

February 18th, 2019

## New Report Identifies Key Links Between Illicit Maritime Activities in the Sulu and Celebes Seas

Monday, February 18<sup>th</sup>: In a new report launching tomorrow, One Earth Future's Stable Seas program highlights the links between illicit maritime activities in the Sulu and Celebes Seas and terrorism. The report will be presented in Manila, Philippines at a meeting of the Contact Group on Maritime Crime in the Sulu and Celebes Seas, hosted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The report will be presented to senior military and civilian officials from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and other important partners.

Developed in collaboration with the Maritime Institute of Malaysia (MIMA), the report hopes to broaden the understanding of maritime security beyond the hard security issues of naval power and sovereignty at sea. The report aims to generate conversation about greater regional coordination around maritime security threats and the broad importance of these issues. Stable Seas also hopes to identify opportunities to engage other civilian agencies and ministries, including those focused on fisheries, environmental protection, trade, and oil and gas production.

"Countries with weak rule of law and poor coastal welfare enable illicit maritime activities to thrive." Says Curtis Bell, director of One Earth Future's Stable Seas program. "This is further complicated in archipelagic regions like the Sulu and Celebes seas, where mitigating factors like regional and international cooperation are key to making any sizable impact in combatting illicit activities."

The recent terrorist attack in Jolo, Philippines also reinforces the need to improve rule of law and coastal welfare in the region in an effort to stymie the flow of funding to terrorist organizations like the Abu Sayyaf Group and the Islamic State. These groups rely on kidnap for ransom (maritime piracy) payments as well as tapping into "shadow economies" to generate funding through illegal trading in weapons, drugs and wildlife products.

While Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines have made some recent strides in improving maritime enforcement, strengthening regional coordination, and building political institutions to uphold the rule of law, corruption remains endemic and a key driver behind a range of illicit maritime activities. Stable seas means the free and open transit of goods leading to stable world economies. If an open space is left, crime and terrorism will fill the void.

## BACKGROUND

One Earth Future (OEF) is a self-funded, private operating foundation seeking to create a more peaceful world through collaborative, data-driven initiatives. OEF focuses on enhancing maritime cooperation, creating sustainable jobs in fragile economies and research which actively contributes to thought leadership on global issues. As an operating foundation, OEF provides strategic, financial and administrative support allowing its programs to focus deeply on complex problems and to create constructive alternatives to violent conflict.

For more information, please contact:

Timothy Schommer – Communications Manager, One Earth Future at [tschommer@oneearthfuture.org](mailto:tschommer@oneearthfuture.org)

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