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Vice Admiral Alexandros MARATOS
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Comments by the Republic of Korea

Dear Vice Admiral Alexandros MARATOS,

I am writing to you to respond to the series of letters circulated by Japan recently.¹ These correspondences were indeed full of groundless claims and accusations. Moreover, they contain numerous factual errors and one-sided arguments that require urgent corrections.

The Republic of Korea presents the following points to the members of the S-23 Working Group, and asks for their fair and objective evaluation of the issue as we prepare for the 18th International Hydrographic Conference (IHC) in April 2012.

1. On the status of the name “East Sea”

The name “East Sea” is a firmly established name in both the domestic and international arenas. The Republic of Korea is therefore puzzled by Japan’s attempt to dismiss “East Sea” as a “groundless and sudden new claim.” As attested to in

¹ Reference Paper(30 November 2011), Japanese Comment in response to the ROK letter Nov 25th 2011(2 December 2011), Japan’s response to S-23 WG Letter No.6 06/2011 dated December 23rd 2011

numerous historical documents, the name “East Sea” has been in use for more than 2,000 years. Furthermore, to the 75 million people living in the Republic of Korea and the DPRK the sea area is known by no other name but “East Sea.”

At the international level, the name “East Sea” has been duly established and is gaining wider acceptance in world maps and media reports. The concurrent use of the names “East Sea” and “Japan Sea” (Sea of Japan) has steadily increased. Indeed, it is not difficult to find the name “East Sea” in respected papers, atlases and books today, such as the National Geographic and the Times. This irrefutable and irreversible international trend must be fully taken into account in the process of publishing the 4th edition of the S-23.

2. On the question of whether IHO TR A4.2.6 and UNCSGN Res.III/20 apply to the sea area between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago

The concurrent use of “East Sea” and “Japan Sea” is in accordance with the IHO Technical Resolution A4.2.6 of 1974. It must be noted that “a bay, strait, channel or archipelago” were mentioned simply as examples of “a given geographical feature” and are in no way a representation of specific limits to which the resolution can be applied. Furthermore, the principle of concurrent use of different names pending agreement for a common name is defined as a “general rule of international cartography” by the Resolution III/20 of the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) of 1977.

3. On the “Way Forward”

Japan’s claim that “numerous countries expressed their support for the Chair’s proposal” is incorrect. The Chair Group asked the position of the WG members on the “Way Forward” on three different occasions and the support for the proposal decreased each time. When the Chair Group did the final round of survey in May 2011, there were only five countries supporting the “Way Forward”.² Furthermore, Chair Group’s letter dated 22 July 2011 confirmed that the majority of the WG members did *not* wish to pursue the “Way Forward,” but viewed that “countries concerned must come to an agreement before moving to an update with some additional comments and views.”

² S-23 WG Letter No.04/2011 dated 22 July 2011

The Republic of Korea would like to reemphasize that the “Way Forward” is a rejected proposal that does not merit further consideration. The Rules of Procedure (ROP) of the WG states that decisions in the WG should generally be made by consensus. There was no consensus on the “Way Forward” and consequently, in accordance with the ROP of the WG, the proposal was abandoned. To claim that the “Way Forward” is still feasible equates to challenging the established procedure of the WG as well as negating the collective conclusion of the WG members.

4. On the mission of the IHO

Japan’s claim that the IHO’s mission is to “bring about the greatest possible uniformity in nautical charts and documents” is misleading. The mission of the IHO, as stipulated in its convention, is “to contribute to making navigation easier and safer throughout the world by improving nautical charts and documents.” Bringing about “the greatest possible uniformity in nautical charts and documents” is the “object” or “means” to achieve the aforementioned mission.

When considering navigational safety, it is clear that the concurrent appellation of “Japan Sea/East Sea” is most appropriate for the sea area between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago. When over 400,000 ships that use this sea area annually identify it as “East Sea”, the sole use of the name “Japan Sea” would mean providing only half the information the ships need. This would cause unnecessary confusion and inconvenience for the S-23 users, and in case of emergencies, when full and accurate information is key, it may even have detrimental effects on the navigational safety.

5. On the claim that the ROK is “politicizing” the issue and “paralyzing” the IHO

The Republic of Korea is deeply concerned and dismayed by Japan’s comments that “The Korean claim paralyzed the IHO... turning the international organization into a highly politicized forum.” The ROK has been addressing the issue from a technical perspective, referring to relevant IHO and UN resolutions and emphasizing the importance of making the S-23 the most user-friendly and most up-to-date guide for the navigational safety around the world.

The Republic of Korea has been taking a flexible and open-minded approach with respect to the matter of naming the sea area between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago. We have agreed to the various proposals made by the IHO, such as the unpublished final draft of the S-23 in 2002 and the publication of two volumes of the S-23 in 2007. We have also agreed to participate in various meetings: the trilateral meeting between the IHB Directing Committee, Japan and the Republic of Korea in 2008 and the S-23 Working Group in 2009. Recently, at the request of the S-23 WG Chair Group, the Republic of Korea has initiated a bilateral meeting with Japan to discuss the naming issue.

In August 2002, Japan launched a fierce political campaign against the adoption of the draft 4th edition of the S-23. According to the article entitled “Sea of Japan: International Hydrographic Organization(IHO)” posted on the website of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan “lodged a strong complaint with the IHO Directing Committee” and “petitioned... most vigorously to withdraw the circular letter.”³ In so doing, Japan has nullified years of technical study in making the draft 4th edition, has challenged the established procedure of the organization, and has pressured the IHB to conclude that “the IHB has been faced with issues beyond its technical purpose.”⁴

6. Other Matters

The issue of naming the sea area between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago is different from the issue of renaming the “Gulf of Tonkin.” It must be pointed out that the Republic of Korea is not asserting that the existing name “Japan Sea” be removed and replaced with “East Sea” in the new edition of the S-23. Our consistent request for the past decades has been and still is the concurrent use of both names “East Sea” and “Japan Sea.” The Republic of Korea hopes that this reasonable and workable compromise solution will be accepted by the Member States of the IHO, so that the work on the publication of the S-23 can proceed in earnest and the new edition be published at an early date.

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (www.mofa.go.jp) – Sea of Japan : International Hydrographic Organization(IHO) October 2007

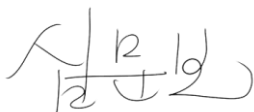
⁴ Circular Letter 38/2002 dated 19 September 2002

Furthermore, when the first edition of the S-23 was published in 1929, the name “Japan Sea” was adopted for the sea area in question based solely on Japan’s claims in the absence of Korea due to unfortunate historical circumstances whereby Korea was under Japan’s colonial rule. As a consequence, the name “East Sea”, despite its historical legitimacy, was deprived of its right to be recognized by the IHO and the sole use of “Japan Sea” became widely spread. Therefore, a fair representation of “East Sea” in the 4th edition of the S-23 would mean restoring the name “East Sea” to its rightful place.

Japan’s sudden claim for the need to change the description of the sea area to “the sea area bordered by Russia, Japan and the Korean Peninsula” is a questionable attempt to obscure the focus of the main debate at hand. There is no confusion among the parties concerned as well as S-23 WG members regarding the whereabouts of the sea area, and for decades the sea area has been called “the sea area between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago” at the IHO without causing any controversy or objection from Member States.

The Republic of Korea will continue to make every effort to find a solution to this issue preferably between the parties directly concerned based on the spirit of flexibility, historical facts, logical and sensible discourse rather than groundless and emotional arguments. The Republic of Korea further believes that as we, the S-23 WG members, prepare for the 18th International Hydrographic Conference (IHC), the spirit of cooperation and flexibility, as demonstrated toward one another so far, must be maintained.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Moon Bo SHIM'. The signature is stylized and cursive, with the first part being a large, sweeping stroke that loops back, followed by '12' and '19' written vertically, and a final flourish.

Moon Bo SHIM
Representative of the Republic of Korea to the S-23 WG