

**THE PLENARY OF THE FORTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK, 1 October 1993

Mr President,

I would like to join the other speakers in extending my congratulations to Your Excellency Ambassador Samuel R. Insanally on your election as the President of the 48th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Your election to the important office of the President of the General Assembly is an honour to your country, with whom Malaysia enjoys warm and friendly relations. With your experience and ability, I am confident that you will discharge your responsibilities well and lead this august assembly to a successful conclusion of its work.

2. I would also like to express my appreciation of your predecessor H.E. Mr. Stoyan Ganev, who discharged his duties with dedication and earnestness, and successfully guided the efforts in revitalising the work of the General Assembly.

Mr. President,

3. May I also take this opportunity to welcome on behalf of Malaysia six countries which have joined the United Nations since last fall - Andora, Czech Republic, Eritrea, Monaco, Slovak Republic and the Republic of Macedonia. Their membership would help in strengthening the United Nations and in executing its increasingly complex role in the maintenance of international peace and security, and the promotion of international economic cooperation.

Mr. President,

4. Malaysia is a developing third world country. We should, according to the stereotypical western concept of a third world country, be politically unstable, administratively incompetent and economically depressed.

5. But we are not quite typical. We have actually made progress. We are quite stable despite a multi-racial time-bomb we inherited from our colonial past. We are fairly competent in the running of our affairs. Such is our progress that we actually contemplate building buildings which should be the preserve of our betters.

6. And we dare to speak our minds.

7. These are unforgiveable sins and we are reminded every time that we should not be too ambitious. We are told that our achievements are temporary, that next year we would go the way of their preconceived third world countries. Of course last year and the years before we were told the same. But so far we have not obliged. We are however humbly aware that nothing is permanent. Our detractors may yet prove right.

8. That we do well and are not in dire need of their development aid is apparently not praiseworthy. Yet, when other developing countries perform badly they are chastised and told to do better, or they would get no more aid or loans.

9. But we will soldier on. We really should not care about what is said of us. Unfortunately these negative remarks make life that much more difficult for us.

10. We need foreign investment. To have them we need a reputation for stability, competence and predictability. But when investors are told repeatedly that we are about to explode in racial violence, etc., they are likely to invest elsewhere. Of course what is said about us is untrue, lies. But these people apparently subscribe to the dictum, that a lie repeated often enough will be believed.

Mr. President,

11. We care for the well-being of our people. We want to develop so as to give them a reasonable standard of living. But we cannot be cowed into not speaking our minds. If the powerful nations do wrong, we will speak out against them even if they say we are unduly suspicious, that we have an exaggerated sense of our own importance, etc. We can be belittled but we will continue to speak the truth.

12. Here at the U.N. we will say what we feel we should say. Of course the controlled `free' Western media will not publish it. But the few here will hear us. In any case it is what we achieve that counts with us. We can do without Western approval.

Mr. President,

13. Four or five years ago the world was celebrating the impending collapse of the 'Evil Empire'. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republic was still intact then, but all indications were that it had given up the fight; that it was coming to terms with its main adversaries, the countries of the Western so-called Free World; and that the Cold War was drawing to a close.

14. Peace was breaking out all over the world and there was much talk of 'peace dividends'. The arms race would end, there would be nuclear disarmament, and as the saying goes, the guns would be turned into ploughshares. A brave new world would emerge: equitable, just and prosperous. There would be no oppression, no terror and no poverty or starvation.

15. Everyone would embrace democracy and the market economy, transiting from authoritarian rule and command economy without any hitches. And a global policeman would see to it that every country stay in line or face the consequences. There was no end to the good things that would make up the 'peace dividends'.

16. It would be wrong to say that there were no 'peace dividends' at all -- the Iran-Iraq War, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the war in Cambodia, some of the Central American wars, and now the violent Palestinian-Israeli confrontation and South Africa's apartheid; these did get resolved, partially or completely. But the world has not become a safer or a better place for a great many.

17. The Soviet Union did not just become democratic practitioners of free trade, working with the good guys for a better world. It broke up into a number of republics, and Russia has become dangerously unstable and ungovernable. The respected great reformer of Perestroika and Glasnost fame has been ousted and disgraced and has been replaced by another who seems to fare no better.

18. The 'Evil Empire' is no more. But the price in human lives and displacement of people is very high. And the price is still being paid.

19. In Georgia, Moldavia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, much destruction and many killings have taken place and are still taking place. The old economic structure has been destroyed, but the new one is far from being in place. Chaos, bloody chaos, prevails in many places.

20. Far from achieving universal peace the world is treated to a spectacle of unparalleled brutality by the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In many countries of Europe fascism has once again reared its ugly head. Houses are torched and people burned to death. And the voters actually approved.

21. During the Cold War days the protagonists tried constantly to provoke uprisings against Governments of the countries they were opposed to. They would provide financial and material help and the promise that they would protect these rebels or provide them with asylum.

22. With the collapse of the communist bloc, the people there expected help when they overthrew their Communist Governments and established democratic free market societies or they sought independence for their countries. In some instances they found their expectations justified. The Slovenes and the Croats enjoyed the full support of the Europeans and were able to mould new nations. But the Kurds and the Bosnians learnt that they thought wrong. It is only coincidental that both are Muslim communities.

23. The most tragic case is that of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The crime of the Muslims is that they wish for a non-Muslim religiously heterogenous state. They were viciously attacked by the Serbs who openly declared that they were and are doing this to ensure that Europe remains Christian. They are not prevented by the Europeans.

24. The cruelties committed by the Serbs defy imagination. In one case, which caused officials in one of the powerful countries of the West to resign in protest over their Government's passivity, a six year-old child was repeatedly raped in front of her mother who not only had to watch but was prevented from giving any help until the little child died after two days of exposure.

25. This is not an isolated incident. Muslim women, old and young and little girls were raped, brutalised and killed by the tens of thousands at the hands of the Serbs and the Croats.

26. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims have died and are dying and some two million have been forced to flee from their burning towns and villages.

27. And what do the erstwhile champions of freedom and democracy do? They actually prevented the victims from defending themselves. Instead they try to force the victims to accept the partitioning and surrender of their territories which had been ethnically-cleansed by the Serbs and Croats. Thus are the rapers and murderers to be rewarded? Only the most gullible will still believe that the vociferous champions of freedom and democracy will risk their necks for other people's freedom and democracy.

Mr President,

28. Malaysia would like to record its satisfaction over the acceptance of Malaysian troops to serve in the U.N. forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina. We regret, however, the exclusion of certain Muslim countries from participating in the UNPROFOR. Apparently the distrust of Muslims is quite widespread.

29. Malaysians are prepared to serve under whoever is appointed by the U.N. in Bosnia-Herzegovina. We hope that our troops will be well-supported. We will not protest if the U.N. decides to increase pressure on the Serbs, including mounting a military offensive, provided due preparations are made.

Mr President,

30. When we add up, the 'peace dividends' accruing from the ending of the Cold War have not been really substantial. If at all, the debit side is much bigger than the credit side. The most glaring example is the renegeing on the much needed development assistance to poor developing countries.

31. Still when drawing up the balance sheet from the ending of the Cold War, one cannot but highlight two significant items on the credit side. The recent signing of the PLO-Israeli peace agreement and that between blacks and whites in South Africa must be regarded as the biggest achievements of the post Cold War period. Admittedly there is still a great deal to be negotiated before justice can be rendered to all sides and before true peace becomes permanent. But the most crucial parts are over.

32. I would like to congratulate all the parties concerned for their good sense and their boldness. The extremists on both sides will not be happy. There will be more violence. But I am sure those who are for peace and good sense will be as brave in peace as they have been in war.

33. I commend these accords to the good people of Northern Ireland. It is brave not to surrender even one inch. But it takes real bravery to compromise.

Mr President,

34. One may well ask why in the face of the much-publicised failure of the U.S-sponsored peace talks, there should be this sudden break-through? The answer is to be found in the press statements. Good sense cannot prevail when the media demands that statements be made by each and everyone before and after each negotiating session. The negotiators are forced to make public stands, to demonstrate how tough they are and how they will not give in even an inch. Having made these stands they were not able to accommodate good sense anymore.

35. In the peace talks in Norway there was no press. And good sense was able to prevail. There is this great democratic principle about the need to know. Do we all really need to know every detail of every negotiation? Does every Israeli settler or Gaza strip Arab, or for that matter every Tom, Dick

and Harry in every part of the world need to know everything about the negotiations? Must Palestinians continue to be killed and be made homeless because everybody needs to know what was said by whom?

36. This need for transparency, this right to information is an invention of those who want to make money from the information industry. We should know about the bestiality of the Serbs in Bosnia so we may react. But this knowledge is largely denied us. On the other hand, we are shown this parade of negotiators to a peace conference day in and day out. Can the average man do anything worthwhile because he has seen the daily TV report?

Mr. President,

37. We live in the Information Age. There has been and there will continue to be an unending explosion in the field of information technology.

38. Today we can sit in our homes and watch and hear a war as it is being fought; witness with eyes and ears a beauty contest as it is being judged and look at bugs under a microscope as it swims, via the TV screen. We see all these as they are, where they are without a second's delay.

39. We can watch murder as it is being committed, in all the gory details. And we can be shocked by it. But then we can also watch Michael Jackson doing his 'moon-walk' even as mass murder and massacres of the most brutal kinds are being committed at that very moment.

40. What we see and hear and witness, Mr President, is what the media decide we should see and hear and witness. If the media wants us to be shocked by the massacre, it can broadcast lurid details of that massacre. But if it chooses to broadcast Michael Jackson at the time the massacre was taking place, we will be stomping our feet in total enjoyment.

Mr. President,

41. Clearly the people who decide what we should see and hear hold terrible power. They can have us dancing in the streets or they can have us rioting in the streets with firebrands in our hands, burning, looting and killing.

42. Can we doubt that such people are powerful?

43. Make no mistake. The people who control the media control our minds, and probably control the world. Presidents can be

made or broken by them. And they have. Countries can be isolated or accepted despite violations of human rights, depending on how the media presents them.

44. And who controls the powerful world media? Not the national Governments of tiny developing nations. Not even the Governments of powerful nations. A very few people in the west control all the international media. Some are journalists but quite a few are not. Collectively they are Big Brothers.

45. Now they have an even more effective weapon in the form of the worldwide TV network. Today they broadcast slanted news. Tomorrow they will broadcast raw pornography to corrupt our children and destroy our culture. They are already doing that in Europe.

46. Today we can still control the reception. The day is fast approaching when only a coat-hanger would be needed to receive TV broadcasts from across the world.

47. We will have nowhere to retreat. Already the small nations are being accused of being undemocratic and limiting freedom because we do not allow reception of international TV networks. We hope it is because our accusers believe in the freedom of the press. But we suspect it is because they monopolise the world media and they stand to profit substantially from the freedom they insist every nation should have.

48. Malaysia believes in press freedom. But that freedom, as with other freedoms and rights, must be accompanied by responsibility. We will continue to expect the Malaysian media to be responsible. We will not forego the need to enforce this responsibility. But as to the international press we can only hope and pray that they will realise the damage they are doing. We will not interfere with them. They are free to report and to write any amount of lies. But we do hope that occasionally they cover the truth also. Power corrupts. But power without responsibility is the most corrupting influence of all.

Mr President,

49. We have heard often enough of the need for restructuring the U.N. We need it because the world has changed. It is not the world of the immediate Post World War II that we have today.

50. The people who plunged the world into a horrendous war are now the good guys, telling the world how to be humane. The rapacious invaders of the past are now the good samaritans

distributing aid to the needy. Will there always be no room for the reformed?

51. We talk of democracy as the only acceptable system of government. It is so good that we cannot wait for the democratic process to bring about its acceptance by every country. It must be forced upon everyone whether it is welcomed or not. Yet when it comes to the U.N. we eschew democracy. And the most undemocratic aspect of the U.N. is the veto power of the Permanent Five. We can accept some weightage for them, but for each of them, alone, to be more powerful than the whole membership of the U.N. is not acceptable; not before, not now and not for the future. There can be for the time being some permanent members. But the veto must go. A formula must be found for new permanent members of the security council. Whatever may be the other qualifications, they must include a genuine and sincere interest in international welfare.

Mr President,

52. At the Ministerial Meeting in Vienna this year a more comprehensive definition of Human Rights was presented. Many countries like Malaysia were smeared in Vienna for allegedly refusing to accept the universality of human rights. We do subscribe to the universality of human rights but not to the irresponsible variety propounded by the West. Human rights is not a licence to do anything without regard to the rights of others. The rights of the majority are just as valid as the rights of the minority or the individual. A society has a right to protect itself from the unbridled exercise of rights by individuals or a minority which in the West has contributed to the collapse of morality and the structure of human society.

53. If individual and minority rights are so totally inviolable than you must allow the resurgence of Nazism and their violently racist activities in Europe and elsewhere. But it is apparent that at least the west still think racist violence is wrong. We hope they will also accept that freedom from poverty and the wish to develop are essential elements of human rights. Finally countries like Malaysia must take exception to preachings on human rights from people who willingly condone and to a certain degree aid ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Until they redeem themselves there, all their talks of human rights sound hollow.

Mr President,

54. This litany of the woes of the developing countries and the world may seem endless. Actually the list is far from

complete. Trade and protectionism, aid and debts, UNCED and pressures on environmental issues, antarctica and many more have not been touched upon.

55. The world of the Post Cold War period is not a thoroughly bad place. But for the developing countries including Malaysia, there is really very little to crow about.

56. A statement in the U.N. Assembly is not going to change the world. But there is really nowhere else that the woes of the third world can be aired. Not to air them is to encourage the kind of supercilious arrogance on the part of those who are most responsible and yet still presume to extoll their own virtues and to preach to others. Even if the benefit is minimal, the truth must be told sometime.

I thank you, Mr President.