

# *Singapore Government*

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**SPEECH BY PRESIDENT S R NATHAN AT THE UN DAY DINNER TO  
COMMEMORATE THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR THE CULTURE  
OF PEACE ON MONDAY, 23 OCTOBER 2000 AT 7.30 PM AT THE  
MANDARIN HOTEL**

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Since its establishment in 1969, the United Nations Association of Singapore has played an important role in educating Singaporeans about the value of the UN for Singapore. My wife and I are pleased to join all of you in commemorating this year's United Nation's Day, appropriately designated the "International Year for the Culture of Peace".

2 This is a special year for the UN, and for Singapore in the UN. The UN has just successfully concluded the Millennium Summit – the largest gathering of

national leaders the world has ever seen. The very fact that so many national leaders attended the Summit reaffirms the centrality of the UN in international affairs. In the same way that the UN has shaped the transformation of world politics since its inauguration, the Millennium Summit has sought to renew and re-energise the member states of the United Nations for the next phase of world politics – the post-Cold War phase. The interactive roundtables were a new and exciting innovation that raised the level of dialogue among the world leaders and contributed to the success of the Millennium Summit. Much of the credit must go to Secretary-General Annan for launching and guiding this initiative.

3 Two weeks ago, Singapore was elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the 2001-2002 term. After 35 years of membership, this was the first attempt by Singapore to bid for a seat in the Security Council. The strong support that Singapore received from friends in the region and from others across the world, is testimony to our reputation in this world body. The active role we have played, and the contributions we have made within the UN over the decades, were thus recognised. I am confident that we will continue to invest our time and energy, as a member of the Security Council, to be a serious and credible member of the UN, notwithstanding our small size. We are committed to helping the UN, through its processes and institutions, to be a more effective organisation in its objective of maintaining international peace and security.

4 Our membership of the United Nations has symbolised our commitment to its ideals of peace and tolerance. As reflected in the words of its Charter, the UN's responsibility is "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war." This important function of the UN remains the primary yardstick with which we have to judge the UN and our commitment to it. The UN has done much to discharge that responsibility. However, war and conflict still remains a constant feature of the international scene, as a cursory glance at the newspapers will show.

5 Cynics point out that the UN has for the past five decades only talked about ringing in peace and ending war. Any lack of success must rest not on the UN alone. It has been trying and must continue to try harder. It must do so because the world has no choice. Just as few nations can stand alone in the modern world, there are few major conflicts that remain strictly internal matters, without any direct impact on the rest of the world. For what happens in one country, especially in our increasingly globalised world, will have a direct bearing on the prosperity and security of another.

6 That is why the UN is today more vital than it ever was. It is the only

genuinely global institution that brings together all the nations of the world within a single forum. Its inclusiveness gives it a special moral authority on the world stage, and the legitimacy to lead and coordinate international action to deal with peace and security issues.

7 But for the UN to realise its vision, it has to tackle the root causes of conflict, starting often with the poverty and inequities that breeds it. War remains increasingly a poor man's burden. Twenty of the world's 38 poorest states are either in the midst of an armed conflict or have only recently emerged from one. The soundest basis for peace to take root and flourish is prosperity. The best way that we can prevent conflict is to promote sustainable development.

8 While globalisation and technology will continue to bring unprecedented prosperity to some countries, they have also marginalised the weak and the less developed. Per capita income differences between countries narrowed from the 1950s to the 1970s. Now, they are widening.

9 At Millennium Summit, there was a widespread recognition that smaller and weaker economies urgently needed assistance to avoid marginalisation. No nation can tackle these challenges alone. At the Summit, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong proposed that the UN play a leading role in this area. He proposed that the UN should provide the leadership within the community of multilateral organisations like the IMF and World Bank to help poorer nations develop the capacity to profit from globalisation and the knowledge revolution. The challenge for the UN now is to follow-up on this and the other constructive proposals made at the Summit.

10 The effectiveness of the UN, however, does not abrogate the responsibility of national governments. A culture of peace will only evolve if it is supported by good governance, access to education and health care, and a commitment to ensure that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfil his or her potential. Every step in this direction is also a step towards reducing poverty, achieving economic growth and preventing conflict. These are the inter-related building blocks of a culture of peace, and of national – and therefore international – security in this new millennium. We, in Singapore, have endeavoured to adhere to these tenets all these years, as an independent state and a member of the UN.

11 The importance of the UN to a small country like us is obvious. We are plugged into the global economy and consequently are highly dependent on international stability for our growth and prosperity. The UN has made for a safer and better world. The next few years will be critical years for the UN. Singapore will continue to support on-going efforts to vitalise and strengthen the UN to face

the challenges of a new millennium.

12 Once again, I commend the United Nations Association of Singapore for the good work it has done. I wish the Association success in its future endeavours.

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