

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
AS CHAIRMAN OF THE FEDERATION UNITED
NATIONS ASSOCIATION AT UNITED NATIONS
DAY DINNER, KUALA LUMPUR ON 24TH
OCTOBER, 1961

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today is one of the great anniversaries of the morden world—the United Nations Day—a day when men of goodwill everywhere meet to renew their faith in the principles and purposes of the Charter they are pledged to uphold.

Sixteen years ago, today, when the United Nations Organisation was formally established it had a membership of fifty one nations. Today that membership has grown to 101. There are very few nations in the world which are not members yet, and there is not a single area of the world which is unaffected by what the United Nations thinks and does.

We in Malaya became a member of the United Nations just over four years ago, in 1957, and in that same year I spoke for the first time at the United Nations Day Dinner. I have done so each year since, and I have come to regard this date in my diary as one which I should never miss, not only as a national duty but a personal one.

On these occasion in the past I have spoken confidently and topically on the current role and performance of the United Nations, with of course particular reference to the Federation of Malaya. The United Nations had become a set theme for speech making, and there was an inherent danger of its becoming routine, because, whatever its critics might say, the United Nations continued on the whole to be a success story. It was very natural and very easy, therefore, for any speaker to draw inspiration from the anniversary of the United Nations Day.

On this anniversary, however, I am speaking in a different atmosphere and different circumstances. I will be failing in my duty as Chairman of the United Nations Association if I do not say that this is no time for panegyrics and praise, but a time of solemn and sober crisis for the United Nations.

Just over five weeks ago the greatly respected Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr Dag Hammerskjold, plunged mysteriously to death in the African night. Shock of that aircraft crash in the jungle echoed round the world. Seldom before in the story of mankind has the death of one man caused such a universal poignancy and regret. For the common man everywhere his sudden passing was a personal loss. The full story of how or why that tragic accident occurred may never be solved, but this we do know, that the impact of that fatal crash has stirred the hearts and minds of men profoundly with worry and concern for the future of the United Nations.

Many men more able than I have spoken movingly about the death of Mr Hammerskjold. Finest tribute I can pay to his memory is to say that in his dedication to duty, in his international role of maintaining peace in the world, he was the greatest civil servant of our time. He worked not for any nation or nations but for all mankind.

He was a man of action rather than words. He was not much given to making public speeches; his metier was the Committee room or the Conference table. But when he did speak out publicly he did so frankly and fairly, without fear or favour, subject to no man's mastery and no nation's will.

I recall three years ago when he visited Malaya, and I had the opportunity to meet him personally, he was extremely well informed about our country, and he thanked our Prime Minister most sincerely for the exemplary way in which Malaya held her membership of the United Nations. He took a great interest indeed in everything he saw here. I remember particularly his reaction in the Operations Room when our manner of conducting the Emergency was explained to him. He was frankly astonished and said so. His words were, "In all my life I have never heard of a war run by Committees and yet it works."

Now Mr Hammerskjold is no more but his spirit of duty and service lives on after him. The whole world misses him deeply, and the United Nations itself is now in the throes of a tremendous time of test. The cold war, the unending struggle between the giant powers, permeates and penetrates the corridors and council rooms of the United Nations building. It is not too much to say that the whole shape and future of the United Nations will be decided by the course of events in New York, the cross-currents

of diplomacy among all the capitals of the world. What the outcome will be, no man can say as yet, but all men can hope and pray that God will guide the minds of men of power and influence along the ways of righteousness of wisdom and tolerance in the interest of the peace and happiness of men and nations everywhere.

In this period of crisis and conflict of power, it must seem to some that small nations can only stand on the sideline and wait results. This is an attitude I decry. The small nations may wield no might in terms of military power, but in terms of moral right and public opinion they are bound in duty to speak out, and to keep on speaking out, so that the United Nations will continue to be the instrument of peace and betterment it was designed to be. In my view all the small nations must stand together to preserve the role and purpose of the United Nations, its manner and its authority, in the tradition of supra-national duty and service established by Mr Hammerskjoeld. If we close our ranks, and refuse to be deflected from this purpose, then there is no doubt at all that the United Nations will survive the threats to its effectiveness, the efforts to destroy its influence, which are now being made.

That is why I say that this anniversary of the United Nations Day is a solemn and sober time for all men everywhere. Ladies and gentlemen, I propose now to break the custom as the principal speaker, and to ask you to rise and to drink with me in all sincerity, in all faith and confidence, to "the success and security of the United Nations."