

*The head of the ASEAN Studies Centre at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Rodolfo Severino, told an international conference on the South China Sea that all members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, both claimants and non-claimants, had interests in the disputes in that body of water.*

Speaking in a panel of the conference on 17 June, Severino explained that these interests lay in regional peace and stability, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and freedom of navigation and over flight in the area.

Invited as an expert on the subject, he pointed out that, in numerous forums and at many levels, ASEAN had dealt with the South China Sea problem as a group, including in discussions with China.

At the conference, organised by the Center for International Law at the National University of Singapore over 16-17 June, Severino also observed that, in practice, it was difficult to undertake joint development in the South China Sea when the necessary goodwill and mutual trust were prevented from setting in by the disputes over sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction.

He saw no difference between the enforceability of a political declaration, such as the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties that China and all ten ASEAN countries issued in November 2002 and a Code of Conduct with which they seemed to be pre-occupied. Severino instead called for the expansion and elaboration of the present declaration, particularly in terms of prohibiting the fortification of facilities in place on the land features in the South China Sea already occupied.