

P-Noy vows to defend territory

Written by Administrator
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President Benigno Aquino III (right) leads flag raising rites to mark the 115th Philippine Independence Day at Liwasang Bonifacio, a square named after Filipino revolutionary leader Andres Bonifacio, in Manila, on June 12, 2013. Assisting him is outgoing Manila Mayor Alfredo Lim. (AP photo/Aaron Favila)

MANILA — President Benigno Aquino III last Wednesday said he has no plans of giving up any part of the country that is being claimed by other states, but he strongly rejected war as an option in settling disputes.

In his Independence Day speech at the Liwasang Bonifacio, the President said, “We need to weigh our decisions carefully when it comes to these matters. As we stand for our rights, we must continue exhibiting the values Filipinos are known for. Aggression does not run in our veins, but neither will we back down from any challenge.”

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Mr. Aquino repeatedly cast aside any thought of resorting to conflict.

He stressed that the Philippines will always engage in dialogue to resolve disputes.

“We have no other desire than to take care of what is rightfully ours,” he said.

“We have never trampled upon the rights of others. We have not claimed or demanded territory that clearly belongs to another. We have neither condescended upon nor oppressed others. Harming others or sowing discord with other countries is not in our history.”

The country is enmeshed in maritime disputes with China and Taiwan over a few islets and shoals in the Spratlys in the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea).

Manila and Beijing are in a “word war” over Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal since Chinese ships “invaded” it in April 2012.

And diplomatic ties between Manila and Taipei were strained to almost breaking point over the killing of a Taiwanese fisherman by the Philippine Coast Guard personnel off Batanes on May 9.

Mr. Aquino said the government will continue to abide by what is right.

“It has never been the policy of the Philippines to take advantage of other countries. If there has been disagreement, the whole world has witnessed our willingness to sit down and conduct dialogue in a peaceful manner,” he added.

“The only thing we have asked is that our territory, rights and dignity be respected, in the same way that we have respected the territory, rights and dignity of other people,” he said.

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But Mr. Aquino stressed that “while we will protect our rights and continue to build consensus with all parties to promote calm and understanding,” there is also the pressing need to “increase the capabilities of our Armed Forces.”

The President urged all Filipinos to fight for freedom and to stand up “as a country with its own sovereignty, as a nation that spilled its blood in the name of freedom, as a Philippines with its own flag, equal to all others.”

Freedom from poverty

He exhorted the people not to wait “300 years, or three decades, or even three years, before we resolve to come together and gain freedom from hunger, poverty or whatever threatens our sovereignty and security.”

“It is not right for Filipinos to have to stand suffering for even one minute longer. If it had only been possible, these problems should have been solved yesterday. But since this is impossible, let’s do it today,” Mr. Aquino said.

Last Tuesday, Mr. Aquino hosted the traditional Vin d’honneur in Malacañang, where he offered a toast “to the continued partnership between all nations to promote peace, amity and unity for the advancement of humankind.”

“To my fellow workers in government — may you remain faithful to serving our people and our republic; to our overseas Filipino workers, for their dedication and sacrifice — may their hard work further contribute to a Philippines that they can come home to with pride and confidence,” he said.

“And to the future and continued success of the Filipino people — may the examples of our heroes be our guide as we tread the straight path to equitable progress,” he said.