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SINGAPORE DELEGATION TO THE XXTH
REGULAR SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Statement of His Excellency Mr. S. Rajaratnam
Foreign Minister of Singapore at the General
Assembly on September 21, 1965, on the occasion
of Singapore's admission to the United Nations.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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Mr. President.

Permit me to add the congratulations of my delegation to those of other distinguished delegates on your election as president of the 20th session of the General Assembly. It is undoubtedly your great experience and wisdom in the ways of men and nations which prompted your colleagues to elect you to this high and responsible office. As a new member my delegation will rely on your wisdom and experience to guide it through this session and my delegation will, for its part, try to lighten your burden by giving you the fullest co-operation throughout the proceedings of this Assembly.

I also take this opportunity to thank all members of the Security Council who scrutinised our application for membership and did not find us wanting. We are particularly grateful to Malaysia, Jordan the Ivory Coast and the United Kingdom for jointly sponsoring our application for membership. Last but not least I must thank all those member States who co-sponsored the resolution welcoming our admission into the United Nations.

Now that Singapore has been received into the fold of the United Nations, I would like to assure this Assembly that my country will join with other nations in their efforts to realise the aims and objects of the United Nations charter. For us the essentials of the Charter are the preservation of peace through collective security, promotion of economic development through mutual aid and the safeguarding of the inalienable right of every country to establish forms of government in accordance with the wishes of its own people. My country stands by these three essential principles and will give loyal and unflinching support to the United Nations in its efforts to promote these ideals.

We support these ideals because we realise that the well-being, the security and integrity of my country can be assured only on the basis of these principles. It is practical self interest and not vague idealism which makes it necessary for my country to give loyal support to these essential elements in the U.N. Charter.

World peace is a necessary condition for the political and economic survival of small countries, like Singapore. For one thing we want peace simply because we have not the capacity to make war on anybody. We are surrounded by bigger and more powerful neighbours with whom we cannot afford to settle issues by force of arms. So it is natural that my country should adhere firmly to the policy of resolving differences between nations through peaceful negotiation; by non-violent means.

At the same time my country is well aware that it is situated in a region of the world which has traditionally been the battleground of big power conflicts. Singapore itself by virtue of its strategic location has attracted the attention of nations who wished to dominate South-East Asia. Under British colonialism Singapore was developed not only as the commercial hub of South-East Asia but also as a military base for consolidating Western imperialism.

Today, with the granting of independence to Singapore, the role of this base is no longer to underwrite British colonialism in South-East Asia. My country has made it clear that it will never allow the base to be used for aggression. The base is there

-3-

with our consent to ensure our own security in an area of increasing military instability. The moment we can be assured of effective alternative arrangements which will guarantee our security that moment foreign bases would have to go.

My country feels that money spent on weapons of war and armies is money wasted. Furthermore it is obvious to us that, given modern techniques of war, a country of about 2 million people can never, on its own adequately secure its defence. Modern defence has to be collective in character especially for small nations and that is why we believe that ultimately our defence and security must be secured through the collective and effective strength of the United Nations. We shall therefore support any and every move to strengthen the peace keeping effectiveness of the United Nations.

But until such time as the United Nations can really safeguard the security of small nations we shall have to find such temporary solutions as we can to assure our security.

Singapore is essentially a trading community. Almost all our energies, resources and talents are devoted to developing our trade and our industries. We have no military aircraft and no tanks. Our army is small. Instead, we have devoted our resources to building homes for the people, schools and hospitals. We seek a welfare state and not a warfare state. If independence and freedom are not to be empty slogans then we must continue to spend as much of our resources as we can on fighting the only war that matters to the people - the war against poverty, ignorance, disease, bad housing, unemployment and against anything and everything which deny dignity and freedom to our fellow men.

To fight this kind of war we need to live in peace with our neighbours. And we want to live in peace with all our neighbours simply because we have a great deal to lose by being at war with them. All we therefore ask is to be left alone to reshape and build our country the way our people want it. We have no wish to interfere in the affairs of other countries or tell them how they should order their life. In return we ask other countries to be friendly with us even if they don't like the way we do things in our own country.

This is why my country has chosen the path of non-alignment. It simply means that we do not wish to be drawn into alliances dedicated to imposing our own way of life on other countries. Friendship between two countries should not be conditional on the acceptance of common ideologies, common friends and common foes.

- 5 -

However, Mr. President, this does not mean that my country equates non-alignment with indifference to basic issues of right and wrong or that it will evade taking a stand on matters which it considers vital lest it displease some member nations, including those with which it has close ties. Non-alignment is only in regard to narrow power bloc interests and not in regard to the basic principles embodied in the U.N. Charter. To be non-aligned in regard to the basic tenets of the Charter is to destroy the integrity and effectiveness of the United Nations in which small countries like mine place our hopes.

My country by the very nature of its historic experience is aware that in the contemporary world a developing country must learn to cherish independence without denying the reality of interdependence of nations. Our abhorrence of dependence on others should not drive us into embracing the dangerous myth of absolute sovereignty. In order to learn to live in peace with other countries there must be willing acceptance of the need for interdependence. The cultural and political development of my country has for decades been based on free intercourse and exchange of ideas drawn from many races, from many continents. We are a multi-racial society constituted out of the three major racial stocks of Asia -- Chinese, Malay and Indian in addition to Arabs, Ceylonese, Eurasians and others.

Four major cultures -- Malay, Chinese, Indian and Western -- and their representative languages are allowed free and equal development on the basis of cross stimulation. We think of ourselves not as exclusively a Chinese, Indian or a Malay society but as a little united nations in the making. The four cultures which flourish in my country collectively represent the historic

achievements of more than half of humanity and we see no reason for suppressing other cultures in order to ensure the supremacy of only one of them. The multi-racial and multi-cultural character of my country has made us somewhat sceptical of those who preach the superiority and exclusiveness of one culture and one race. In a multi-racial society one soon learns that no one people has a monopoly of wisdom and that one's own culture is not without flaws. This not only breeds tolerance for different viewpoints but also a readiness to learn and borrow from the accumulated wisdom of other people. These are, we have discovered, attitudes of mind essential for the smooth and constructive development of a multi-racial and multi-cultural society.

The United Nations is also a multi-national and multi-cultural organisation trying with some measure of success to develop a sense of international solidarity and common purpose among the nations of the world. We shall therefore bring to the work of the United Nations the attitude and approaches of a multi-racial nation aware that independence and interdependence of peoples and nations are not incompatible goals to pursue.

Finally, Mr. President, though we are a small country not endowed with ample natural resources and though we cannot be counted among the highly advanced nations of the world we are nevertheless a highly urbanised community that has acquired experience and knowledge which we are prepared to share with others in the regional co-operation schemes organised by the agencies of the U.N. Undoubtedly these offers of assistance can be carried out only on a modest scale but if we obtain help from others we must be ready to help others as much in return.

This is what the United Nations means to us and despite the cynics who focus attention on its many shortcomings my country has faith in the future of the United Nations simply because without it there is no worthwhile future for humanity.