

Int'l community watching China's next move after sea ruling

By **ROY C. MABASA**

TOKYO, Japan – The Philippines should not fear that it is alone in its effort to uphold the rule of law in its territorial dispute with China over parts of the contentious South

China Sea, according to a renowned Japanese foreign policy expert.

“You have a lot of friends on your side,” Shingo Yamagami, acting Director General of the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA), told Manila Bulletin in ▶ 8

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an exclusive interview in the Japanese capital. “Frankly, I believe the international community is with you.”

Yamagami said there is none more encouraging, or which affords a clearer indication of the international community's support to the Philippines on this issue than the recent statement issued by the foreign ministers of the Group of Seven (G7) advanced democracies and later endorsed by the leaders of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

In their Statement on Maritime Security issued in Hiroshima last April 11, the G7 foreign ministers called on all states to pursue the peaceful management and settlement of maritime disputes in good faith and in accordance with international law, through applicable internationally recognized legal dispute settlement mechanisms, including arbitration.

Strong support

The G7 foreign ministers also recog-

nize that the use of such mechanisms is consistent with the maintenance and enhancement of the international order based upon the rule of law, and to fully implement any decision rendered by the relevant courts and tribunals which are binding on them, as provided under UNCLOS.

“In a statement made by G7 leaders and foreign ministers, it is not the support but what could be the support they can provide,” Yamagami pointed out. “As far as I know, that is the strongest worded, and the most unambiguous support provided by the G7 vis-a-vis the effort by the Philippine government.”

He also expressed his admiration to the Philippine government and the Filipino people for their strong desire to resolve the issue in a peaceful manner.

“I am convinced that the role played by the Philippine government has been remarkable,” said Yamagami, whose area of expertise include international politics and security. “The Philippine

legal team did a marvelous job. They deserve overwhelming support and praise because they aspire to try to solve the issue peacefully in accordance with the dispute settlement mechanism provided for in the treaty for which both China and the Philippines are signatories – the UNCLOS.”

Tempered victory

Yamagami said when he visited Manila last month, he was very much impressed by the calm and collected response of the Filipinos to the widely anticipated decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the territorial dispute case brought before it by the Philippines in 2013 against China.

“I saw that there was no euphoria on the part of the Filipinos,” Yamagami noted. “Rather their response was very much restrained and they're cool

headed. I was very much impressed by that. That was more than encouraging to me.”

According to the former ranking official of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as far as Japan is concerned, the South China Sea dispute between the Philippines and China is not merely a bilateral issue but more importantly an issue of worldwide concern on whether the international community could maintain liberal order.

“What we are witnessing is the great task on how to maintain a liberal order – regional as well as international order – in which the rule of law plays the pre-eminent role,” said Yamagami who also has a wide experience in legal and treaty affairs. “The most important aspect of this issue is how to incorporate this emerging power into a rules-based

society.”

China's move

“In this regard, how China will respond to this award is a very important litmus test in order to see their will and capacity to become a responsible member of the international community,” he added. “What is requiring attention is the response on the part of Beijing, not on the part of Manila.”

Founded in 1959, JIIA is a Japanese policy think-tank focused on foreign affairs and security issues. In addition to a wide range of research projects, the institute promotes dialogues and joint studies with other institutions and experts at home and abroad, examines Japanese foreign policy and makes proposals to the government, and disseminates information on international relations to the public.