

President Wu Shicun's Opening Remarks at the 42nd Annual Conference of the COLP

This is a speech of President Wu Shicun at the 42nd Annual Conference of the Center for Oceans Law & Policy University of Virginia School of Law themed “Cooperation and Engagement in the Asia Pacific Region”, which was held on 24-25 May 2018 in Beijing, China. This conference is co-organized by NISCSS, Center for Oceans Law and Policy (COLP) of University of Virginia School of Law, the Chinese Society of International Law and Korea Maritime Institute.

Good morning, dear friends. It’s my great pleasure to welcome you all to Beijing, on behalf of the organizing committee, particularly our two local hosts, the National Institute for South China Sea Studies, and Chinese Society of International Law. I would like to congratulate the Center for Oceans Law and Policy, University of Virginia School of Law for having successfully convened forty-one annual conferences on the law of the sea. And I am sure, with the joint efforts from the core organizers and additional sponsors, whose names are all listed on the conference brochure, this 42nd annual conference, themed as “cooperation and engagement in the Asia Pacific Region” will be yet another success.

When Dr. Myron Nordquist proposed to me last May to co-organize this event in China, we had a discussion about what would be the best theme for this conference. We came to the conclusion that we should focus on the Asia Pacific, which encompasses many important maritime regions, and harbors promising opportunities for maritime cooperation and engagement. These opportunities range from protection and preservation of the marine

environment, straits governance, shipping, search and rescue, sustainable fisheries, among many others. We look forward to hearing your views on these topics in the coming days.

In light of this theme, I would like to share with you my humble thoughts on how to promote maritime cooperation in this region, with a focus on building a strong economic cooperation framework for the greater South China Sea. This process involves both the littoral states and other states in and beyond the region.

2018 marks the 15th anniversary of the strategic partnership between China and ASEAN, which provides an important opportunity for the two sides to strengthen their relationship. The South China Sea is an integral part of the Maritime Silk Road. An economic cooperation framework for the South China Sea would contribute to the building of a community of a shared future for China and other littoral states.

An inclusive and step-by-step approach to achieve economic cooperation would be to engage the South China Sea countries, and countries beyond the region. This process could start with some promising industries and projects in which cooperation has already begun, such as maritime and air connectivity, port economy, maritime tourism, fishery and aquatic farming, and maritime disaster prevention and mitigation.

Track-2 or track-1.5 consultation mechanisms should be established, such as an expert forum on the economic cooperation framework of the South China Sea. This would provide intellectual support for cooperation and decision-making at the government level. Pilot projects should be established that can deliver concrete benefits for all countries involved, and provide a model for practical cooperation in the South China Sea. On the basis of project implementation and policy support, this vision of an economic cooperation framework of the South China Sea could be formally

put forward at a leaders' summit or via the ministerial consultation mechanism.

Hainan province, which is home to China's only provincial-level special economic zone, will have an important role to play in the economic cooperation framework for the South China Sea. In April 2018, Hainan was granted permission by the Chinese government to establish a free trade harbor, much like Hong Kong and Singapore. Hainan's "special advantages" – including its status as China's biggest special economic zone, its geography and "best ecological environment" make it an ideal testing ground for economic reforms. By accelerating the building of an open economy, advancing international industrial cooperation, and enhancing the development of service businesses, the province will become a national pilot program for further integration into the global economy. Through projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative, Hainan will expand its influence in the global community and establish a "pan South China Sea tourism economy cooperation rim".

With that, I want to wish us all a highly successful and productive conference. Thank you.