

**THE PLENARY OF THE FIFTY-FIRST SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

NEW YORK, U.S.A, 27 SEPTEMBER 1996

I am happy to acknowledge a Malaysian as the President of the General Assembly, a first for Malaysia. We are thankful to all member states for their support, especially the members of the Asian Group, which endorsed Malaysia's candidature early.

2. I would like to think that the selection has to do with Malaysia's efforts and involvement with the UN and globally. Within three years of Malaysia's independence, we were involved in UN peace-keeping operations in the Congo. Today in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Malaysia is perhaps the only developing country participating in the NATO-led peace-keeping forces, paying in full the cost of our involvement. Malaysia will continue to participate in international activities, UN sponsored or otherwise, combining altruism with enlightened self-interest.

3. This time last year, there was much celebration as the UN attained its 50th year. Amidst the celebrations extolling the achievements of the UN, there were serious concerns expressed about the relevance and effectiveness of this organisation, and the need for democratic reforms so that the UN can better fulfil the purposes and principles of the Charter. The 50th anniversary came and went and despite the extravaganza, very little has been achieved.

4. The organisation itself remains distant and removed from the aspirations of the 'peoples of the UN' which it is supposed to promote and protect. Hopefully, the tragedy of Bosnia-Herzegovina will, with international help, be on the mend but Palestine's hopes and aspirations have been undermined by the new Israel government, backed unfortunately by some Western powers, backtracking on painfully negotiated agreements. At this moment, a rash decision by Israel not only imperils further the peace process, with lives being lost but can inflame and outrage Muslim states and Muslim Society if the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque is defiled. In Africa, Somalia, Rwanda and Liberia remain on the razor's edge of survival and Burundi awaits UN and regional initiatives to avoid a catastrophe. And there are countries like Afghanistan, victims of the Cold War, abandoned by the major powers, needing help to reconstruct and overcome the destruction wrought by war. And what will be the fate of tiny Chechnya and its valiant people, facing the full onslaught of mighty Russia?

5. While some developing countries get fragmented and marginalised, the process of power accretion and benefits

continue with the major countries, aided by their control of the Security Council, their monopoly of nuclear power and their economic high ground. One sees various twists and turns, double standards and selectivity, as the dictates of domestic politics overrule justice and humanitarianism in international affairs. Commitment to multilateralism is so qualified and investment in the UN so tentative that common needs have often been sacrificed.

6. Now as the United Nations begins its 51st session, we urge again that the international community work collectively for substantial change, reflecting a more equitable sharing of political and economic power. This call for reform is made even more urgent when we consider that the premises by which international relations are conducted today continue to perpetuate a grossly unjust system.

7. The systematic abuse of power by the major countries has continued. They apply selective sanctions and double standards on the developing world to promote their narrow national interests. Clearly disregarding multilateralism, with its inherent qualities of mutual respect and shared interests, the North continue their vice-like grip on all spheres of international activity - politics, international trade, development, the environment and the media to name a few.

8. Elitism exercised by the major countries is frequently cloaked as 'globalism' or as serving the common interests of nations. However even a cursory examination of this brand of globalism reveals it to be sanctimonious if not hypocritical. For example, under the guise of safeguarding 'international peace and security', the nuclear weapon states maintain their right to destroy, or threaten to destroy, all life on this planet. Yet these countries deny others even the right to use conventional weapons for self-defence.

9. Malaysia deeply regrets the lack of a consensus on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) but welcomes its subsequent adoption by the 50th General Assembly. We worry about nuclear aspirations in our region and that of Israel. To a large extent the refusal of the Nuclear Weapon States to a time-table for nuclear disarmament is responsible for this situation and seriously flaws the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Malaysia is encouraged by the recent International Court of Justice advisory opinion on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons. To render the Court's finding meaningful there should be serious efforts made towards accelerating the process of nuclear disarmament including the early convening of a Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

10. While these major powers advocate peace and condemn arms races by others, their industries aggressively develop and promote the sales of defense technologies and weapons of death. Like a drug dealer supplying his helplessly addicted victims, the Northern-based arms industries keep poor countries mired in a cycle of poverty and insecurity, laying waste vital human skills and resources.

11. Perhaps such political elitism comes naturally to these powerful countries, many of which were imperial powers before. A clue as to their priorities for the global agenda is to be found in the recent communique of the G-7 Economic Summit. Reform of the United Nations, in particular the Security Council as urgent issues gave way to the pre-eminence of globalisation of the world economy. And so the Security Council remains as a blunt instrument of the foreign policies of the permanent members.

12. In the context of a globalised world, much is made of the terms 'inter-dependence' and 'mutual interests'. Multilateralism has been elbowed aside. Yet multilateralism is the foundation of international relations and cooperation which the UN symbolises. From now on globalisation will take over and nations will lose their sovereignty.

13. Consider the current financial crisis that faces this organisation. The United Nations is on the verge of bankruptcy being held to ransom by its major donor country, the wealthiest nation in the world. That country refuses to meet its assessed and legally due contributions, yet insists on maintaining its hegemony on global management.

14. The major powers' solution to the United Nations stalemate is to speak of revitalising the UN as if they were conducting a corporate down-sizing exercise. While ending bureaucratic inefficiencies and wasteful use of resources are important, we should be mindful that the UN is not a business house. Over concentration on internal management issues can deflect the UN's attention from its major global responsibilities. While Malaysia is critical of the management and leadership of the UN, we cannot but regret the tendency of major powers to assign the UN complex tasks, missions impossible, without clear mandates and authority, nor adequate resources. How does the UN undertake peace-keeping operations without the authority or the means to keep the peace?

15. We find the inequities of power-sharing in the United Nations to be intolerable and view with alarm prevailing trends to weaken this organisation further. Already, the centre of gravity for all principal economic decisions that affect developing countries is vested in the undemocratic

Bretton Woods institutions, the WTO and of course the self-appointed Group of Seven.

16. Strengthening multilateralism requires a reform of the Bretton Woods institutions which dominate the development scene. These institutions are operating against their overall mandate. Decision-making is undemocratic and untransparent. Despite their specific mandates to facilitate development and regulate the international monetary system, these institutions are used to discipline third world countries, and to act as debt collectors for the rich North. It is salutary to note that the World Bank collected a net amount of \$7.2 billion in 1995 in debt repayment over and above what it disbursed in aid to the poor indebted countries and raked in a profit of almost \$1.5 billion. The International Monetary Fund has now become an enforcer of the dictates of market lenders and is now assuming the role of a global rating agency.

17. The majority of poor developing countries are saddled with unsustainable levels of debt, which preclude them from having a share of world prosperity and growth. Debt service on current scales is untenable and debtor countries as a consequence can do little to alleviate their poverty and misery. The chilling numbers speak for themselves - more is spent on servicing debt than on financing basic programmes for health care, education and humanitarian relief.

18. The reductions in the commitments for concessional assistance by almost all the industrial countries mark a turning point in the international development co-operation. Bluntly put, the rich have reneged on solemn commitments and pledges. The cut-backs in pledges for the replenishment of IDA, and unwillingness to clear earlier arrears, triggered by a unilateral decision of the major contributor to scale back its contributions, have led other donors to scale back their contributions as well.

19. Now that the concept of globalism is so intimately linked with international trade, it is important to critically examine the realities of this so-called 'free trade'. The painfully long history of the Uruguay Round negotiations should have forewarned us that the WTO, although established as a rules-based multilateral organisation to regulate international trade, will become answerable only to the world's wealthiest economic powers. Like the Bretton Woods institutions, the WTO remains outside any relationship of accountability to the far more democratic United Nations General Assembly.

20. During the Uruguay Round, the developing countries discovered that instead of negotiating international rules on

trade in manufactured goods, the rich countries of the North had widened the agenda and pushed for liberalisation in economic areas where they clearly have an advantage, in particular the financial services and investments.

21. Even though some countries of the South have benefitted from the liberalisation of trade, and Malaysia is one of them, the GATT agreement nevertheless harbours new threats to developing and newly emerging economies. Not only have the poor countries of the South to struggle uphill merely to meet the basic needs of their peoples, but they are now bullied into adjusting their economic policies to meet their new obligations under GATT so that Northern-based corporations can penetrate and capture their markets. The poor may not reserve their markets for themselves even when they have no capacity to penetrate the markets of the rich.

22. Fair competition and level playing fields are only for the rich. For example, their attempts to link the environment and labour standards to trade in manufactured goods is a clear attempt to deny developing countries their meagre competitive advantage. The relationship between trade and labour standards emerged not because of a concern for the well-being of workers in poor countries, but as protectionist moves aimed against growing and competitively-priced imports from the South.

23. To compound this unfair interpretation of the multilateral trade rules, we find that when it comes to technology transfer, the Northern countries take a fiercely anti-liberal stand, insisting that all WTO member states compulsorily introduce a set of national laws to protect intellectual property rights. Since most patents are owned by the North, this in effect means legal protection of their technological monopoly and a drastic curtailment of the right of developing countries to have access to new technology.

24. It appears therefore that the Northern interpretation of 'free trade' and 'liberalisation' are slogans that in reality mean liberalisation when it benefits the North but protectionism if it can block the South. Thus while goods and capital are permitted and encouraged to move around the globe, labour and technology may not.

25. Even as we are asked to submit to GATT rules and the WTO, we find one country blatantly undermining the WTO by enacting extra-territorial laws which must be submitted to by all nations and their companies on pains of ex-communication.

26. The GATT agreement also fails to protect the genetic resources of the South whilst allowing genetically modified materials to be patented. We now have a situation where theft

of genetic resources by Western biotech TNCs enables them to make huge profits by producing patented genetic mutations of these same materials. What depths have we sunk to in the global market place when nature's gifts to the poor may not be protected but their modifications by the rich become exclusive property.

27. There are of course many gainers and losers in the world of the WTO, but we are concerned that the major losers will once again be the poorest and most marginalised countries. A small number of developing countries, like Malaysia, have benefitted. But let me point out that our gains have been through thrift, productivity and ingenuity of our people, hard-earned fruits of our labour. Lest it be forgotten, our new found prosperity has also benefitted those in the developed countries. Our products are competitively priced - contributing to lowered inflation in the rich countries. Our prosperity has provided vast and expanding markets for the goods of rich countries - creating jobs and helping to lower their unemployment rates.

28. The term 'globalisation' has become the buzzword of our times. In the G-7 communique, globalisation was touted as 'the source of hope for the future, responsible for the expansion of wealth and prosperity in the world.' However, some would argue that globalisation, with its objective of breaking down borders and sucking the countries of the world into one single economic entity has eclipsed multilateralism or attempts to masquerade as the same thing. Indeed, globalisation has been described by the rich as a 'new global partnership for development'.

29. If the current behaviour of the rich countries is anything to go by, globalisation simply means the breaking down of the borders of countries so that those with the capital and the goods will be free to dominate the markets. Colonies in the former British Empire will remember 'Imperial Preference' when they were made the exclusive markets of the metropolitan power. Globalisation can mean just that except that the world market will belong to the rich nations. Linkages to non-trade issues will prevent the poor from ever challenging the rich, in the same way the colonies were not allowed to industrialise.

30. We do indeed live in a brutal and unjust world where the astonishing developments in science and technology, and our increasingly sophisticated knowledge base, are not matched by the ability of governments to marshal forces to overcome the social and economic inequities of their countries. The facts and figures are well documented and widely known, but it is

worth repeating just to jog our conscience, if we still have any.

31. What are the universal values of this globalised world when increasing numbers of people in both the North and South live in abject poverty? 1.3 billion people, a fifth of the human race, lack access to the most basic necessities, such as food and clean drinking water, while preventable hunger and disease kill 35,000 children throughout the world every day. The 1996 UN Human Development Report states that in the last 40 years, the richest 20 percent of people have seen the differential between themselves and the poorest 20 percent double.

32. Are we expected to believe in the sincerity of the rich countries when they talk about a 'new global partnership' and 'the achievement of sustainable development' when the facts are that today we have over 20 million environmental refugees in addition to an equal number of traditional refugees. Why should the developing countries accept the twisted lexicon of Northern development- speak - when 'development assistance' means that the net flow of wealth from poor countries to rich has increased to at least US\$400 billion a year, when the terms of trade, transfer pricing, debt servicing and the brain drain are taken into account.

33. Wading through the burdens of this strife-torn world is a critical dilemma that faces the international community today. It is one of international leadership and the failure to deal with these critical issues. Instead we witness a persistent abnegation by the major powers of the responsibilities that accompany the rights and privileges of such authority. We must determine the type of world and society we want to live in and these should be based on truly universal values.

34. As we approach the next millennium where the pre-eminence of transnational forces has blurred the definition of national sovereignty, we must seriously question why a powerful minority are still allowed to bankrupt and coerce the majority to meet their narrow economic and political ends. The poor are no longer independent. They have already lost control over their own currency. And now they have lost their borders too.

35. Freedom of the press is touted as a basic democratic principle. But control of the media by a handful of Western corporations has made nonsense of this principle.

36. Proclaiming to be 'windows on the world', the Western media, manipulated and censored by those in control, invariably manage to distort reports so as to put anything

happening in the South in the worst possible light. Anything positive in the developing countries is ignored.

37. The growth and influence of electronic, satellite and information technology is astounding. But its impact poses one of the biggest political and ethical challenges of our time, subverting and distorting our social consciousness. The elites of the North and South have become blind to the enormities of reality. Events and people are stripped of their context, so we become less capable of recognising the common humanity and equal rights of all people in the world. Pictures of poverty and inequality are no longer received with moral outrage, but become simple facts of life. Thus begins the process of dehumanisation and disengagement from the rest of human society.

38. Although without doubt the information age will bring cheap and easy access to knowledge and education, and will facilitate worldwide business, already its abuse is affecting the moral values of the world. Smut and violence gratuitously distributed by criminals in the North is no less polluting than carbon dioxide emissions nor less dangerous than drug trafficking. If one great power can apply its laws to citizens of another country considered guilty of drug trafficking, why cannot countries with different moral codes extradite the traffickers of pornography for legal action under the laws of the offended nation? Why cannot there be international laws and international courts to punish those who spread filth and incite racial hatred and racial violence? Before the whole world sinks deeper into moral decay, the international community should act. Abuse of the ubiquitous Internet system must be stopped.

39. Monopoly of the electronic media by the North should be broken. As it is we are getting slanted news made worse by broadcasters interpreting in favour of their own or their countries' interests. As usual the poor countries with no role in operating the international media, have become the principal victims of 'world news networks'. Not only are distorted pictures of our countries being broadcast but our own capacity to understand what is happening is being undermined. In the past Western missionaries spread the gospel. Today the media has taken over and all our cherished values and diverse cultures are being destroyed.

40. The UN has not always been a failure. In its early years it helped to dismantle the empires of Western European countries. Malaysia is grateful for it too won freedom because of the moral suasion of the UN. But the UN now seems blind to what is being done towards Iraq and Chechnya. One great power continues its vendetta against Iraq firing missiles at distant

targets to bring Iraqi leadership to its knees, oblivious to the sufferings of the besieged Iraqi people. Another power has shut the gates of mercy on the Chechens and with rockets and bombs have killed indiscriminately and with appalling brutality in order that Chechnya remains part of an empire. How much more should the Chechens suffer before the Security Council takes notice? Where are the vaunted defenders of human rights who claim that national borders will not stop them?

41. It is a fact that every year many statements are made at the United Nations that lament the crises of poverty, third world debt, human rights abuse, conflicts and wars, social disintegration and environmental degradation. It is boring almost. And yet nothing much has been done which could bring about amelioration of this sad state of affairs.

42. Perhaps it is because the processes of inter-governmental consensus decision-making of the United Nations, are tedious and frustrating.

43. Perhaps it is the mismanagement by the Governments of so many of the poor nations which afford many excuses for the rich not to help.

44. It is of course easy to use the United Nations as a forum to unmask the hypocrisies of both the North and the South, but it is more difficult to work collectively to implement change and solve problems. Still Malaysia believes this repetitive criticism is valid and necessary, that international injustices and oppressions should not be swept in the dustbins of history. I would like to say again that Malaysia strongly believes in the multilateralism of the United Nations and is prepared to invest in this international organisation with all our strength, beliefs and moral fibre.