

**STATEMENT BY MR TAN SOO KHOON, SPEAKER OF  
PARLIAMENT OF SINGAPORE AT CONFERENCE OF PRESIDING  
OFFICERS OF NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS  
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Mr Chairman,

It gives me great pleasure to be here to address this distinguished gathering. It is an opportune time that this meeting is held on the eve of the Millennium Summit, when all nations will meet here in New York to chart out a common vision for the new millennium. In this regard, the *Declaration on the parliamentary vision for international cooperation at the dawn of the third millennium* is welcomed.

2 The *Declaration* captures the challenges of the third millennium for members of the IPU. Any attempt to deal with the future must take account of the internationalisation of economies and societies during the last decade. Technology has accelerated time and compressed space, linking us in ever tighter webs of interdependence. While globalisation and technology have brought unprecedented prosperity to many countries, they have also marginalised the weak and the less developed. Globalisation benefits those countries which can seize its opportunities. It evokes a sense of helplessness and loss of control for those who cannot.

Mr Chairman,

3 What place do national parliaments occupy in a new age of diffused national authority and weakened international institutions? I believe that we, parliamentarians, can make a difference. To do so, we must first embrace change ourselves – our practices, processes and most of all our mindset.

4 International institutions, including the UN, have no independent legitimacy. None are “sovereign” - they exist only because nations have signed agreements giving them existence. Its mandates are determined, and its resources furnished, by its member states. The members of the IPU are the ones who must decide for their respective nations how best to cope with the challenges of the new global order. A well functioning international system is necessary, but national action remains the determining factor of success or failure. It falls on us to develop the policies and the national consensus that must underpin international efforts to restructure and change.

5 At the national level, we must invest in and prepare our peoples to maximise the opportunities offered by globalisation, and minimise its cost. We must make education a priority in our legislative agendas. We must invest in training and in developing telecommunication infrastructure so that our peoples will be able to plug into new information networks, and maximise the promise of a increasingly intergrated world.

6 As parliamentarians, we too must embrace the new opportunities which are being made available by the information and communication revolution so that we can better serve our constituents. We must be prepared, with the rapid spread of information, to react fast to developments and respond to the demands of our constituents. In fact, the nature of our constituency will change. Pressures will no longer be limited from our domestic contituents. For example, on environment issues, there is an international coalition of concerned individuals and NGOs that have made their voices heard. The recent WTO conference in Seattle is one example of how these groups were able to mobilise support using the internet from across the world to make an impact on global policy. We have to recognise that in a globalised world we can no longer define our national interests narrowly. As parliamentarians, we must be able to operate simulataneously on both the national and international stage effectively to achieve our desired ends.

7 Under such circumstances, cooperation between national parliaments also needs to be enhanced. We have much to learn from each other and gain from a frank exchange of ideas. The *Declaration* has laid out ways in which a *parliamentary dimension* can be added to international cooperation. This is

an area that members of the IPU should further explore.

Mr Chairman,

8 Singapore is playing its small part in enhancing parliamentary dialogues. We are proud to report to you that the Singapore parliament has not only contributed to the IPU, we are also active in other international inter-parliamentary organisations, such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum (APPF). At the regional level, Singapore will host the 21st ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organisation (AIPO), which will be held right after this meeting from 10-15 September.

Mr Chairman,

9 The United Nations will remain the primary focal point for international cooperation and collective action. The UN will never achieve legislative authority. No world government is around the corner. But, just as all parliaments initially provided all sections of society, rich and poor, to have their voices and views heard, the UN must perform that role for its member states. Only the UN provides an effective forum for the smaller and weaker states.

10 For small states like Singapore, the UN's role in promoting the rule of international law is critical. Despite its imperfections, the UN has made for a more predictable and safer world. We will do what we can to help because we believe in the UN. It is for this reason that, after thirty-five years of membership, we will seek election to the Security Council next month. Guided by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and contemporary international law, Singapore will seek to reflect faithfully the interests and concerns of developing countries as well as other small states.

Mr Chairman,

11 We must brace ourselves for the challenges of the future. We need to come together at all levels and work in partnership to build a better world. Ultimately, the work of the national parliaments, like the UN, will be

judged by a simple criteria – did we make a positive and meaningful difference to the lives of our peoples in this new Millennium.

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Thank you Mr Chairman.

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