



**PERMANENT MISSION OF SINGAPORE  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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**UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
62<sup>ND</sup> SESSION**

**GENERAL DEBATE**

**STATEMENT BY**

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## The Challenge of Global Governance

Mr President

1 The item at the top of our agenda is climate change. The coming Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Bali needs our full support. This is one problem which can only be overcome by our collective effort.

2 If we fail, the future will be troubled. Small island countries like Singapore will be in grave danger. People living in the lowlands will have to move to higher ground. The pressure of migration into spaces which become more habitable because of global warming may well become unstoppable. There will be new conflicts in the world. We are now coming to understand better the role of climate change in the conflict in Darfur. It does not excuse the heinous crimes which have been committed there but understanding the water situation in that region will help us find more durable solutions for the future. Many historians are now re-assessing the role of climate change behind major political events in the past.

3 We cannot be sure whether our best efforts can stop global warming. The earth's climate has always gone through cycles. But even if all we can do is to slow down the process, that will buy us time to accumulate knowledge, develop new technologies and adapt. For example, the cost of recycling or desalinating water has been steadily coming down and is becoming completely affordable for us in Singapore. Improvements in water technology can diffuse political tensions in many parts of the world.

4 There are many problems we face which can only be overcome by the nations of the world acting together. Climate change is one. Another is the danger of global pandemics which must also be kept high on the global agenda. The late Director-General of WHO, Dr Lee Jong-Wook, once said that it was not a question of 'whether' but 'when'. With the mass movement of human beings, much of it at jet speed, a new bug can spread quickly. It was just a few years ago when we had the scare of SARS. We are still not sure why that epidemic burnt out so quickly but, lucky, it did. During the few months when it hit us in Singapore, our economy was severely affected. Our tourism industry was devastated. As our economy is so dependent on external trade, shutting our airport was not an option. Instead, we hurriedly converted military night vision devices into thermal scanners and used them at the airport so that arriving and departing passengers with fever could be pulled aside for medical examination. We knew we could not overcome this problem on our own. The Leaders of ASEAN convened an emergency meeting to which the Premier of China, the Chief Executive of Hongkong and the Director-General of WHO were also invited.

5 Whether it is climate change, global pandemics, the fight against terrorism, the multilateral trading system or international finance, we need better global governance. During the Cold War, the world was divided into two camps with each superpower taking the lead in its own sphere. That era is behind us. A multi-polar world is crystallising. On no major issue now can one country, however powerful, act on its own in complete disregard of the views of others. The situation in Iraq is a sad example of this. Russia,

China, India and Brazil are emergent or re-emergent powers whose interests must increasingly be factored in. Smaller countries too have become more assertive, refusing to be ridden roughshod over by the bigger countries.

6 When major international institutions like the UN, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, GATT and WHO were established many years ago after end of the Second World War, the world was very different from what it is today. Because of this, these institutions are not as effective as they ought to be. However, we have to work with these institutions as they are, not as we want them to be if they are established today. Unless there is another global conflagration, the improvement of global governance can only be achieved through gradual evolution not revolution.

7 We can do this at two levels - at the level of the major powers and at the level of small and medium size countries. At the level of the major powers, international institutions should increasingly reflect the multi-polar reality. For example, the reform of the UN including the UN Security Council should take into account the weight of India, Japan, Germany and Brazil, and the growing importance of regional organisations. Selection for heads of the IMF and the World Bank should be widened. Membership of the G8 should be enlarged to include countries like China and India. It is also important that international organisations be held to the highest standards of management. We must maintain their moral authority in the eyes of the world. That Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's recent visit to a refugee camp in Darfur should be received with so much applause was because of the prestige of the UN and the hope reposed in the blue helmet.

8 For climate change, it is good that the US has convened a meeting in Washington of the world's biggest emitters of greenhouse gases. As the world's biggest economy, the US has to exercise leadership but it cannot do this on its own. Without major emitters achieving a certain common understanding among themselves, we will not make much progress at the coming UNFCCC meeting in Bali.

9 For small and medium size countries, their involvement in international institutions should be enhanced. It is unhealthy if the only way small and medium size countries can ensure their interests are taken into account is by threatening to block the progress of others. Indeed, if every country in international organisations has the power of veto, the result must be paralysis. As a small country ourselves, Singapore takes the view that small and medium size countries have both rights and responsibilities. We too must have a sense of responsibility for the global system. A rules-based world gives us more freedom than one where might is right.

10 Regional groupings can help small and medium size countries strike this balance between rights and responsibilities. The African Union offers a good example of how the discipline of a group gives each of its members a greater say in world affairs than what it could have on its own. Group solidarity enables regional organizations like MERCOSUR, GCC and ASEAN to play bigger roles in the world. ASEAN will soon be strengthened by the leaders' adoption of a formal Charter next month. Both formal and informal arrangements have their uses. For example, the Forum of Small States, or FOSS for short, is a loose coalition of one hundred countries which meet regularly to exchange views and give support to one another. They make up more than half the members of the

UN. Formal and informal groups can play a constructive role by taking the middle ground and moderating the excessive demands of radical members. Without such groupings, the WTO, which makes decisions by consensus, cannot work. With respect to the Doha Development Agenda, it is important that we use the Chairman's texts on agriculture and NAMA (industrial goods) as the basis for final negotiations. At the APEC meeting in Sydney recently, this was agreed to even though one or two countries had reservations. Let us, through the groupings we belong to, encourage each other towards compromise on Doha. The positions are not so far apart now and it would be a great pity to walk away from a Doha deal which could add hundreds of billions of dollars to global welfare.

11        However effective they are, international institutions cannot stop the natural rivalry among nation-states. The major powers will still push their weight around. But rules can be established for civilized behaviour and to prevent countries from extreme actions endangering the planet we share and our common heritage. We are not a union of nations but we are at the very least a confederation of nations. There are limits to the sovereignty we exercise as independent nation-states. For example, the countries of the world have not only a legitimate right but also a responsibility to decry the brutal suppression of demonstrators in Myanmar. Yesterday, the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN expressed their revulsion through a Chairman's statement which also called on the Myanmar Government to abandon their old ways and take a fresh approach towards national reconciliation with all groups in the country. We applauded the initiative of the UN Secretary-General to dispatch Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari and urged the Myanmar Government to work with him for the good of the people of Myanmar.

12        Mr President, six months before September 11, in March 2001, the people of the world watched with shock and horror the deliberate destruction of the ancient Buddha statues in Bamiyan by the Taliban. We must never allow such wanton acts to take place again whether the injury is to world heritage sites or to the environment or to human beings. Behind such acts is an attitude of hatred and intolerance which must not be condoned. If this century is to be one of peace and development, all of us must internalise a spirit of inter-faith understanding and common humanity. Recently, the Indian Government announced its intention to revive the ancient Buddhist university at Nalanda and offered it to Asian countries as a project to promote cultural and religious exchange. For hundreds of years, Nalanda was a great university drawing students from all over Asia to study not just Buddhism but also philosophy, science, mathematics and other subjects. This is a project deserving of our support.

13        We need many such endeavours in the world today to create a greater awareness of our common origins and our growing interdependence. Without that larger sense, the challenge of global governance will be difficult to overcome. Without all countries feeling a sense of shared responsibility for the earth's environment, for example, climate change will become much worse before effective measures are taken, by which time it may be too late.

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