CHINA, ASEAN TO BEGIN CONSULTATION ON CODE OF CONDUCT IN SOUTH CHINA SEA IN MARCH

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14.02.2018

Xinhua, 2018-02-13

China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will start consultation on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea in early March, according to a consultative meeting between China and the Philippines on Tuesday.

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou and Philippine Foreign Undersecretary Enrique Manalo held the second meeting of the Bilateral Consultation Mechanism on the South China Sea (BCM) in Manila on Tuesday.

"With the objective of maintaining and promoting peace and stability in the region, both sides discussed ways to manage and prevent incidents at sea, promote dialogue and cooperation on maritime issues, and enhance mutual trust and confidence," said a statement issued after the one-day meeting, adding they "had a positive, fruitful and productive meeting."

The technical working groups identified a number of possible cooperative initiatives that can be explored in the future, with both sides reaffirming that contentious maritime issues are not the sum total of the China-Philippines relationship.

"Both sides reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace and stability, freedom of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea, freedom of international commerce and other peaceful uses of the sea, addressing territorial and jurisdictional disputes by peaceful means, without resorting to the threat or use of force, through friendly consultations and negotiations by sovereign states directly concerned, in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations and the 1982 UNCLOS," the statement said.

UNCLOS refers to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

It said both sides also agreed to continue discussions on confidence-building measures to increase mutual trust and confidence, and exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities in the South China Sea that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability.

"There were intensive discussions on mutually beneficial joint initiatives and consensus on the convening of technical working groups in the areas of fisheries, oil and gas, marine scientific research and marine environmental protection, and political security, in the framework of the BCM," it said.

Both sides highlighted the importance of the BCM as a consultation mechanism that would continue to contribute to the stable growth of bilateral relations.

Taking off from the discussions during the inaugural meeting of the BCM in May 2017 in China's southwestern city of Guiyang, it said both sides had a frank, cordial exchange of views on issues of concern on the South China Sea during the meeting.

Both sides "had productive exchange of views on ways to strengthen cooperation in areas such as marine environmental protection, fisheries, marine scientific research, and oil and gas, without prejudice to their respective positions on sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction."

The third meeting of the BCM will be held in China in the second half of 2018.

Kaynak/Source: