

THE 50TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
NEW YORK, 29 SEPTEMBER 1995

Let me congratulate you Mr. President on your election to the 50th United Nations General Assembly. I wish you a successful presidency. Appreciations are also due to your distinguished predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Amara Essy, who provided the leadership during the 49th UN General Assembly.

2. This General Assembly is meeting amidst hectic schedules of events to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations. Some of us have become preoccupied with these celebrations. We should ask whether these activities are merely media events or would they seriously contribute to a better UN? Will the high point of the 50th Anniversary be reduced to a special commemorative meeting condensed into a declaration of good intentions which no one seriously cares for, or should we resist the tendency to celebrate, to expand millions on galas and parties and to eulogise through rhetorical speeches the anniversary of the United Nations' establishment? After all we cannot even answer the basic questions of where we stand and what the UN is, whipping boy or serious enduring player.

3. Admittedly it is easy to raise questions than to find answers. But these questions must be raised and they deserve to be answered. On its 50th year the UN system finds itself under criticism for being unable to handle basic and critical political, economic and social issues. Despite earlier hopes of a just world order following upon the end of the Cold War, what we see is still a UN which dances to the grating music of the major powers in total disregard for the high principles and objectives pledged at its formation. We will have to conclude that the narrow national interest of the few is still what the UN is all about. Also the principle which largely move the major powers, that what they need for themselves must influence their dealings with the needs of others, is fully operative, making nonsense of interdependence, social compassion and justice.

4. And so we must forget the promise of an international political leadership that can collectively come to grips with the myriads of issues for a shared survival. Confrontation between states, intra-state conflicts, economic and military threats, the dehumanising effects of poverty; all these are heightened rather than diminished by the ending of the Cold War. The contradictory impulses of interdependence and isolationism are more evident than ever before. Humanitarianism is not only drying up fast; but what survives is replete with conditionalities. The UN presents a shattered image with a threadbare moral authority, despite the important

early successes in decolonisation and the subsequent elimination of apartheid.

5. The victors of 1945 have clung tenaciously to the levers of power. They control the high ground, exercising influence and power as nakedly as when they were colonial powers. Only the masks have changed. The multilateral organisations created on the eve of war's end were and still are structured to further their economic interests and the pursuit of their strategic political goals. The Security Council, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, have merely become the instruments of power perpetuation. Less than six months ago, we were witness to the use of the UN to push through, draconian-like, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Before the ink was dry, some of the nuclear powers proceeded to test their diabolical weapons. What, may I ask, qualifies some countries for possession of the means of mass destruction in perpetuity? It is time that the nuclear-weapon states commit themselves to nuclear disarmament through a programmed reduction of their nuclear arsenal within a specific time frame, beginning with the immediate cessation of all nuclear tests and culminating in their total elimination. Soon it may be too costly and too late.

6. Perversely, the major powers not only continue to compete in developing ever more destructive conventional weapons, but they also compete to sell arms. And when some developing countries buy arms, the Western controlled media accuse them of indulging in arms races.

7. We seem to inherit a world in which moral considerations have no real role to play or that acts of realpolitik have no moral consequences. Tears appear to be shed about the human tragedies in Bosnia, Rwanda, Liberia, Somalia and Chechnya. But many have become desensitised to the horrors that flash across our screens. The Charter incorporating the idealism and dreams of 1945, is more honoured in its violations than its adherence. Tell us how have the principles of the Charter on the non-use of force and the illegality of claiming territory acquired by aggression been of help to the Bosnians? What protection or solace has the Genocide Convention been to those slaughtered in Rwanda, Bosnia, Cambodia and Chechnya? The lesson for the peoples of these countries is clear; no international order or international ethos will be defended unless the major powers see their vital interests are at risk.

8. The United Nations have been party to the double talk in Bosnia, insisting that morality had no place in peace-keeping since the impartiality that peacekeepers had to maintain required them to eschew making any judgement about the rights and wrongs of the situation. I ask the UN whether there can be

a middle ground where genocide and ethnic cleansing are concerned? I ask the Secretary-General of the UN whether he is obliged to defend the moral principles in the UN Charter or whether he should console the dying and the bereaved that there are others elsewhere suffering worse fates?

9. Isn't there, in the context of the larger picture, a special role for the UN to provide international leadership? Clearly, the major powers have failed to provide leadership; choosing only to act in furtherance of their national or domestic political interests. They continue to harp on human rights and the sanctity of human life but they act only when they run no risk.

10. Admittedly, blame must also be apportioned to many of us in the Third World. Some of us have led our people down the path of despair and misery. With the demise of colonialism, there was the promise of freedom, and development. Yet many succumbed to the temptations of creature comfort, failing to further the rights and welfare of our own people. But then when we were colonies, the only form of Government we knew was authoritarian colonialism. It is too much to expect some of us, at the midnight flag lowering, to suddenly become democratic and sophisticated.

11. The threat of a brutalised world is never more evident than in the Serb program of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the massacres in Rwanda. For a long time the major powers were opposed to taking strong measures against the Serbs. We are seeing belatedly some sense of purpose in the NATO bombings and efforts to negotiate a solution. However, we should be cautious about rushing towards solutions that reward aggression and genocide. It is possible that some in the West and in the United Nations longed for Bosnia's quick defeat. It would save them from making any decision. But the Bosnians refused to oblige. In Rwanda the European troops withdrew when the massacres began. And in Somalia failure to understand the situation lead to the victims fighting their UN saviours.

12. The United Nations Secretariat must take some of the blame for all these brutalities. In Rwanda it truly shirked its duty while in Bosnia it sent in a protection force which was instructed not to protect the Bosnians. Why it should be called UNPROFOR was a mystery until lately. It was there to protect itself. It makes a distinction between peace-keeping and peace-enforcement. If there is peace to keep, why do you need military forces? Isn't it because of the possibility of breaches of the peace that the forces are put there? And when there are breaches the forces must stop them, if peace-keeping

is to be meaningful. But instead when peace is broken the UN threatened to withdraw and leave the victims to their fate.

13. Fortunately, in Palestine, another historical flash point, efforts continue to be made towards durable peace. That peace process must result in a Palestinian homeland, a viable state at peace with its neighbours. The attempts to weaken the present Palestinian leadership by undermining its credibility will only result in the rise of extremism and a protracted and bloody intra-Palestinian conflict which will spill over into Israel and elsewhere.

14. The absence of international leadership and commitment is evident in the area of development as well. The rhetoric of development is increasingly devoid of meaningful content. The North has turned its back on commitments relating to development assistance. Yet such is the concern for the survival of insects and plant life that human development must be stopped if it is suspected it might endanger a few animals or plants. That there are plenty of the same species elsewhere is considered irrelevant. And so one-fifth of the world's population remain mired in poverty having been denied development assistance by the rich and the powerful. The latter have retreated into their regional clubs and cosy arrangements for perpetuating unconscionable levels of consumption. Some of the countries of the South have tried to pull themselves up literally by their own bootstraps. But the moment they appear to succeed, the carpet is pulled out from underneath their feet. GSP privileges are withdrawn and their records of human rights, democracy, etc are scrutinised in order to obstruct their progress.

15. Some among the more successful South have been enticed to join the rich and the strong, so they may not lend what little strength they have to their compatriots.

16. Commitment to the environment should not be turned into an occasion for recrimination and pointing of fingers. Worse, it should not be politically instrumentalised to disadvantage the South. Development can take place without irreparable damage to the environment. Forcing the developing countries to remain undeveloped in order to preserve the environment for the rich is manifestly unfair. Yet the environmental obstacles placed in the way of the poor South will do just that, beggaring the poor to enrich the already rich.

17. Poverty in itself creates an environment that is as damaging to humanity as any other kind of environmental pollution. Obviously we need to determine our priorities. Do we keep the poor permanently poor so the rich can enjoy the

environment or do we sacrifice the environment a little in the interest of relieving poverty?

18. We, in Malaysia, accept that economic development should not be at the expense of other groups or the future generations. Environmental sustainability, social equity and a culture that allows for the fulfilment of human needs must replace the culture of materialism. The Western consumer society, which is spreading worldwide requires ever increasing consumption to keep production and profits continuously rising. For this more fuel is needed and the trend in the consumption of fossil fuel in recent years is alarming. Yet very little is being done to curb such wasteful use of a depleting resource while the development of renewable resources such as hydro power meets with all kinds of objections. Progressively industrialising Malaysia has the capacity and the resources to design and implement a model of development sensitive to the needs and cultural values of developing countries without imitating the flawed Western model. We only ask that misguided crusaders should keep out. These modern day imitations of the Communist agitators would do well to look at their own countries' wasteful consumption and carbon dioxide emission.

19. Social disintegration is a serious problem as the world's population become more urbanised. This is not helped by the West seeking to impose its moral values. The institutions which hold society together are now being undermined. At the Beijing Women's Summit despite a consensus cobbled together to alleviate the sufferings of women, the mad quest for personal freedom took one more tradition bashing step. People it seems cannot be free unless they have sexual freedom; a freedom which rejects the inhibitions of traditional and religious values, of marriage and family as institutions of society. Sexual freedom will render fidelity meaningless as much as it renders marriages anachronistic. The new liberalism extends to a new definition of the family, which is to include homosexual pairs, unmarried women with children by unknown fathers, groups of men and women living together with no fixed partners and many other combinations.

20. If the West wants to be liberal and sexually free, this is its right. But what is wrong is the attempt to impose its morality or lack of it on the rest of the world. And in Beijing that was what it tried to do. The UN should not lend itself to this kind of undemocratic disregard for the rights of others.

21. Of late there has been much talk about reform of the UN. Clearly there is a need for this after 50 years of the UN carrying the tattered baggage of the last World War. Surely

the results of that war cannot be reflected in the structure and procedures of the UN forever. It has to end some time. And the 50th anniversary is as good a time as any for burying the relics of past follies.

22. Since democracy seems to have displaced religion as a faith, it is fitting that there must be democratic reforms in the UN. Some of those countries which had vested themselves with infallibility and permanency have now become second raters. New players have emerged who should be accorded recognition. A more equitable representation on the Security Council is a must. This means that permanent seats should be given to regions possibly determined by a regional mechanism.

23. The veto power should be dropped. Under no circumstances must the Security Council be made an instrument of any one country.

24. Reform must extend also to the financing of the UN. It is wholly unacceptable that member states, especially the rich ones, should fall into arrears with impunity and yet exercise special rights and influence. The membership rules must be applied to one and all. New bases for assessment should be made taking into consideration the wealth or lack of it among the members.

25. Various global taxation schemes including modest levies on global air travel, a tax on global speculative flows of capital, a tax on the exploitation of mankind's common assets on the seabed, and a tax on the trade in weapons of war have been proposed. Of these the last one, based on the principle that he who profits from the tools of war must contribute to the maintenance of peace, merit urgent attention and adoption.

26. Reform of the United Nations also require the cleansing of the bureaucratic aegean stables in the Secretariat. The morale of the international civil service is at its lowest ebb. The excesses and the fat must be trimmed but failure to do so must not be used as an excuse for not paying dues or for opting out.

27. It is heartening to note that UNCTAD and other economic agencies of the UN have now acknowledged that linking trade with non-trade issues serves no useful purpose either for the developed or the developing countries. Unemployment in the developed countries is not due to workers in developing countries working hard to compensate for their lack of other competitive advantages, but rather to the profligate ways of the developed nations with their high wages and unemployment benefits. Why it is assumed that workers in developed countries would work when they are to be paid for not working

is a mystery at par with the idea that people would be happy and productive if the diligent are paid as much as the indolent.

28. The reform of global institutions must encompass the Bretton Woods organisations. Their energies and resources must be channelled towards the battle against the pollution caused by poverty worldwide. The Bretton Woods organisations have to cease acting as debt collectors for the mighty and the rich bankers, who in turn must learn to live within the rules of their own creation, that of taking commercial risks which go hand-in-hand with the pursuit of gain. A return to their original mandates, that of promoting balanced development in the case of the World Bank, and that of enforcing monetary and fiscal responsibility in all countries, irrespective of their status in the global economy, is a first priority. Reform must include a re-evaluation of the governance arrangements at the Bank and the Fund through a realignment and re-allocation of quotas and share-holdings that take into account the changed structure of the world economy. New arrangements for governance must recognise the growing clout of the newly emerging economies that now contribute to a rising share of global output, to trade and capital flows.

29. The debt millstone weighs heavily on the poor. This burden must be eased, especially for the poorest nations of Africa. Malaysia hopes that effective actions will be taken forthwith taking into account decisions made at the 49th General Assembly on finding a durable solution to the external debt problem of developing countries.

30. While bilateral debts extended by donor countries have over the years been restructured and rescheduled - though with humiliating conditions imposed by the Paris Club of Creditors - multilateral institutions, led by the World Bank, have steadfastly refused consideration of restructuring debt owed to them. The World Bank continues to increase its profit levels and amasses reserves which today stand in excess of US\$16 billion. Why are these reserves, built from payments by developing countries, not used for debt relief? And why do we allow the intransigence of one or two countries to preclude the issuance of Special Drawing Rights by the International Monetary Fund? These and other issues must feature in a reform of the Bretton Woods institutions.

31. The conclusion of the Uruguay Round, and the establishment of the World Trade Organisation offer a glimmer of hope for rule-based trading relationships. Malaysia applauds and welcomes the underlying principles and we pledge ourselves to play by the mutually agreed undertakings.

32. Regrettably, powerful trading nations threaten through unilateral actions to undermine the carefully negotiated agreements. The deliberate creation of regional trading blocs, the introduction of managed trade, the attempts to link human rights, environmental considerations, and labour codes to trade, are major threats, which if implemented would dim the hope of a free environment for trade. We reject such attempts. The new protectionism, will return the world to a bygone era when trade wars led to military confrontations.

33. And finally the new threats with the advent of the Information Age. The poor countries have long suffered from biased reporting by the world media, controlled by the developed world. Now the computer network created for the spread of knowledge and information has become polluted by the irresponsible dissemination of filth through them. Someone is making money from this filth. The world community must find a way to keep out such filth and to provide for legal action to be taken against them by aggrieved countries even when they broadcast from outside their borders. They should be allowed to bring these miscreants for trial in the aggrieved countries under their laws. After all we have already had many instances of extraterritorial application of the laws of some countries without so much as a by your leave.

34. Freedom of information is fine but even in this age of freedom we cannot allow morals to be completely undermined in order to enrich the merchants of porn and filth.

35. When all is said and done we still have to admit that the UN is the only truly multinational organisation where the voices of small nations can be heard. We support the UN but we must correct the tendency to make it an instrument of the rich and the powerful. The UN must stand on the side of the collective needs of people and nations in order to serve all humankind.