

ARLMUN IV

Association of Southeast Asian Nations
(ASEAN)



Topic I: South China Sea Conflict
Topic II: Rising Sea Levels

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Co-Chair: Arya Chudiwale

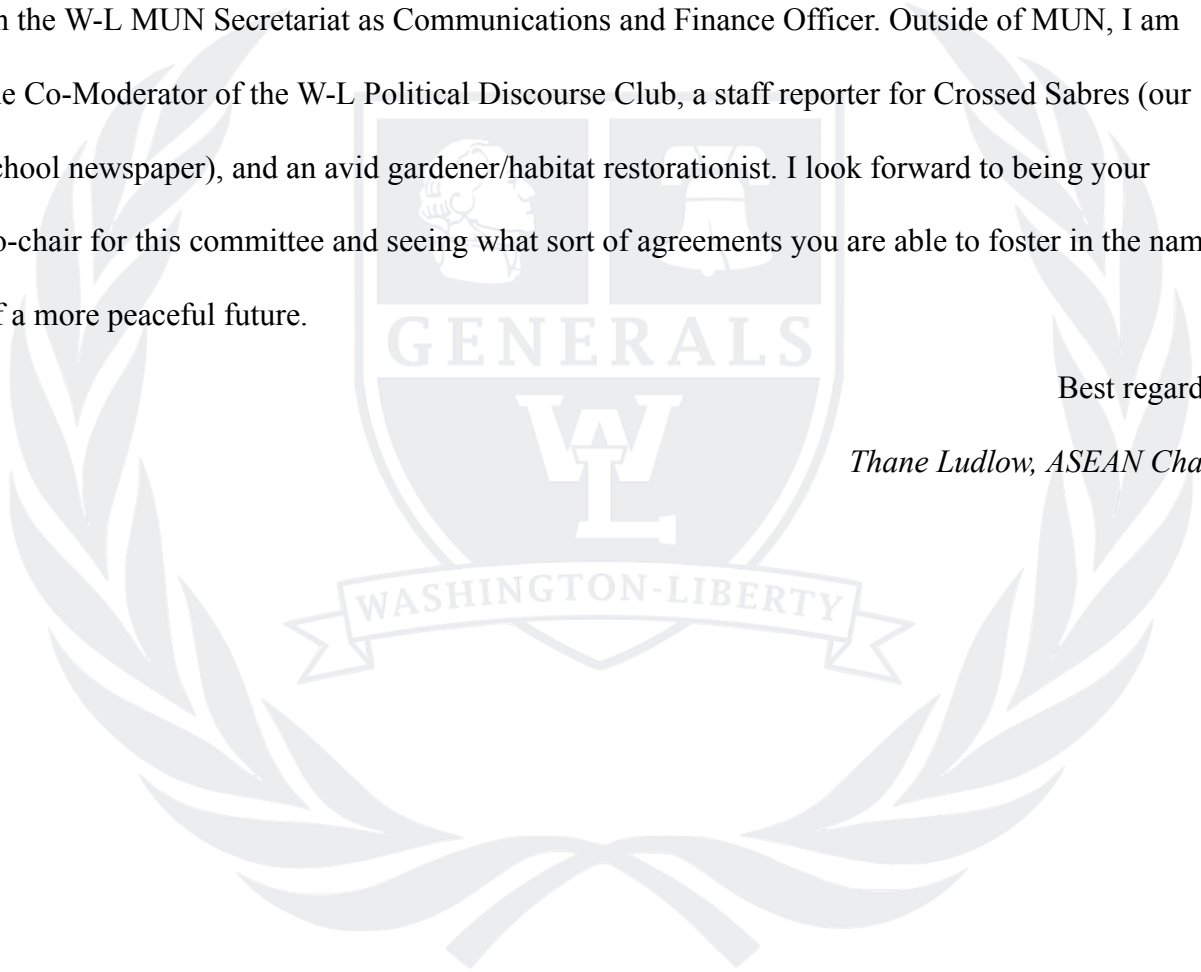
Letter From the Chair

Hello Delegates,

My name is Thane Ludlow and I will be your chair for the ASEAN committee at ARLMUN IV. I am currently a senior at Washington-Liberty High School and am enrolled in the full IB program. When it comes to Model UN, I have participated in roughly 20 conferences and currently serve on the W-L MUN Secretariat as Communications and Finance Officer. Outside of MUN, I am the Co-Moderator of the W-L Political Discourse Club, a staff reporter for Crossed Sabres (our school newspaper), and an avid gardener/habitat restorationist. I look forward to being your co-chair for this committee and seeing what sort of agreements you are able to foster in the name of a more peaceful future.

Best regards,

Thane Ludlow, ASEAN Chair



Topic One: The Conflict in the South China Sea

Introduction:

The South China Sea is a significant geographical region for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it is the site of many of the world's major shipping lanes. Most trade through the Pacific Ocean travels through this sea ("South China Sea perspectives: Japan."). Additionally, several economically important resources are found in abundance in these waters. This includes an abundance of fish and other aquatic life, much of it predestined to be fished extensively by local communities. On a more global scale, the South China Sea contains large quantities of oil and gasses that lie beneath its seafloor - hence the sea's invaluable strategic benefit (Holt).

Background:

After the end of WWII in 1945, Japan lost control over most of its overseas territories outside of the Japanese archipelago (Vox). By 1949, the People's Republic of China had taken the opportunity to claim the geographically and economically profitable South China Sea with the disputed "Nine-Dash Line". This "Nine-Dash Line" covers the majority of the South China Sea; encompassing over 90% of its surface area and overlapping with the claims of multiple other countries in Southeast Asia including Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

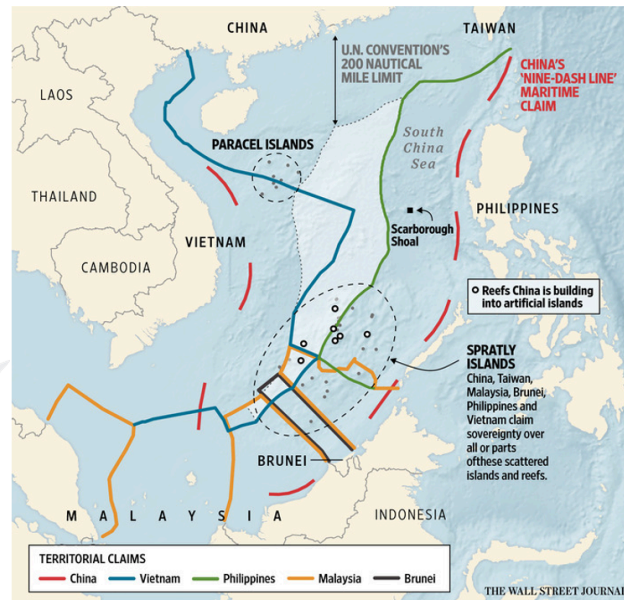


Figure 1: China's South China Sea Claims (2009): Black, Benjamin at:

<https://sites.psu.edu/jlia/the-south-china-sea-disputes-a-clash-of-international-law-and-historical-claims/>

The United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea defined the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of a country as 200 nautical miles off its archipelagic baseline where that country has sovereignty and exclusive access to the area's economic resources (UNCLOS). When this was defined, the People's Republic of China had claimed the "Nine-Dash Line" as legitimate although it encroached on the sovereign waters of five other Southeast Asian nations. To solidify its claim, the People's Republic of China has been constructing artificial islands within its alleged claims. The islands were constructed on sandbars and reefs with dredged material added on top of the raised areas. Located within the Spratly Islands at the geographic center of the South China Sea and the Paracel Islands, they are placed to extend China's EEZ as a further backup to their claim within the "Nine-Dash Line" (Vox). One such example is Fiery Cross

Island which, in 2014, was a reef and by 2016 was a fully equipped Chinese military installation that includes an airfield, fighter aircraft, anti-air missiles and jamming equipment.

In 2015, the U.S. destroyer U.S.S Lassen sailed through the disputed territory close to another one of China's military bases, Subi Reef as an indirect check to China's power (Vox). In retaliation, a People's Liberation Army Navy destroyer and patrol boat followed the destroyer out of the Spratly Islands as a warning for the United States to not interfere, increasing US-China tensions.

In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague ruled in favor of the Philippines' claims of sovereignty within their EEZ which was also claimed by China (Mensah). China claims they have a historic right to the territory tracing back to exploration under Admiral Zheng He and others in the 15th century although they did not send a representative to the proceedings (Black; Mensah). China has stated that "it will neither accept nor participate in the arbitration unilaterally initiated by the Philippines" and will continue using the "Nine-Dash Line". However, the Hague has responded that the "absence of a party or failure of a party to defend its case shall not constitute a bar to the proceedings" (Permanent Court of Arbitration).

Current Situation:

Military tensions are rising in the region, with several nations moving to expand control and power within the region. Vietnam has fortified some of its outposts, filling in the sea around some of the islands in the Spratlys similar to China's artificial islands ("Vietnam in big push to expand South China Sea outposts - U.S. think tank"). Japan has planned to significantly boost its military prowess, expanding its defense to degrees not seen since World War II. These defenses, approved in direct response to rising aggressions, would be capable of striking and

counterstriking were Japan attacked (Brad Lendon, Wayne Chang, Emiko Jozuka, Junko Ogura). While it has no direct claim to territory within the South China Sea, Japan's economy depends on the sea lanes and trade that runs through the region, and the hostilities between neighboring nations may also threaten Japan ("South China Sea perspectives: Japan"). All other nations that lay claim to territory have opposed China's claims in varying degrees of aggression. However, more northern or less affected nations such as South Korea have maintained a mostly neutral stance on the issue (Holt). China itself has constructed and militarized at least three artificial islands, and has been asserting power through military vessels which the government has claimed are for fishing (Heijmans). China has also asserted that the development of these military bases is within its rights and that it acts in response to the threat of the United States' military near its waters ("China has fully militarized three islands in the South China Sea, US admiral says").

China and the Philippines have entered the early phases of discussion on most issues presented by the disputes. The primary disagreements that are being discussed comprise fishing, oil reserves, and the prevention of larger conflicts between the two nations (Ip). The presidents of both countries, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Xi Jinping, each seem to profess optimism and hope for peace. The two nations have discussed increased trade and collaboration on regional activities, and China has agreed to provide financial and infrastructural aid to the Philippines. However, the disagreements over territorial claims remain a major conflict in continuing discussions (Lo).

Several key economic resources are also a factor in the territorial claims. Fishing vessels from many Southeast Asian nations have been restricted from their normal fishing grounds due to the increased military presence (Holt). China has already forced fishing vessels from its claimed waters (both the disputed and undisputed ones), in a manner that contributes

significantly to overfishing in regions outside its recognized borders. This specific occurrence is already causing Vietnamese fishers to be pushed into Indonesia and Malaysia's territorial waters. The whole of Southeast Asia is reliant on the region's fishing, thus the loss of aquatic life as a result of overfishing would likely throw the entire region into food insecurity ("South China Sea"). In addition to this, the Philippines have broken an agreement to cooperate with Vietnam and China in exploring the gas and oil reserves in the South China Sea, an action which the Permanent Court of Arbitration rules as unconstitutional for other nations to access resources under their sovereignty. This increases instability, as these resources have considerable strategic value, and there is currently an agreement with China dictating access to them (Holt).

Southeast Asia relies in many ways upon their access to the South China Sea. Should this regional conflict descend into violence, it may very well force the involvement of nearby nations, while the loss of sea trade through the South China Sea would prove devastating to the global economy.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. What is your country's position on the South China Sea territorial dispute? Does it simply view the claims as legal or illegal, or is it more complex and dependent on the specific disputed territory?*
- 2. How does the South China Sea dispute affect your country's interests and economic opportunities?*
- 3. Is it necessary to take a stance against China through the use of the United Nations' resources and other sanctions for the South China Sea dispute? If so, how?*

4. *How could territorial claims in the South China Sea be altered to meet the requirements of international maritime territorial possession law and achieve a peaceful solution?*



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Topic Two: The Effect of Rising Sea Levels

Introduction:

Due to rising sea levels, Southeast Asia is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Important cities such as Jakarta, Ho Chi Minh City, and Bangkok, among others, are consistently flooded and parts of these cities are expected to be underwater by 2050 (Southern). Retreating shorelines will affect population centers and the homes of more than four hundred thousand Southeast Asians (World Economic Forum). This region has historically been important and has been under the spotlight since the growth of the importance of the spice islands in the 16th century, and as a global hub of maritime trade. Because of the threat of lost lives and destruction of urban areas, and economic threat, the issue of rising sea levels and climate change is turning into a crisis for many in Southeast Asia and across much of the global seaboard.

Background:

The relationship between climate change and rising sea levels is important to note to achieve a complete understanding of the geopolitical crisis in Southeast Asia. Due to the heating of the earth, major ice formations including massive western ice sheets in Antarctica are rapidly melting (Vox). Directly corresponding with the rising temperatures estimated at 1.1°C since 1880, global sea levels have risen 21-24 centimeters in the same period (Lindsey; NASA). Currently, sea levels are rising at a rate of 3.0-3.5 mm a year, but this is expected to accelerate and have risen to approximately 0.5-2.4 meters by 2100 (NOAA). The following graph shows a depiction of those in Southeast Asia that are threatened by rising sea levels. Much of the region is projected to fall under the new projected sea level, as highlighted in red.

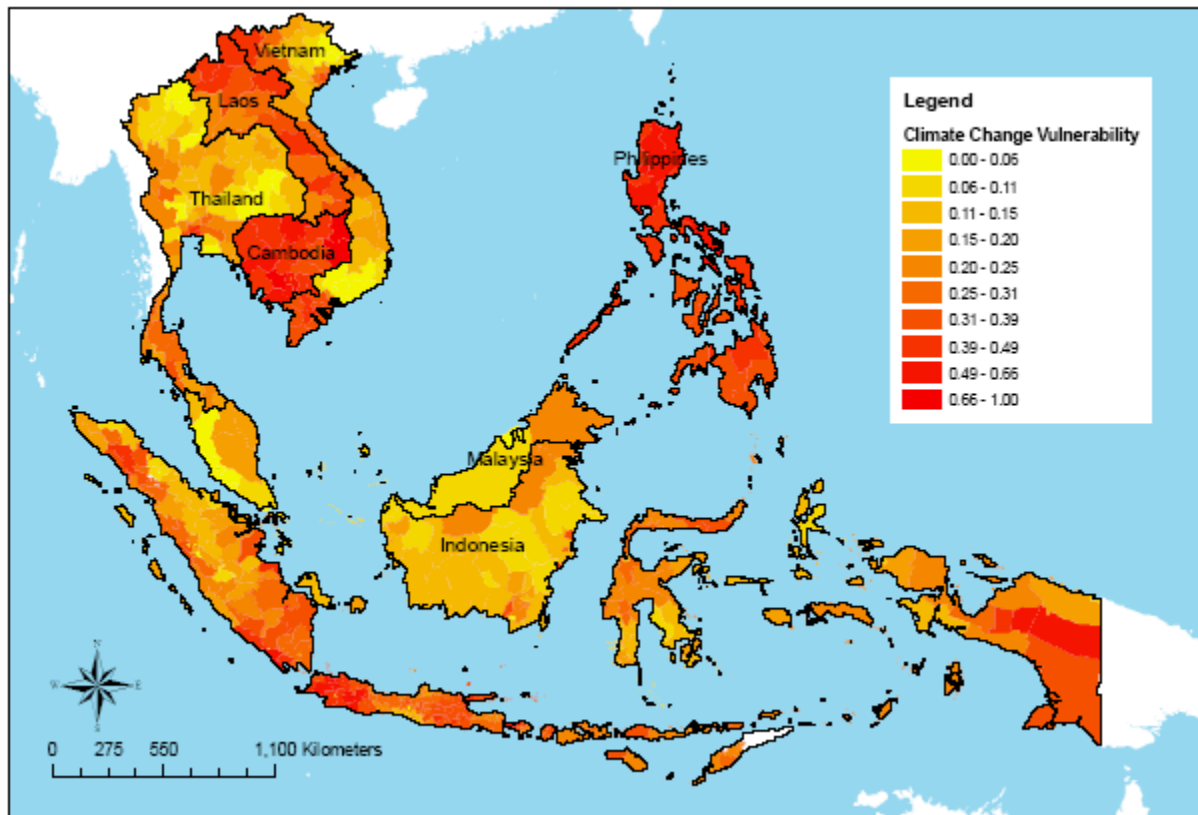


Figure 1: Climate Change Vulnerability Map of Southeast Asia (2009): H, Francisco at: <https://asiatimes.com/2020/01/se-asia-slowly-but-surely-sinking-into-the-sea/>

A report from Professor Benjamin Horton at Nanyang Technological University states that the findings of the study he conducted are “unambiguous” and point towards a major climate crisis. In a survey done of twenty-five cities affected by rising sea levels, nineteen were within Asia, depicting the extreme impact of this problem in the daily life of so many in the region (World Economic Forum). Many Southeast Asians in coastal cities have reconstructed their homes several times as sea levels rise and they are destroyed by the more extreme flooding, particularly in the city of Jakarta, Indonesia (Vox). As world sentiment turns toward slowing and reversing climate change, many countries in Southeast Asia have made ambitious plans to

achieve lower emissions and assist refugees and homeowners. However, the execution may still be theoretical as we advance further into the 21st Century.

Current Situation:

The majority of Southeast Asia lies on relatively low land, near the ocean. Rising sea levels will displace a large amount of the population, and their cities. Indonesia has already made plans to move its capital from Jakarta, which contends with both the rising Java Sea and the city's sinking (Henschke & Utama). However, while the government moves, the general people of Jakarta must still contend with their rapidly submerging city. The megacity currently contends with severe flooding due to its position within a swamp, and could potentially be fully submerged by 2050 (Lin & Hidayat), forcing its 10 million residents to flee.

Like Jakarta, most of Southeast Asia's largest cities are located on the coast, including the Thai capital of Bangkok. Both Bangkok and much of Malaysia's coast are projected to be mostly submerged within a few decades (Banergee). The whole of the region will likely see the displacement of millions from natural disasters. In addition to the flooding, there is a growing concern about tropical storms. Though they are a relatively common phenomenon in the region, projections show their destructive capabilities may double by the end of the 21st century (Fox).

The most common response to these issues have been based upon infrastructure, particularly common are flood prevention strategies. This includes raising buildings' foundations, and building dikes, seawalls, or reclaiming land. These methods are less effective as climate change worsens and seas rise and heat up. Though these approaches have proven ineffective at best, most continue to build up this infrastructure rather than turning to other strategies. This is partially because there are very few methods that are efficient enough to keep

pace with the sinking cities and rising waters. Additionally, the cost and weight of these projects both drains the city of funds, and causes further sinking and strain on the land (Fauzi).

Issues with the food supply will also arise for Southeast Asia. Changing weather patterns have already caused increased damage to crops, and growing unpredictability will force rapid change to farms and farming seasons. Changing sea levels and temperature will also affect marine biodiversity and the fishing that much of the region depends on (World Economic Forum). Additionally, most trade with Southeast Asia is done by sea, and any change of weather, or the rising waters themselves, puts this trade at risk. In tandem with that is the projected decrease of agricultural production worldwide, further preventing the importation of food or other goods to combat the crises facing the region (Asian Development Bank).

Questions to Consider:

- 1. What is your country's position on the rising sea levels issue? Can it be classified as a crisis, and what action needs to be taken?*
- 2. How do the rising sea levels in Southeast Asia affect your country's interests and economic opportunities?*
- 3. Is it necessary to take a stance to reduce climate impact and to additionally provide aid to those threatened by the rising sea levels? If so, how?*
- 4. How does the problem of rising sea levels fit into a larger global context and why is it significant?*

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