



## The 2016 Arbitral Award is Not a Mere Scrap of Paper

We, the undersigned faculty of the University of the Philippines College of Law, in reference to the statements made by President Rodrigo Roa Duterte that the 2016 Arbitral Award is a mere scrap of paper that should be “thrown to the wastebasket,” that China is “in possession” of the West Philippine Sea (WPS), and that Chinese fishermen are free to fish in the Philippines’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), respectfully state:

We object.

Words have power, amplified by the power of the person who uttered them. When a President speaks on a matter of foreign policy, the world listens. President Duterte’s statements trivialize the Arbitral Award, contradict the country’s own legal position, and effectively waive rights already won. The Arbitral Award is a victory and the pride of the Filipino people; it does not belong to the waste can.

Words have power, shaped by the circumstances under which they are uttered. To say that China is in possession of the WPS is a falsehood. China has neither a legal nor physical hold of the WPS. At a time when China continues to chip away at our nation’s territorial integrity with repeated incursions into our maritime zones, the President’s statements achieve nothing but encourage further disregard of the UNCLOS and the rule of law.

Words have power, especially when internalized by the people who seek clarity, reassurance, and leadership in the most challenging of times. President Duterte’s statements are disheartening to Filipino fishermen who look to him to safeguard the Philippines’ sovereign rights in waters which, by international law, are for our exclusive benefit. They are demoralizing to our uniformed personnel who bear the heavy burden of holding the line and defending our sovereign rights and sovereignty over our seas.

The statements of the President betray the interests of the country he swore to protect.

In witness whereof, we urgently call on President Rodrigo Roa Duterte to immediately RETRACT his statements and recall his duty to act in the best interest of the Philippines and the Filipino people.



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