

**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP**  
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER  
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE

**THE HON MINORU KIHARA**  
MINISTER OF DEFENSE

**THE HON GILBERTO C. TEODORO JR.**  
SECRETARY OF NATIONAL DEFENSE

**THE HON LLOYD JAMES AUSTIN III**  
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

## **JOINT STATEMENT**

### **AUSTRALIA-JAPAN-PHILIPPINES-UNITED STATES MARITIME COOPERATIVE ACTIVITY**

Australia, Japan, the Philippines, and the United States uphold the right to freedom of navigation and overflight, and respect for maritime rights under international law, reflected in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Demonstrating our collective commitment to strengthen regional and international cooperation in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific, our combined defense/armed forces will conduct a Maritime Cooperative Activity within the Philippine Exclusive Economic Zone on April 7, 2024.

The Maritime Cooperative Activity will be conducted by naval/maritime and air force units in a manner that is consistent with international law as well as domestic laws and rules of respective nations, and with due regard to the safety of navigation and the rights and interests of other states. It will also demonstrate professional interactions among naval/maritime and air forces. Ultimately, the Maritime Cooperative Activity will strengthen the interoperability of our defense/armed forces doctrines, tactics, techniques, and procedures.

We stand with all nations in safeguarding the international order – based on the rule of law – that is the foundation for a peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific region. Our four nations reaffirm the position regarding the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Tribunal Award as a final and legally binding decision on the parties to the dispute.

**Quotes attributable to Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon. Richard Marles MP:**

*“Australia is committed to working with our partners to uphold the global rules-based order.*

*“Australia has consistently emphasised the importance for all states to be able to exercise rights and freedoms, including freedom of navigation, in a manner consistent with international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.*

*“This Maritime Cooperative Activity with our partners; the Philippines, Japan and the United States demonstrates our unwavering commitment to working together to maintain a peaceful, stable and prosperous region.”*

**Quotes attributable to Minister, the Hon. Kihara Minoru:**

*“Guided by the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), Japan has the vital importance of striving to realize a free and open international order based on the rule of law and securing regional peace and stability in cooperation with its ally, like-minded countries and others. Japan believes that the issue concerning the South China Sea is directly related to the peace and stability of the region and is a legitimate concern of the international community including Japan, Australia, the Philippines, and the United States, and thus Japan opposes any unilateral changes to the status quo by force, such attempts as well as any actions that increase tensions in the South China Sea.”*

**Quotes attributable to Secretary of National Defense, the Hon Gilberto C. Teodoro Jr.:**

*“The Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Concept (CADC) that we are implementing includes strengthening and deepening cooperation and interoperability with all nations, big and small, to maintain regional peace and stability as well as good order at sea based on international law, principally UNCLOS. The series of bilateral and multilateral MCA is a step in building our country’s capacity for individual and collective self-defense. This first in a series of activities demonstrates the enduring friendship and partnership among the peace-loving peoples of the Philippines, United States, Australia, and Japan.”*

**Quotes attributable to Secretary of Defense, the Hon. Lloyd James Austin:**

*“Every country should be free to conduct lawful air and maritime operations. These activities with our allies Australia, Japan, and the Philippines underscore our shared commitment to ensuring that all countries are free to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows. Our operations together support peace and stability at the heart of our shared vision for a free and open region.”*

**-- APRIL 2024**