

《Officials say negotiation must prevail》

Vietnam tells China warships welcome in one of its harbors

Senior defense officials attending a high-profile security forum echoed China's call for nations to properly tackle disputes in the South China Sea while maintaining peace and stability.

One of the officials, Nguyen Chi Vinh, Vietnam's deputy minister of national defense, said his country "warmly welcomes" Chinese warships to visit one of its harbors and is ready to boost cooperation between the two countries' coast guards.

He made the remarks on the sidelines of the annual Shangri-La Dialogue, which opened in Singapore on Friday.

Experts said the move will improve interaction for regional security and help ease tensions.

Sun Jianguo, deputy chief of the Joint Staff Department of China's Central Military Commission, elaborated on the country's position on the South China Sea while meeting with senior defense officials from other countries.

The Vietnamese deputy defense minister told Sun that visiting Chinese vessels are welcome to conduct joint drills with the Vietnamese Navy in humanitarian relief and maritime search and rescue programs.

Although he did not name the harbor, experts said it might be Cam Ranh Bay in southern Vietnam, a key stronghold that received two Japanese warships on May 29.

Jia Duqiang, a researcher of Southeast Asian studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said Vietnam is "sending a positive signal" amid lingering tension in the South China Sea.

It is meant as "a gesture to ease a confrontational situation and expel China's doubts", Jia said.

The recent tension, fueled by an international arbitration case filed by the Philippines against China over the the South China Sea issue, "has prompted some countries, including Vietnam, to rethink", he said.

"As arbitration serves no good purpose in resolving the issue and maintaining peace, it is necessary for countries to return to the negotiating table," Jia said.

Indonesian Defense Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu told Sun that the South China Sea is a "common home" for all countries in the region, and they should jointly safeguard regional security.

Ryacudu said disputes over maritime sovereignty should be resolved gradually, taking into consideration many factors, such as the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, UN charters and historical backgrounds.

New Zealand Defense Minister Gerry Brownlee said all parties involved should boost dialogue and communication, seek common ground and properly tackle disputes.

Mark Binskin, chief of the Australian Defence Force, said both Australia and China are committed to ensuring regional prosperity and development, and Australia is ready to maintain dialogue and communication with China.

Zhang Junshe, a senior researcher at the PLA Naval Military Studies Research Institute and a delegate attending the dialogue, said the talks on Friday show widespread support for direct dialogue and negotiation by countries directly involved to solve their disputes, which Zhang said is the "only correct and feasible way".

