



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

231 East 51st Street, New York, N.Y. 10022 • Tel. (212) 826-0840 • Fax (212) 826-2964 • <http://www.mfa.gov.sg/newyork>

**UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
61ST SESSION**

GENERAL DEBATE

STATEMENT BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY MR GEORGE YEO
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE**

22 SEPTEMBER 2006

Please check against delivery

REGIONAL CONTRIBUTION TO GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Madame President,
Mr Secretary-General,
Distinguished Colleagues

The recent war in Lebanon had no clear victor. Israel succeeded in removing the immediate threat across the border but could not wipe out Hezbollah. Hezbollah claimed victory having survived Israeli air bombardment and ground action. On both sides, innocent people have suffered greatly. Whether the present ceasefire can become a lasting peace depends on many factors, not least the ability of the Lebanese Army and UNIFIL to maintain the buffer in southern Lebanon. But one thing was clear: that without the eventual intervention of the UN, the fighting would have continued and more lives would have been lost.

2 The Middle East is going through the throes of change. In Palestine, there is no escaping a two-state solution. However, defining the precise boundaries of that solution is a grinding process which will take time. No one can achieve all his demands; no party can insist on absolute security. Between Sunnis and Shiites in Lebanon, Iraq and elsewhere in the region, a new balance is being established. This will also take time. In many countries, there is tension between those who are impatient for change and those who believe that discontinuity will lead to chaos and anarchy. For as long as there is more despair than hope, terrorist organisations will be able to find fresh recruits. What happens in the Middle East affects the entire world. No country is insulated, if nothing else, from the terrorist threat and high energy prices.

3 No grand solution is possible. The end of the Cold War marked the end of an era when the major powers could settle the terms among themselves over the heads of lesser countries. It was not so long ago but it seems strange today that a cold peace could be maintained for decades by each side pointing tens of thousands of nuclear missiles at the other. Technology has changed the rules. Warfare has now become asymmetric. Cruise missiles and submarines cannot solve the problem of suicide bombers. And those who manipulate these terrorists might well take positions in global financial markets to benefit from the havoc that they create.

4 In a sense, technology has globalised the world and broken it into smaller pieces. Empires have broken up. New countries have been born. In large countries, power has often devolved downwards and regions have become more assertive. It has become a messier world which presents new challenges to global governance. Improving global governance from above sometimes seems an impossible task. Take the reform of the UN for example. Despite all the efforts made and the fine speeches delivered, the results have been quite modest. The near-collapse of the Doha talks is another example of how difficult it is to effect change from the top

down. When the GATT was formed in 1948, there were only 23 members. Today the WTO has 149 members. No country or group of countries seems able or willing to take the lead in brokering a compromise. We must hope that Director-General Pascal Lamy will succeed in his heroic efforts to rescue the Doha Round from failure. There are other areas in which global action is needed but insufficient. All of us worry about global climate change but how can there be consensus when the costs and benefits fall so unevenly and the major polluters are unwilling to accept responsibility? We hear dire warnings from the World Health Organisation about a global flu pandemic, yet our collective response is so feeble.

5 While we should never give up hope on global initiatives, we should be realistic because achieving global consensus in a multi-polar world is, to say the least, challenging. When governments have to win elections, they are more likely to respond to short-term political needs than to worry about longer-term global concerns. We can often do more at the regional level. At that level, the stakes are clearer to our constituencies and the need for action easier to explain. The UN Charter does recognise the role regional arrangements can play in helping the UN achieve its objectives.

6 In a globalised world with porous borders, regional cooperation can often bring about quick benefits. Take, for example, the simple act of re-opening the Nathu La Pass in the Himalayas between China and India almost 3 months ago after 44 years. Immediately, on both sides of the Pass, ordinary people benefit immensely from trade and travel. New problems will arise of course but they can be managed.

7 All over the world today, regional initiatives are proliferating. Many overlap. Some are modest in their objectives, providing forums for public and private sector leaders to meet and consult. Others are more ambitious, creating regional free trade areas, or fostering joint efforts against problems like drug trafficking and terrorism. Many of these regional initiatives are open and inclusive, and should be encouraged. Those which are superfluous will gradually wither away. Some can make significant contributions to global governance and reduce the burdens borne by the major powers. International organisations like the UN, WTO, WHO, IAEA and UNEP should work with them, strengthen their capabilities and encourage mutual learning. They create a habit of cooperation among neighbouring countries and reduce misunderstanding.

8 In Asia, the role of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) has not only been beneficial to the ten countries of Southeast Asia, it has also helped to create a larger architecture of cooperation. Founded 39 years ago in 1967 when the war in Indo-China was raging, ASEAN began as a grouping to promote what then Indonesian President Suharto called 'regional resilience'. The original five non-Communist countries - Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines and Singapore - were determined to keep the peace among ourselves and concentrate on economic development. Brunei joined ASEAN in 1984 after it became

independent. With the end of the Cold War, peace returned to Indo-China and ASEAN gradually expanded to include the newer member-states of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, to become a community of ten.

9 In 1992, the countries of ASEAN decided to establish a free trade area in stages. For trade in goods, we are largely there. For investment and services, we still have some way to go. But there is considerable political will to press on and make the whole of ASEAN a single economic space. Already, ASEAN as a grouping plays a major role in global trade, accounting for some 6 % of total world trade.

10 The re-emergence of China and India as major powers presents us with both opportunities and challenges. ASEAN's trade with both is growing rapidly. But they are also a competitive challenge to us. When the Leaders of ASEAN met in Bali three years ago, they took a major decision to establish an ASEAN Community by 2020 with three main pillars - security, economic and cultural. To create such a community, an ASEAN Charter will be drawn up next year as a mini-constitution to provide the legal basis for our future integration. It will include provisions for dispute settlement by independent panels.

11 The European Union is an inspiration to us in ASEAN. Two months ago, the European Commission hosted members of an ASEAN Eminent Persons Group and generously offered advice and assistance. While ASEAN integration will never be as deep or as broad as that of the EU, there is much that we can learn from the European experience.

12 For ASEAN to prosper, it is important that we maintain good relations with all the major powers. For many years now, ASEAN has promoted good relations with the US, the EU, Russia, China, Japan, Korea, India, Canada, Australia and New Zealand who are all our dialogue partners. With strong growth in global trade, ASEAN has negotiated or is in the process of negotiating free trade agreements with China, India, Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand, and closer economic partnerships with the US and the EU. We have a simple strategy which is to give all of them a strong stake in our unity and development. Strategically, some of the most important sea lanes pass through ASEAN waters. About a third of global trade, half of global oil trade and 80% of the oil bound for China and Japan, pass through the Straits of Malacca and Singapore.

13 Through the ASEAN-plus groupings and the East Asia Summit which includes China, Japan, Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand, we are creating a new architecture of peaceful cooperative development in larger Asia. ASEAN is not big enough to be a major global player but ASEAN plays a significant role in holding Asia together and keeping it open to the rest of the world. Whatever we do in Asia must not cause the US, the EU or Russia to think that we are excluding them.

14 ASEAN is a work in process. Like other regions in the world, we face many problems - economic development, separatist movements, terrorism, drug-trafficking, environmental degradation, maritime security, ethnic/religious divisions, avian flu, among others. However, what each of us in ASEAN has come to appreciate is that, without ASEAN, each of these problems is much harder to solve. And ASEAN alone cannot solve any of them. We have to work with other countries and with international organisations. We are grateful for their assistance, their partnership and their cooperation.

Madame President,
Mr Secretary-General

15 ASEAN supports you and the UN strongly. We will work with you to improve the workings of the UN and make it more effective. In this regard, ASEAN continues to endorse the candidature of Dr Surakiart Sathirathai as the next Secretary General despite the recent coup in Thailand. Although it was a setback, Thai society has a deep resilience which will enable it to recover quickly. ASEAN will always be on the side of the Thai people. If every region in the world, working with the UN, can help to stabilize its own immediate environment and promote favourable economic conditions, the prospects for global peace and development will be enhanced. What the nations of Africa have been able to do despite adverse circumstances is impressive. The willingness of individual African countries to agree on common positions is unique to that continent and an inspiration to the rest of us. The UN is already stretched and can only do so much. Instead, let us in each of our regions do our part and work with the UN and its organisations in a complementary way. On Darfur, for example, we need close cooperation between the UN and African countries to stop the killing. Wherever possible, regional organisations should be strengthened. The UN and other international organisations can play a facilitating role, provide resources and advice, set standards and establish benchmarks. Even in the Middle East, where the work often seems the hardest, regional cooperation can help create a better environment for peace and development. Without the goodwill of its neighbours, the reconstruction of Iraq, for example, will be much more difficult.

16 With over 500 million people, ASEAN has 8% of the world's population. Our share of global GDP is much lower at 2%. But, within the limits of our modest capabilities, we in ASEAN will do our part to contribute to the good work of the UN in making this a better world and not add to its problems.

.....