

TR 1:10:71

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE
TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE UNITED
NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, IN NEW YORK
ON 1ST OCTOBER, 1971

Mr President,¹

I feel happy and privileged that in delivering my first address to the General Assembly in my capacity as Prime Minister of Malaysia, I should be able to do so under your distinguished presidency. I have had the pleasure of working closely with you over many years during which we have collaborated together to forge ever closer relations between our two neighbouring countries and to strengthen regional ties among the countries of Southeast Asia. From my long and close association with you, I have come to know and to admire your remarkable attributes as a courageous leader of Indonesia and a wise and far-sighted statesman of Asia. With you as its President, this General Assembly is assured of brisk, impartial and effective guidance of its affairs. It is with special pleasure therefore that I offer my sincere congratulations to you on your election as President of the General Assembly.

Mr President, I wish to take the opportunity now of conveying to your distinguished predecessor, Ambassador Edvard Hambro of Norway, my delegation's warm admiration and thanks for his patient and statesmanlike leadership in steering the historic and difficult twenty-fifth Session of the General Assembly to a successful conclusion.

Mr President, my decision to come to the United Nations at first available opportunity upon assuming office as Prime Minister just a year ago reflects my government's continued commitment to the ideals and the purposes and principles of the charter. It also reflects my keen desire to renew personally my government's pledge of support for the United Nations system in all its endeavours to secure for humanity a safe, just and prosperous international order.

1 Tuan Adam Malik, Menteri Luar Indonesia.

Over the last twenty-six years of its existence, the United Nations can claim to have played an important role in human affairs. It has often been successful in restraining the wider excesses of power politics on the international stage. Its efforts have brought the Colonial System almost to an end except for the stubborn resistance to de-Colonization in Southern Africa. It has formulated and entrenched certain basic principles of human rights and human dignity. It has played a considerable role in the field of disarmament. Its activities in the field of economic development has been of immense value to developing countries. All this and more the United Nations can rightly claim.

It will be noticed that I have expressed the record quite modestly. I have done so with a purpose because I believe it is important that we do not lose ourselves or our perspectives in a welter of self congratulations about United Nations. The achievements of the United Nations are sufficiently remarkable to stand by themselves without any embellishment. But it is important that as we meet here each September, we should ask ourselves what part the United Nations plays in the lives of our countries and in the formulation of our foreign policies. Are we in fact serious about the United Nations? It is understandable that the bright glow and expectations of the dawn of 1945 are inevitably tarnished in the cold light of experience over the last twenty-six years. We should nevertheless frankly face the question whether the people of the world look with hope and expectations to each session of the General Assembly or whether they, and their governments, regard it as yet another international meeting which consumes a disproportionately vast expenditure of time and money.

Let me say at once that for my part I do not regard the annual session of the General Assembly as merely a ritual gathering of the world's statesmen. Nevertheless, I am acutely conscious of the disillusion and disappointments of many people and many governments the world over in the United Nations. This is a fact which we must face—we must not gloss over it—we cannot ignore it in the hope that it will somehow disappear. Of course, the United Nations will go on. But do we take seriously its role in international affairs as a centre for harmonising conflicting interests and as a catalyst for peaceful change? Or have we established alternative networks of relationships for the resolution

of our problems while paying suitable and regular obeisance to the United Nations. For my part, it is precisely because I value the United Nations—what it stands for and what it can achieve—that I urge the assembly to take a dispassionate and even a critical look at the direction in which we are going.

The United Nations, of course, involves working on the underlying factors which make the international society—the interests, the fears and suspicions, the hopes and the expectations of the member States. It represents the sum total of the national entities which make up its composition. But it should be more than the sum of its parts. This annual gathering in New York must be something more than a meeting of National Governments. Rather it should also be an expression of the concept that there is an international community which bears the responsibility for dealing with matters that refuse to be confined within our national boundaries. This does not mean that we should ignore the fact that we assemble here to promote the interests of our own national constituencies. But we must try to go beyond that and to remember that we also comprise a collective body whose electorate is the international Society. This is the framework within which the United Nations must operate. One of the great challenges of the seventies is whether the nations of the world can in their pursuit of national objective conform to the underlying concepts and norms of the charter and work together as a global community.

I believe that sometimes we have succeeded. From time to time we have shown our consciousness of the fact that we are all fellow passengers on this fragile planet earth. We are on this journey together—we are becoming inevitably more interdependent. It is this consciousness of a world community which we must carefully cultivate and nurture.

The facts of international life in the world today are such that the further development of the United Nations is dependent in the first place on the attitude of the major powers. They have it in them to decide whether the United Nations can become a truly effective organisation which is capable of fulfilling its purposes and the hopes and expectations of mankind. This is because they cannot be ignored. The resolutions of the United Nations can be ignored. The weak developing countries can be ignored. It depends on the major powers, therefore, what role the United

Nations will play on the international stage. There is at the same time a corresponding obligation on the part of the smaller powers. Just as we must do our utmost to avoid the alienation from the United Nations of smaller countries because of the dominating role of the major powers, so also we must strive to prevent the alienation of the major powers from the organisation through the attempted imposition of the will of the majority. Speaking as a representative of a small developing country, I am acutely conscious of the fact that the simple mechanical process of majority voting along group, political or ideological lines will not solve any problem. There is often a need for greater realism and restraint. More efforts might be made through the process of negotiation and consultation to arrive at solutions which while they must be solutions of principle are at the same time realistic and attainable.

There is, however, one aspect of this matter which must not be lost sight of. The rhetoric and resolutions at the United Nations cannot simply be dismissed as a sign of immaturity or irresponsibility because they are often only the expression of the importance of the group of developing countries at the United Nations. We cry aloud in the hope that we may be heard. We seek to express our appeal and our outrage at the human condition which all humanity must bear witness. We seek to remind a callous world of the horrors and injustices of apartheid and colonialism in Southern Africa. Of the tragic plight of the people of Palestine and of the continuing struggle against human poverty and human misery which face such a vast majority of mankind. I need not add more to that list. The problems of the world which cry out for solution are quite familiar to us all.

Let us pause a moment and look again at the situation in Southern Africa. The stubborn refusal of the South African Government to abandon its abhorrent apartheid policy and its persistent denial of United Nations Authority in respect of Namibia must be regarded as constituting one of the grave challenges confronting the United Nations. There are also the entrenched forces of colonialism in Southern Rhodesia, Angola and Mozambique. Some five or six years ago there was a glimmer of hope. Since then dark clouds have enveloped the horizon almost completely. There can be no denial that South Africa's contemptuous disregard of the United Nations has established a precedent whose corroding influence on the authority and

credibility of the organisation has already begun to assume alarming proportions. Today, it is my hope that the recent advisory opinion of the international court of justice will give the necessary impetus to the Security Council to take positive action which could represent a break-through on this tragic issue.

I refer to another problem which continues to grapple the United Nations, and that is the situation in West Asia. Resolution 242 was unanimously approved by the Security Council to provide the framework for a peaceful settlement. Four years have since passed and we are almost precisely where we were. Israel continues to be in illegal occupation of Arab Territory. The people of Palestine continue to be denied their inalienable right. While noting with deep regret the negative Israeli attitude, let me express the hope that the positive reply of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the initiative taken by the special representative of the Secretary General will enable the search for a peaceful settlement to proceed forward.

Mr President, I do not wish to sound unduly pessimistic. Looking at the picture as a whole, and looking towards the future, we may find some encouragement in the events of the last session of the General Assembly. That session was characterised by a degree of understanding and co-operation. It marked the culmination of the first quarter century of the organisation with the adoption of several historic declarations which together sum up the progress already made and the determination to continue with the work of achieving the purposes of the United Nations. I refer to the declaration on the strengthening of peace and security—the declaration on peaceful relations among states—the declaration on agreed principles on the exploitation of the seabed for peaceful purposes—and finally the international development strategy for the second development decade. It is in this sense that I view the decade ahead which we have just begun as one of hope as well as one of great challenge and opportunity for the United Nations.

I would like specifically to refer now to the problem of economic development, which is the single most crucial issue facing the developing countries. The challenge facing the international community is not just a challenge for economic development but in its totality it is a challenge involving the peace and stability

and indeed the survival of mankind. What the world is striving for, to ensure a durable peace is not just a balance of power, but a balance of prosperity, of opportunity and of well being. And in this, the developed as much as the developing countries, have a mutual stake and interest.

It is in this context that I view the urgent and compelling need for the effective implementation of the international development strategy of the second development decade. While economic development must remain the primary responsibility of the developing countries themselves, it is essential that their dedication and labours should be matched by development assistance and more favourable economic and commercial policies on the part of the developed countries equally dedicated and committed to the attainment of the goals of the second development decade.

The problem of development must, therefore, be approached in the perspective of creating the overall conditions necessary for peace and stability in the world. And unless there is a genuine partnership between the developed and the developing countries, and economic development is accepted as a common challenge to all the prospects for a radical improvement in the world economic framework and consequently the prospects for establishing a sound basis for world peace and security will remain as remote as ever.

Mr President, what in sum I am advocating is a realistic appraisal of the United Nations as it is today, and in the light of the appraisal, a renewed effort to fulfil the dreams and hopes which were born in San Francisco twenty six years ago. I am aware that what I have said is not new; we are all conscious of it, though we may not often wish to express our thoughts. But I believe we must if we value the United Nations. It is no use coming to the United Nations each September to say polite things to one another and then to go on our separate ways. Let us even be a little impatient, a little critical of ourselves. Let us look at our agenda and remind ourselves how many of the items on it have not become hardy annuals when we appear to be going through the same debates each year. It is any wonder then that there is increasing disillusionment about the United Nations? What would we think, what would our people think, if each year in our own national assemblies the same debates take place, the same decisions are taken and then things go on precisely as they were before?

Let us reassess our position, let us take stock of where we stand and apply ourselves with vigour and tenacity to solving the problems which face us. Let us remember that words are only words. They do not in themselves solve any problem. We must mean what we say and we must do our utmost to see through to the end what we have agreed upon. We must have a sense of commitment and a clear sense of direction. There must be a definite and sustained follow-through of the sentiments we express here. Only in this way can the United Nations succeed. I believe it is important, indeed vital that the United Nations should succeed. I would like it to occupy a central place in our consideration of foreign policy. I would like it to capture the imagination and to live up to the hope of our people. To these ends I pledge Malaysia's readiness to play her part.

Mr President, I believe it would be right that in this statement J should also address myself to the political and security situation especially as it affects Southeast Asia. There can be little doubt that the seventies will be a period of great challenge and opportunity. We are already witnessing the beginnings of a momentous drama unfolding over the political horizon. In Asia, in particular, while admittedly wars and human suffering still rage, there are already hopeful signs of a gradual thaw in long-held rigid positions of the protagonists in the ideological and political confrontation in the area. The recent announcement by Washington and Peking of a visit by President Nixon to China in the near future is a dramatic manifestation of this thaw. I do not entertain any illusion about the outcome of this meeting but it is essential that we should be aware of the significance of the moment and that we should seize the opportunity to chart a new course of destiny in Asia and the world.

While the dialogue among the major powers is a welcome development, it may be well for the other countries of Asia not to be content to be spectators in this unfolding drama. For in the evolution of a new situation which such dialogue among the major powers may well bring about, it is essential that the interests of all countries, both the big powers and the small powers, should be accommodated. In terms of peace and security in Asia, I believe that Southeast Asia would have a great relevance in the establishment of an Asian equilibrium and it is incumbent upon the nations

of Southeast Asia to play a positive role in this dynamic political evolution.

This leads me to the policy of neutralization of Southeast Asia which Malaysia has been advocating in the past one year or so as the only viable long-term solution for peace and stability in Southeast Asia. It is in this context that I welcome the initiative of the Government of Ceylon that the Indian Ocean area be declared a zone of peace. The United Nations should take action towards this objective while there is still time before the military involvement of the major powers in the area assumes significant proportion.

Mr President, as regards to the proposal for the neutralization of Southeast Asia, my Government has on many occasions explained the considerations which have led us to make the proposal. I do not, therefore, propose to elaborate on them again. What is required in Southeast Asia in our view is a new international order by which the region is free and isolated from competition and interference by outside powers and in which the neutrality of the region, and the independence and territorial integrity of the countries in it, are fully guaranteed.

The essence of the neutralization proposal must be the recognition and accommodation of the legitimate interests of all powers concerned in the area, both the guarantor powers as well as the countries within the area itself. There need to be harmonising of all these interests, the end result of which should be an order every one can live with. The question really is therefore: is there room for adjustment and accommodation so that there can emerge in time an international order which is acceptable to all which is compatible with the legitimate interests of all. Surely, there must be, if there is a determined will and effort on the part of all concerned to work for the attainment of that objective.

The countries in Southeast Asia have a primary role to play to bring about the conditions which are necessary for the realisation of the neutralization proposal and to show that a neutralised Southeast Asia meets with the legitimate interests of the great powers themselves. The questions of peace and war in Southeast Asia affect us together in the region. It is, therefore, my firm conviction that on these questions we in Southeast Asia should consult closely together for the attainment of our common

regional cohesion and solidarity. The movement towards regionalism is gaining increasing momentum among the countries objectives. Central to this approach is the cultivation of a sense of of Southeast Asia and there have been established many regional bodies covering such matters as education, transport and communication, development financing, and so on. Above all, there is the region's own body, the Association of Southeast Asian (ASEAN) formed and fashioned by us some five years ago to forge closer links and to promote co-operation in economic, social and cultural matters among its members. For my part, I view the exercise in regional co-operation in Southeast Asia as exemplified by ASEAN, as having value beyond that of merely economic, social and cultural co-operation. Even more important it will engender conditions of stability in the region and a sense of solidarity and cohesion among Southeast Asian countries. It will constitute the solid foundation for the realisation of the neutralization proposal for Southeast Asia.

One of the essential pre-requisites for the realisation of the neutralization proposal is the existence of a dialogue between the major powers. It is important that the channels of dialogue be opened and widened and the most important of these channels is China's participation in the United Nations. That China should be in the United Nations is, after twenty two years, no longer a matter of dispute. There are, however, certain—shall I say—technical differences among us. I wish therefore to take this opportunity to state the position of my Government. Malaysia will oppose any resolution which proposes "dual representation" for the China seat because in our view, there is one China and one seat for China in the United Nations. It is beyond doubt that the Government of the People's Republic of China is de jure and de facto the Government of China. We will also oppose any resolution which puts forward the view that the seating of the People's Republic of China involves the expulsion of an existing member, as we consider that the question of expulsion does not arise. As things stand at present, what has been termed the Albanian resolution most nearly meets our position. If there is no other resolution which comes closer to our position, we will support that resolution but I wish to make it clear that in our view the question of Taiwan is a separate issue which will have to be resolved by the parties concerned. We are anxious that this question should be peacefully

resolved. It is our hope that in the solution of this problem due account should be taken of the wishes of the people of Taiwan to be ascertained by the process of self-determination.

Mr President, it is my hope that with the participation of China in the United Nations, we will enter into a new era of meaningful dialogue among all the major powers of the world so that out of this dialogue, conflicts can be blunted and disparate interests harmonised. One of the great virtues of the United Nations is that as a centre of harmonising the actions of States, it is not only the consensus of the big powers that count but the consensus of the entire membership. It is, therefore, the forum in which not only the interests of the major powers can be reconciled but where the consensus of the major powers can be reconciled with and even serve the interest of the entire international community. That I submit Mr President is what the United Nations is all about and it lies within our hands to make our Organisation discharge this function.

Mr President, may I finally say a few words about our Secretary-General.² He had come into office from the tragic circumstances falling on his predecessor. From that moment of tragedy he had unobtrusively but resolutely held the United Nations together by his strength of quiet dignity. It is very difficult for me to express the deep gratitude that we owe him. In all of ten years with unfailing devotion he had steered the organisation through many perils. We all know how difficult is the task of the Secretary-General. But his unflinching perseverance in his endeavours to give practical expression to the aims and purposes of the Charter is always kept from which we may draw inspiration. His work will be remembered by present and future leaders of the United Nations and history will preserve his name as one of the architects of international co-operation and understanding. In many crisis especially in the crisis of confidence that the United Nations has had to face now and again, U Thant represented all that is best in the United Nations. We extend our hands to him in gratitude. We hope that he will remain available in the future for other great services to the United Nations in fields where his experience and ability could bring the Organisation great results. We wish him and his family health and happiness.

2 U Thant.