

Lunch Event with Australian FM Julie Bishop
“Change and Uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific – Strategic
Challenges and Opportunities for Australia
and the Philippines”
March 16, 2017, Rigodon Ballroom, Manila Peninsula

Secretary Andanar and members of government, Excellencies and members of the diplomatic corps, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

It is indeed an honor and a privilege to introduce a true and precious friend. Having had the incredible opportunity to work with her during my term as Philippine Foreign Secretary, it is a joy to see the Australian Foreign Minister once again and to recall with respect and admiration her being a diplomat of the highest order.

As a Foreign Minister par excellence, she is known for having overseen the single largest expansion of Australia’s overseas diplomatic presence in 40 years, and for having strengthened Australia’s key strategic and economic relationships.

In terms of Philippines-Australia relations, her strong leadership and deep commitment has resulted in the elevation of bilateral relations to a Comprehensive Partnership in 2015. The frequency of our high level exchanges and the depth of our cooperation in areas of foreign affairs, defense, education and development cooperation, among others, have strengthened the steadfast and enduring nature of our partnership.

I understand that this is the Honorable Foreign Minister’s fourth visit to the Philippines which included her compassionate presence and very significant Australian support for those afflicted by typhoon Yolanda in Tacloban.

At every opportunity, she has made immense contributions to peace and security in the Asia Pacific region. She continues to fearlessly advocate for the rule of law, international rights to freedom of navigation and over flight and the peaceful resolution

of disputes in the South China Sea. In regional fora, she has made strong and unequivocal statements supporting the Philippines initiation of arbitral proceedings on the South China Sea issues in order to provide greater clarity on maritime entitlements and subsequently in upholding that the decision of the arbitral tribunal is binding to the parties.

She has also been instrumental in creating greater awareness globally on the importance of the arbitral award and its contribution to the implementation of international law. There remain many challenges in the South China Sea, yet we are encouraged that we have like-minded friends like Australia who share our democratic values and our conviction about the need to uphold the rule of law as the bedrock of peace, order and stability in our world.

The Australian Foreign Minister has consistently supported the peace process in Mindanao. Australian development assistance has been funding capacity building and institutional development in Mindanao.

With Australia being the Philippines' fifth largest development partner and second largest source of development grants as of September, 2016, Australian support has been far reaching and has been producing vast results especially in the education sector.

She has moreover been a driving force behind Australia's reinvigorated engagement with ASEAN and the rest of the Asia Pacific region. With Australia's initiative of a Women's Business Forum in Manila as part of the celebration of 50th Anniversary of ASEAN, both the Philippines and Australia will once again be working closely together in empowering women.

As the first female Foreign Minister of Australia, she has been an outstanding role model for young women around the world and she has never failed to support women leadership and advancement of women in society.

We deeply thank our dear friend for accepting our invitation and we look forward to her remarks which will encourage even more thought-provoking discussions on how we can address the many regional issues we all face today.

Please join me, ladies and gentlemen, in welcoming the Honorable Foreign Minister Julie Bishop.