



ASIA PACIFIC
FOUNDATION
OF CANADA

FONDATION
ASIE PACIFIQUE
DU CANADA

TRACK 1.5 DIALOGUE ON PHILIPPINES-CANADA RELATIONS

TOWARDS A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

SUMMARY REPORT



Building Bridges
Celebrating Connections

SUMMARY REPORT

On December 11, 2024, the Embassy of the Philippines in Ottawa and the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada convened the inaugural **Canada-Philippines Track 1.5 Dialogue in Ottawa**. The event brought together policymakers, private-sector leaders, civil society, and academics from both countries to reflect on the state of bilateral relations and identify opportunities to move toward a more formal strategic partnership.

The Dialogue took place at a pivotal moment in the bilateral relationship. Participants emphasized that the Philippines — as a rapidly growing economy, a vibrant democracy, and ASEAN’s upcoming 2026 Chair — is an anchor partner for Canada in Southeast Asia.

Discussions focused on key areas of co-operation: **maritime security, cybersecurity, trade and investment, and migration**. Participants emphasized the growing strategic convergence between Canada and the Philippines and the importance of working together to strengthen resilience in the face of regional and global challenges.

Recommendations included elevating bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Partnership, concluding a Canada-Philippines Status of Visiting Forces Agreement, expanding educational and research partnerships (including transnational education opportunities), and investing in public diplomacy to raise awareness of the relationship’s importance.

The dialogue underscored a clear message: **Canada and the Philippines already enjoy strong foundations, but this is the moment to deepen co-operation in security, trade, technology, and people-to-people exchanges — and to anchor their partnership as a cornerstone of Canada’s Indo-Pacific Strategy.**



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Elevate the relationship to a Comprehensive Partnership. Formalize a Canada-Philippines Comprehensive Partnership Agreement to provide strategic direction and a durable framework for co-operation.
- 2 Conclude and sign a Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SOVFA). Establishing a SOVFA would enable deeper defence and security collaboration, including joint exercises, training, and humanitarian assistance.
- 3 Deepen co-operation on non-traditional security. Scale up joint efforts in maritime domain awareness, fisheries governance, and cyber resilience, leveraging Canadian expertise such as the Dark Vessel Detection program.
- 4 Explore a bilateral Canada-Philippines FTA. In parallel with a Canada-ASEAN FTA, pursue a bilateral trade agreement that addresses specific opportunities in agriculture, digital trade, critical minerals, and clean energy.
- 5 Expand educational and research partnerships. Build on existing ties by supporting transnational education programs, student mobility, and joint research initiatives between Canadian and Philippine universities.
- 6 Invest in people-to-people links and diaspora engagement. Enhance credential recognition agreements (especially in health care), expand labour mobility pathways, and raise public awareness of the Filipino community's contributions to Canadian society.
- 7 Promote broader public awareness of the relationship. Launch public diplomacy initiatives — building on the success of projects like 75 Faces of Migration — to highlight the importance of the Canada-Philippines relationship for both countries and for Canada's broader Indo-Pacific engagement.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DIALOGUE

Maintaining a Free and Open Indo-Pacific

- Persistent illegal Chinese operations in the South China Sea were seen as a major threat to regional stability by both Canadian and Philippine participants.
- Participants noted that the Philippines has been a leading voice in defending its sovereignty in the South China Sea, and that Canada can play a meaningful role through its defence diplomacy by publicly supporting Manila's messaging and helping to strengthen regional deterrence.
- The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on defence co-operation, signed between Canada and the Philippines in January 2024, was highlighted as a milestone. To build on this momentum, participants suggested Canada:
 - Engage more actively in mini-lateral security frameworks such as the Quad, which has shown interest in closer ties with the Philippines.
 - Conclude negotiations on a Canada-Philippines Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SOVFA) to create a stronger foundation for joint training, exercises, and operational co-operation.
- Participants noted that a less contentious but promising entry point for Canada lies in addressing non-traditional security threats such as illegal fishing and environmental degradation. Canada's Dark Vessel Detection (DVD) program was identified as a tool that could help expose illicit Chinese activities in Philippine waters, while also supporting public awareness and confidence in maritime security efforts.

Enhancing Digital Co-operation Against Cyber Threats

- Experts emphasized the growing overlap between maritime security and cyber threats in the South China Sea, where disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks are increasingly used as tools of influence.
- Both countries face persistent cyber threats, with China identified as the most significant state-based actor targeting Canada, according to Canada's 2023 *National Cyber Threat Assessment*.
- The Philippines, which only launched its first national cybersecurity strategy in 2023, could benefit from Canada's early experience and best practices in building cyber resilience.
- Strengthening government-private sector collaboration — particularly to help SMEs protect themselves from online fraud, ransomware, and data theft — was highlighted as a priority.
- Participants stressed that trust-building is essential for deeper intelligence-sharing and effective collaboration. Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy offers an opportunity to expand its presence in regional cyber forums and advance shared principles for digital governance.

Building on Momentum in Trade and Investment

- Bilateral trade reached C\$3.4 billion in 2023, with strong growth potential, boosted by Canada's largest trade mission to the Philippines in December 2024.

- The Philippines' young, growing middle class and robust 6% GDP growth rate make it an attractive market. Yet Canadian companies could do more to increase visibility and brand awareness in the country.
- With a Canada-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement under negotiation, participants noted the potential value of pursuing a Canada-Philippines bilateral FTA, which could complement the ASEAN deal and provide more tailored market access.
- Beyond trade agreements, participants saw opportunities to expand collaboration in critical minerals, clean energy, artificial intelligence (AI), and the digital economy. With its C\$38-billion business process outsourcing (BPO) sector, employing 1.3 million people, the Philippines is well-positioned for partnerships on AI adoption, digital services, and transnational education.

Immigration: A Contribution Not to Overlook

- The Dialogue coincided with the launch of *75 Faces of Migration*, a joint exhibit by the Embassy and

Consulates General of the Philippines in Canada and the Embassy of Canada in Manila. The exhibit showcased the contributions of Filipino migrants and diaspora communities, which have enriched Canada's society and economy.

- As Canada confronts a flat domestic labour force and looming retirements in health care and construction, immigration from the Philippines will remain vital. Filipino workers already display some of the highest labour force participation rates among Canada's immigrant communities.
- Yet challenges remain: many Filipino migrants are underemployed due to limited recognition of foreign credentials — with hundreds of qualified nurses, for example, unable to practice in their profession. Enhanced mutual recognition agreements and bilateral training programs could help bridge this gap.
- Participants also highlighted the need for greater regional distribution of immigrants across Canada to meet labour shortages in smaller cities and rural communities.

Drafted by Alexandre Veilleux, Advisor, Research & Communications, and Vina Nadjibulla, Vice-President Research & Strategy, APF Canada



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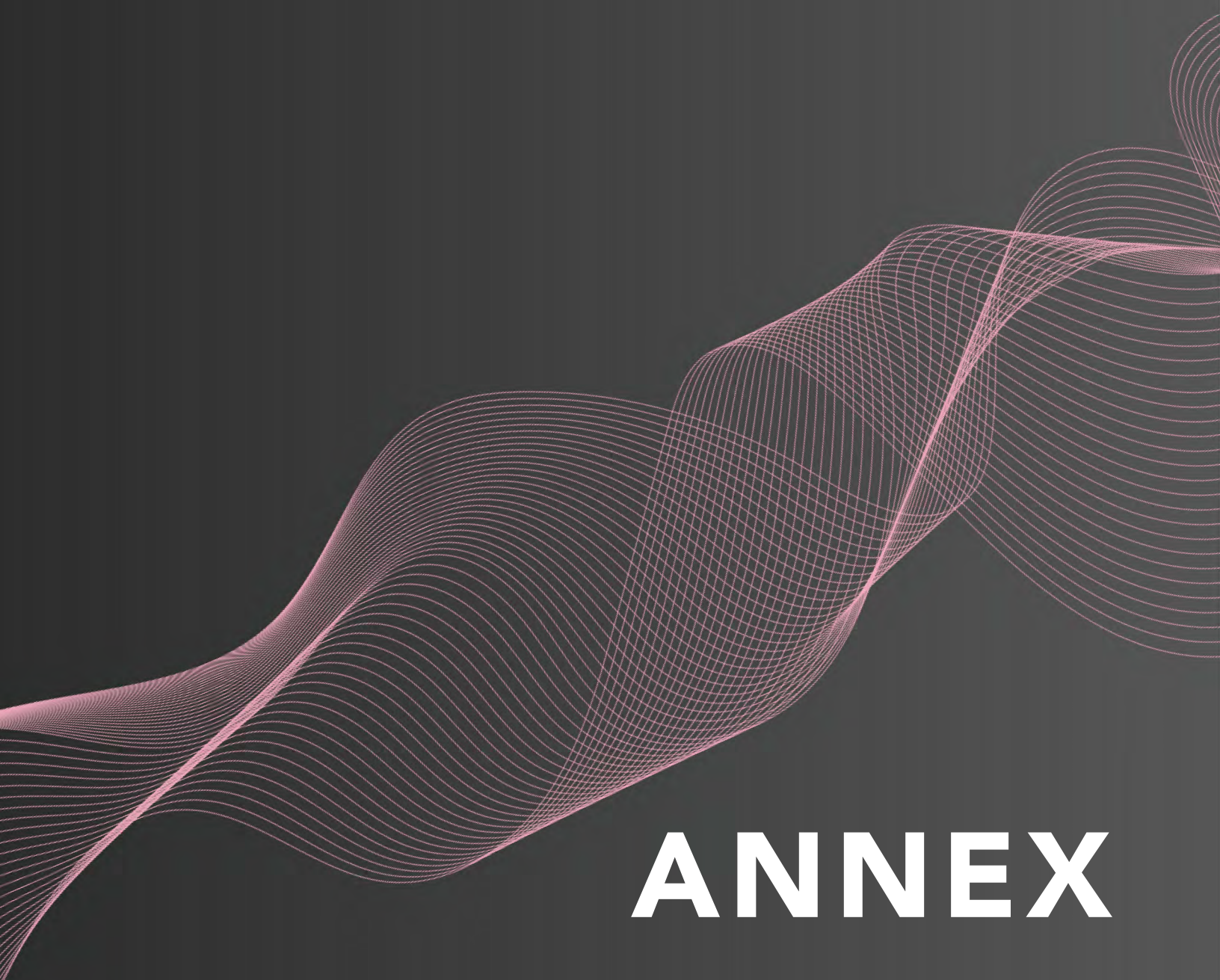
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DU CANADA

The Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APF Canada) is an independent, not-for-profit organization focused on Canada's relations with Asia. Our mission is to be Canada's catalyst for engagement with Asia and Asia's bridge to Canada.

APF Canada is dedicated to strengthening ties between Canada and Asia through its research, education, and convening activities, such as the Canada-in-Asia Conference series, our Women's Business Missions to Asia, and the APEC-Canada Growing Business Partnership project fostering sustainable inclusive growth and poverty reduction. APF Canada also works with business, government, and academic stakeholders to provide Asia Competency training for Canadian organizations and students.

Our research provides high-quality, relevant, and timely information, insights, and perspectives on Canada-Asia relations for Canadians and stakeholders across the Asia Pacific. Our research work also includes regular Insights, Dispatches, Reports & Policy Briefs, Strategic Reflections, Case Studies, Explainers, and a weekly Asia Watch tracking the latest news on Asia that matters to Canada.

[Visit our Website](#)



ANNEX

Opening Session and Launch of the 75 Faces of Migration

9:00 A.M. – 9:30 A.M.

WELCOME REMARKS:



Her Excellency Maria Andrelita S. Austria

Ambassador of the Philippines to Canada



Mr. Jeff Nankivell

President and CEO, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

KEYNOTE ADDRESS



The Honourable Rob Oliphant

Member of Parliament, Canada's Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Member of Parliament

Session 1

9:30 A.M. – 11:00 A.M.

Political and Security Relations

A. Maritime Security and the Law of the Sea

MODERATOR:



Mr. Jonathan Berkshire Miller

*Director of Foreign Affairs, National Security, National Defence,
Macdonald-Laurier Institute*

PANELLISTS:

PHILIPPINES GOVERNMENT:



Mr. Angelito De Leon

Undersecretary, Department of National Defense



Commodore Jay Tarriela

Spokesperson, Philippine Coast Guard

CANADIAN GOVERNMENT:



Mr. Scott Millar

Assistant Deputy Minister (Policy), Department of National Defence



Mr. Brent Napier

Director, Enforcement Policy & Programs, Fisheries and Oceans Canada

PHILIPPINES
ACADEMIC:



Dr. Aaron Jed Rabena

Assistant Professor, Asian Center, University of the Philippines

CANADIAN
ACADEMIC:



Mr. David Perry

President, Canadian Global Affairs Institute

COFFEE BREAK / HEALTH BREAK (15 MINUTES)

11:15 A.M. – 12:15 P.M.

B. Cybersecurity and AI: Enhancing Digital Co-operation

MODERATOR:



Ms. Vina Nadjibulla

Vice-President Research & Strategy, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

PANELLISTS:

PHILIPPINES
GOVERNMENT:



Mr. Jose Carlos Reyes

Cyber Security Bureau Director, Department of Information and Communications Technology

CANADIAN
GOVERNMENT:



Mr. Sami Khoury

Government of Canada Senior Official for Cyber Security

CANADIAN
GOVERNMENT:



Mr. Greg Bunghardt

Director of Cyber Security Policy, Department of Public Safety Canada

CANADIAN
THINK-TANK:



Prof. Wesley Wark

Centre for International Governance Innovation

Signing of the Donation Agreement between the Philippine Embassy and McGill University on a Philippine Studies Program

12:30 P.M. – 1:30 P.M.

LUNCHEON

Role of Parliamentarians in Strengthening Canada-Philippines Relations



The Honourable Marco Mendicino

Member of Parliament, Member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights



The Honourable Dan Mazier

Member of Parliament, Member of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

NETWORKING

Session 2

1:30 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.

Economic and Development Co-operation: Seizing Momentum in Canada–Philippines Relations

MODERATOR:



Dr. Kai Ostwald

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of British Columbia

PANELLISTS:

PHILIPPINES GOVERNMENT:



Her Excellency Maria Andrelita S. Austria

Ambassador of the Philippines to Canada (Recorded Message)

CANADIAN GOVERNMENT:



Ms. Patricia Peña

Assistant Deputy Minister, International Assistance Partnerships and Programming Branch, Global Affairs Canada



Ms. Mary-Catherine Speirs

Director-General for Trade Negotiations, Global Affairs Canada

PHILIPPINES NGO ACADEMIC:



Mr. Alexander Escucha

President, Institute for Development and Econometric Analysis

CANADIAN NGO ACADEMIC:



Mr. Bart Édes

Policy Analyst and Author; Distinguished Fellow, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

CANADIAN PRIVATE SECTOR:



Ms. Motria Savaryn-Roy

Director of Geopolitical Economics, Sun Life

COFFEE BREAK / HEALTH BREAK (15 MINUTES)

Session 3

3:45 P.M. – 5:45 P.M.

Labour and Migration and Launch of the 75 Faces of Migration Exhibit

MODERATOR:



Dr. Erik Kuhonta

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, McGill University; APF Canada John H. McArthur Research Fellow

PANELLISTS:

PHILIPPINES GOVERNMENT:



Mr. Eduardo Jose De Vega

*Undersecretary for Migration Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs
(Recorded Message)*



Ms. Rea Oreta

Consul General, Embassy of the Philippines in Ottawa

CANADIAN GOVERNMENT:



The Honourable Marco Mendicino

Member of Parliament, Member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights

PHILIPPINES NGO:



Ms. Carmelita Nuqui

President, Philippines Migrants Rights Watch

CANADIAN
ACADEMICS:



Dr. Philip Kelly

Associate Dean for Research and Professor, Department of Environment and Urban Change, York University



Dr. Dominique Caouette

Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Montreal

5:45 P.M. – 6:00 P.M.

Closing Session

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS:



Vina Nadjibulla

Vice-President Research & Strategy, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

6:30 P.M. – 8:30 P.M.

Cocktail Reception

LE BRETON ROOM, DELTA HOTELS OTTAWA CITY CENTRE



THE PHILIPPINES

GOVERNMENT



**Her Excellency Maria
Andrelita S. Austria**

*Ambassador of the Philippines to
Canada*



Rea Oreta

*Consul General, Embassy of the
Philippines in Ottawa*



Angelito M. De Leon

*Undersecretary for Capability
Assessment and Development,
Department of National Defense*



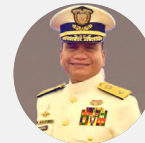
**Eduardo Jose
De Vega**

*Undersecretary for Migration Affairs,
Department of Foreign Affairs*



Jose Carlos Reyes

*Cyber Security Bureau Director,
Department of Information and
Communications Technology*



**Commodore Jay
Tarriela**

Spokesperson, Philippine Coast Guard



CIVIL SOCIETY



Alexander C. Escucha

*President, Institute for Economic
Development and Econometric Analysis*



Carmelita Nuqui

*President, Philippines Migrants Rights
Watch*



**Dr. Aaron Jed
Rabena**

*Assistant Professor, Asian Center,
University of the Philippines*





CANADA

GOVERNMENT



The Honourable Rob Oliphant

*Member of Parliament, Canada's
Parliamentary Secretary to the
Minister of Foreign Affairs and
Member of Parliament*



The Honourable Marco Mendicino

*Member of Parliament, Member of the
Standing Committee on Justice and
Human Rights*



The Honourable Dan Mazier

*Member of Parliament, Member of the
Standing Committee on Environment
and Sustainable Development*



Greg Bunghardt

*Director of Cyber Security Policy,
Department of Public Safety Canada*



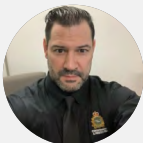
Sami Khoury

*Government of Canada Senior Official
for Cyber Security*



Scott Millar

*Assistant Deputy Minister (Policy),
Department of National Defence*



Brent Napier

*Director, Enforcement Policy &
Programs, Fisheries and Oceans
Canada*



Patricia Peña

*Associate Assistant Deputy Minister,
International Assistance Partnerships
and Programming, Global Affairs
Canada*



Mary-Catherine Speirs

*Director-General for Trade
Negotiations, Global Affairs Canada*



🕒 CIVIL SOCIETY



**Dr. Dominique
Caouette**

*Professor of Political Science,
University of Montreal*



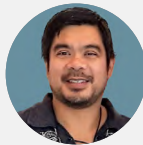
Bart Édes

*Policy Analyst and Author;
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Dr. Philip Kelly

*Associate Dean for Research and
Professor, Department of Environment
and Urban Change, York University*



Dr. Erik Kuhonta

*Associate Professor, Department of
Political Science, McGill University;
APF Canada John H. McArthur
Research Fellow*



**Jonathan Berkshire
Miller**

*Director of Foreign Affairs, National
Security, National Defence,
Macdonald-Laurier Institute*



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