the global economy has plunged into a deep recession. Globalization and regional cooperation are facing grave challenges. On top of that, some superpower is wantonly bossing around to stir up rivalry and geopolitical tensions. In light of the pandemic and evolving regional situation, we have to address arising challenges to further grow China-Philippines relations.

Firstly, the lingering maritime dispute. Properly handling the issue and maintaining peace and stability in the South China Sea bear on the long term and sustainable development of bilateral relations.

Secondly, the alarming external disruptions. Glutted with cold-war mentality, some superpower is instigating the containment and oppression of China in every possible way, trying to sow discord among regional countries, and even forcing them to choose sides. Under such pressure and complicated circumstances, it takes the Philippines strategic insight and strong will to uphold its independent foreign policy.

Thirdly, the ailing public sentiments on China. Driven by ulterior political motives, some Philippine politicians keep on slandering China-Philippines relations and whipping up hostility against China. Mutual understanding and good faith between our peoples have to be further enhanced.

In the fast changing world, China and the Philippines are bound to navigate through all these disruptions and challenges

with concerted efforts. We should earnestly pull together in the following key aspects:

- Firstly, we should continuously deepen good neighborliness and friendship despite external disruptions. The important consensus reached between President Xi Jinping and President Duterte, such as setting aside maritime disputes, managing the situation through bilateral consultations and enhancing dialogue and cooperation, have to be vigorously implemented by both sides, so that the hard-won sound momentum of bilateral relations could be well preserved and enhanced.
- Secondly, we should continue to manage maritime disputes through friendly dialogue and consultations, including the Bilateral Consultation Mechanism (BCM) and advancing the consultation on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC). As the Honorable Secretary of Foreign Affairs Locsin said, the South China Sea issue is not the sum total of China-Philippines relations; it is just a little pebble on the avenue leading to our mutually beneficial economic progress, and we mustn't stumble over the little pebble.
- Thirdly, we should not allow external powers to roil the waters in the South China Sea, or waver our commitment to pursuance of independent foreign policy and China-Philippines friendly relations. The Philippines' future will not float in anywhere but will be deeply rooted in its own national development, in a stable and amicable neighborhood, and in a peaceful and prosperous Asian region.
- Fourthly, we should explore new opportunities for common development under the new normal and in the post-pandemic era. As one of the first countries to stem the spread of the COVID-19, China has steadily revived economy. In

the second quarter this year, China's gross domestic product expanded by 3.2 percent year-on-year, making it the first major economy bouncing back to growth so far.

China will continue to engage with the Philippines in joint COVID-19 prevention and control and exchange experience on resumption of work and production. We should step up efforts for the establishment of a "fast lane" for urgently needed personnel exchanges and "green corridor" for logistics, so as to ensure stable industrial and supply chains.

China stands ready to continue to synergize the Belt and Road Initiative and Build, Build, Build program and accelerate the implementation of cooperation projects to stimulate economic recovery and growth of the Philippines. Seizing the new opportunities highlighted amid the pandemic, we need to strengthen such digital economic cooperation areas as 5G, big data, and artificial intelligence to foster new growth drivers for bilateral cooperation.

Last but not the least, we should strengthen extensive interactions and exchanges between political parties, congress, local governments, media and think tanks of our two countries, to foster a favorable atmosphere for the China-Philippines relationship to grow from strength to strength.

Under the still raging pandemic crisis and the profound changes, the future of our two peoples are ever more intertwined. We should and we will heal, recover, and grow as one. It is with this hope that I look forward to hearing your insightful input and discussions. Thank you and *mabuhay!*