

Supporting Peace, Security and Maritime Cooperation in the Philippines and the Indo-Pacific Region

A Strategic Narrative for Peace, Security and Maritime Cooperation

Basis of Supporting Peace, Security and Maritime Cooperation in the Region: The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the world's most strategically important region, accounting for a substantial share of global trade, economic growth, and maritime connectivity. The region faces increasing geopolitical competition, maritime disputes, transnational crime, environmental pressures, irregular migration, and the impacts of climate change.

The Philippines occupies a pivotal position within the Indo-Pacific. As an archipelagic state with more than 36,000 kilometers of coastline and one of the world's largest exclusive economic zones (EEZs), the country sits at the crossroads of major international sea lanes. The security and prosperity of the Philippines are therefore intrinsically linked to maritime stability, effective governance of marine resources, and peaceful management of disputes. Recent developments in the South China Sea and broader Indo-Pacific security environment have highlighted the need for strengthened maritime domain awareness, law enforcement capabilities, regional cooperation mechanisms, and adherence to a rules-based international order.

As geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific continue to evolve, Germany and the Philippines share a growing interest in strengthening maritime security, regional cooperation, and a rules-based international order. The convergence of development cooperation, diplomacy, and security cooperation creates new opportunities for strategic engagement.

Key Challenges in Maritime Security and Cooperation in the Philippines: Due to the Philippines' territorial landscape and the Southeast Asian region's governance issues and diversity, some of the issues that need to be looked at include:

1. Maritime Territorial and Jurisdictional Challenges. The Philippines faces ongoing maritime disputes in the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea, creating risks of escalation, disruptions to fisheries and livelihoods, and challenges to maritime governance. Ensuring compliance with international law and promoting peaceful dispute management remain critical priorities.	2. Limited Maritime Domain Awareness. Given its vast maritime territory, the Philippines faces capacity constraints in monitoring maritime activities, including illegal fishing, smuggling, trafficking, environmental crimes, and unauthorized incursions. Enhanced surveillance, information sharing, and inter-agency coordination are needed to improve maritime governance.
3. Transnational Organized Crime and Maritime Threats. Maritime routes are increasingly used for trafficking in persons, narcotics, arms, and other illicit activities. These threats require stronger law enforcement cooperation and regional intelligence-sharing mechanisms.	4. Climate and Environmental Security. The Philippines is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, marine ecosystem degradation, and resource competition create new security challenges and increase the risk of displacement and social tensions.
5. Fragility and Conflict in Coastal and Island Communities. Many coastal and island communities experience poverty, weak state presence, resource competition, and vulnerability to recruitment by criminal or extremist groups. Sustainable peacebuilding therefore requires integrated approaches that address governance, livelihoods, natural resource management, and social inclusion.	6. Regional Cooperation Gaps. Maritime security challenges increasingly transcend national borders. Effective responses require stronger cooperation among ASEAN member states, coast guards, maritime law enforcement agencies, and regional institutions to promote confidence-building and collective security.

GIZ in the Philippines – A strategic partner: For over 50 years, GIZ—wholly owned by the German government—has supported Philippine development through international expertise, local partnerships, and engineering know-how. GIZ plays a key role in the country's peace and maritime security by focusing on capacity building and policy support.

German and Philippine Cooperation for Maritime Security and Peace: For Germany and the European Union, maintaining a free, open, secure, and rules-based Indo-Pacific is essential to safeguarding international trade routes, regional stability, and international law, particularly the principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Germany's Indo-Pacific Guidelines emphasize the importance of multilateral cooperation, conflict prevention, maritime security, and strengthening resilient institutions across the region. Against this backdrop, German development cooperation and foreign policy increasingly recognize that sustainable development, peace, and security are mutually reinforcing. Investments in governance, conflict prevention, maritime security, resilience, and regional cooperation contribute not only to national stability but also to inclusive economic development and human security.

German engagement in the Philippines is guided by the strategic partnership between Germany and the Philippines, Germany's Indo-Pacific Guidelines, the European Union Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, and the development policy objectives of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the German Federal Foreign Office (AA).

Germany and the Philippines have recently deepened cooperation in the security sector, including defense and maritime cooperation, reflecting shared interests in maintaining freedom of navigation, protecting international maritime trade routes, and strengthening regional stability. In 2025, both countries signed a defense cooperation arrangement that expands collaboration in cybersecurity, logistics, defense cooperation, and peacekeeping. Some of these are based on the following:

1. Promotion of a rules-based international order through support for international law, multilateralism, and peaceful dispute resolution.
2. Strengthening peace and security through conflict prevention, peacebuilding, resilience, and inclusive governance.
3. Advancing sustainable development by addressing the root causes of conflict, inequality, displacement, environmental degradation, and economic vulnerability.

The Role of GIZ as a Strategic Partner in the Philippines for Peace and Security: GIZ serves as a trusted and long-term partner of the Philippine Government, supporting peace, security, and development through integrated and conflict-sensitive approaches. Active in the Philippines since the 1970s, GIZ combines technical expertise, policy dialogue, institutional strengthening, and stakeholder engagement to address complex development and security. This integrated approach aligns with Germany's understanding that sustainable peace and security can only be achieved through inclusive development, effective governance, and strong institutions. GIZ is well positioned to serve as the German Government's implementing partner in this sector by combining its longstanding experience in peacebuilding, governance, conflict prevention, and institutional capacity development with emerging priorities in maritime security and Indo-Pacific cooperation. Building on decades of successful engagement in Mindanao and new partnerships with maritime institutions such as the Philippine Coast Guard, GIZ can help advance a comprehensive approach to peace and security that promotes stability, resilience, inclusive development, and regional cooperation across the Indo-Pacific.

GIZ's Role in the Peace and Security Sector in the Region and Worldwide: Globally, GIZ is one of Germany's principal implementing organizations in the fields of peacebuilding, conflict prevention,

stabilization, security sector reform, displacement, migration, and resilience. GIZ operates in numerous fragile and conflict-affected contexts across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Europe. Some key areas of GIZ engagement include:

1. **Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention.** GIZ supports mediation, dialogue, reconciliation, and social cohesion initiatives in fragile contexts. Programs strengthen local capacities for conflict management and violence prevention while promoting inclusive governance. Through global advisory projects and regional projects in the Southeast Asian and African region, GIZ supports activities in research, training, policy dialogue, conflict prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding capacity development. Through global and regional programs, GIZ has supported policy development and knowledge generation on peacebuilding, security governance, disaster risk management, and resilience, including engagement in the Philippines as part of broader international efforts to strengthen peace and security frameworks.
2. **Security Sector Support.** GIZ works with partner governments to improve security governance, strengthen civilian oversight, and enhance the effectiveness and accountability of security institutions. The focus is on human security and citizen-centered approaches.
3. **Crisis Prevention and Resilience.** Through programs in countries such as Colombia, Mali, Lebanon, Jordan, Myanmar, and the Philippines, GIZ strengthens resilience to conflict, disasters, and displacement while linking humanitarian, development, and peace interventions. In the Philippines, GIZ has supported local governments and communities in addressing displacement caused by conflict and disasters, helping strengthen resilience, social cohesion, and inclusive governance in vulnerable regions of Mindanao.
4. **Maritime Security.** In the Indo-Pacific and other strategic regions, GIZ increasingly supports maritime governance, coast guard capacities, regional dialogue, and the implementation of international norms governing maritime conduct. These efforts contribute to safeguarding global trade routes, preventing

Project References

Southeast Asian Cooperation on Maritime Security (SEACOM) (2026-2027) Donor: German Federal Foreign Office (AA) through the Defense Enhancement Initiative; Countries: Philippines; Lead Agency: National Maritime Center and Philippine Coast Guard (Philippines), National Security Council (Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia)	Supports and promotes improved regional cooperation between the selected ASEAN member states to monitor key sea routes. This includes the procurement, provision and development of technical equipment, support for the development of guidelines, training and analysis for the more efficient exchange of security-relevant information, as well as the implementation of joint operational missions, simulations and training.
Supporting the Philippine Coast Guard in Strengthening the Rules-Based International Order in the Indo-Pacific Phases 1-3 (2021-2022, 2023-2025, 2025) Donor: German Federal Foreign Office (AA) through the Defense Enhancement Initiative; Country: Philippines; Lead Agency: Philippine Coast Guard	Supports increasing capacity of the Philippine Coast Guard for fulfilling its mandate and responsibility to perform maritime law enforcement, search and rescue, safety, environmental protection, and security through knowledge sharing, doctrine and curriculum development activities and procurement of Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) and other equipment.
Conflict-Sensitive Resource and Asset Management (COSERAM) (2010-2015)	Promoted conflict-sensitive management of land and natural resources to reduce tensions

Donor: Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ); Country: Philippines (Mindanao); Lead Agency: National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA)	and support peace and development in Mindanao.
<u>Supporting Peace and Development in Mindanao : Inclusive and Peace Promoting Development Mindanao (SPADE) (2021-2026)</u> Donor: Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ); Country: Philippines; Lead Agency: Department for the Interior and Local Governance	Supports implementation of peace and development agendas in conflict-affected areas of Mindanao, strengthens local governance, conflict-sensitive investment, social cohesion, and inclusive development following the Bangsamoro peace process.
<u>Sector Programme on Peace and Security, Disaster Risk Management (2017-2020)</u> Donor: Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ); Countries: Global (including Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar, Mali, Jordan, Lebanon, Colombia, Rwanda, Timor-Leste and others) Partner: Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)	Advises the German Government on peacebuilding, conflict prevention, disaster risk management, displacement, and security policy. Supports conflict-sensitive development programming.
<u>CPS SAUP - Regional program SAUP (Southeast Asian University Partnership for Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation) GIZ (2023-2027)</u> Donor: Engagement Global GmbH; Country: Cambodia, Philippines, Timor-Leste; Partner: Ohne politischen Träger - Direkt mit Bevölkerung oder Nichtregierungsorganisationen (NGO)	Develops university programs on peacebuilding and conflict transformation, builds local expertise, and promotes long-term peace through education and research.
<u>SIF PH - Stabilisation of communities, reducing the causes of displacement and promoting peace in the conflict regions of Mindanao (2020-2023)</u> Donor: Engagement Global GmbH; Country: Philippines; Partner: Ohne politischen Träger - Direkt mit Bevölkerung oder Nichtregierungsorganisationen (NGO)	Supports stabilization of conflict-affected communities, reduces drivers of displacement, and promotes peacebuilding and resilience in vulnerable areas
<u>SIGA PH - Facilitation of equal and inclusive participation - Strengthening the potential for peace in Mindanao (2023-2028)</u> Donor: Engagement Global GmbH; Country: Philippines; Partner: Ohne politischen Träger - Direkt mit Bevölkerung oder Nichtregierungsorganisationen (NGO)	Seeks to strengthen the foundations for sustainable peace in Mindanao by ensuring that groups that are often excluded from decision-making processes can participate more effectively in peace and development initiatives through dialogue, governance and other development processes. These groups include women, youth , Indigenous Peoples (IPs), Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), conflict-affected communities, Civil society organizations (CSOs), and local peace actors and community leaders.