

Singapore Government

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SPEECH BY MR LEE KHOO CHOY, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE (PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE), AT THE MINISTERIAL MEETING OF THE COORDINATING BUREAU OF THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT (NAM) IN HAVANA, CUBA ON 3 JUNE 1982

I wish first of all on behalf of my delegation, to extend to the Government of Cuba our appreciation for its warm hospitality. We look forward to a pleasant stay in this beautiful city of Havana and hope that the Conference will be productive and fruitful.

This Ministerial Meeting in Havana is being held at a time when the world is fraught with tensions and conflicts. We find that we are faced with new disputes even before the old ones have been settled. Against this backdrop, what is and can be the role of the NAM in contributing to world peace and stability? As a Movement reflecting the views of almost a hundred countries or two-thirds of the world community, the NAM can be a powerful force in world affairs. Our Movement's authority does not stem from its military or economic power, but its ability to mobilise the views of its members to take a collective and united stand on international issues. The NAM constitutes a moral force whose views the international community cannot afford to ignore.

The NAM cannot however become a credible force unless certain conditions are fulfilled. The first requirement is that the Movement must not only be united, but also be able to project its unity and solidarity. A house divided will get little respect from the international community. Instead, we will only be an object of mockery. There are those who assert that it is not possible for such a large grouping of diverse countries, professing so many different political ideologies, and having different economic and social systems to have a common viewpoint or position on the issues which face the Non-Aligned Movement.

While this may be so, it is my delegation's contention that while there will always be differences between sovereign countries, the NAM is united on the basic principles that were enunciated at the time our Movement was founded and which should continue to guide the members of the Movement. The rest of the world will judge the Movement on its ability to abide by and observe these basic principles. Unfortunately, the Movement has in the last few years been far from united. It is riven with disputes between its members. These quarrels threaten to tear asunder the fragile fabric of non-aligned unity. Many of these disputes have come about only because some of our members ignore and even flagrantly violate the basic tenets of the Non-Aligned Movement.

I refer in this respect specifically to Vietnam's invasion and occupation of Cambodia, one of the founder members of the NAM, in December 1978-January 1979. Its action was a violation of some of the fundamental principles of the Movement; including respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of states, non-interference in the internal affairs of states. If the members of the Movement do not themselves observe these cardinal principles of the Movement in their relations with one another, what moral right do we have to ask other members of the international community to observe them? What protection can we as members expect from the Movement? We, the members of the NAM must first be able and willing to observe these principles in our relations with each other. Only then will we be a respected force in international affairs.

The second requirement, if we are to have any influence on the course of world affairs, is to make our voices heard when the sacrosanct principles of the NAM are transgressed and ignored by members of the international community who are outside our Movement. However, this means that the NAM must speak out with a firm voice and condemn the guilty party whenever the situation demands it. It is imperative that aggression and the use of force to settle disputes in international relations must be condemned wherever and whenever they occur, regardless of the identity of the perpetrator. This has to be so if the NAM is genuinely non-aligned. There should be no room for selectivity on this matter.

The strength of our Movement has been diluted by the efforts of a minority who deliberately seek to further the interest of their own ideology and the interests of their superpower patron. In the early years of the Movement, we took an evenhanded approach to the two great powers. Today, it has become noticeable even to the most casual of observers, that the NAM in its declarations and pronouncements, is quick to condemn one great power while remaining silent on the actions of the other. By keeping silent in these instances, we are indirectly encouraging that great power to pursue its actions which are detrimental to the interests of the majority of members of the Movement. It was a matter of great regret to my government that the NAM did not take a clear and unequivocal position on issues such as Cambodia and Afghanistan. In both cases the NAM did not condemn the aggression against a member of this Movement. How can we expect the world to take us seriously when this Movement does not even take a stand and recognise aggression when it is committed against two of its own members?

The NAM will be a credible moral force only if it is able to chart a course of genuine non-alignment. This is the raison d'etre of the Movement's birth and its existence. We have to stay clear of alignments with the ideological blocs that prevail in the world today. The great powers have their own interests which are not always or necessarily identical with the interests of the non-aligned countries. Non-alignment does not mean that we remain neutral on the important issues of the day. To my delegation, it means that we take a clear and principled stand on issues which threaten the survival, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of small non-aligned countries. This is the only way in which the Movement can safeguard the interests of its members.

Mr Chairman, my delegation continues to be troubled by the still unresolved problems that vitally concern the members of our Movement. It is with deep regret that we have observed the slow progress towards independence for Namibia. We hope that the obstacles in the way of independence can be overcome without delay so that the people of Namibia, led by SWAPO the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people can attain the goal of independence as early as possible. The struggle of the black and other coloured people of South Africa for racial justice also has our full support. My government recently participated in the

Asian Regional Conference on Action against Apartheid which was held in Manila in May.

In the Middle East, we hope that there will be a peaceful solution to the Iran-Iraq war. We wish to reaffirm our support for our Arab friends in their legitimate struggle to recover their territories which were occupied by Israel through military conquest in 1967. My government deplored Israel's annexation. In this context, we welcome the restoration of Egyptian sovereignty over the Sinai. Israel's annexation of Arab Jerusalem and its settlement policy in the West Bank and other occupied territories cannot be condoned. We recognise the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to a homeland of their own.

In the case of the Malvinas (Falkland) Islands my government hopes to see a peaceful solution to the dispute and calls on the parties to observe Security Council Resolution 502 of 3 April 1982 in its entirety.

Mr Chairman, we live in troubled times. Singapore is a small country that gained its independence only 17 years ago. We have no wish to be caught in the midst of power contests, be they superpower or regional power contests. However, when the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of other small nations are violated by bigger nations we feel that our own security is endangered. This is why Singapore has spoken out firmly against certain policies of the Soviet Union and Vietnam.

The world today is a very different place from the days when the Movement was founded. Then, our objective was to oppose Western imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Today, we must make it clear that we will resist as strongly, communist imperialism or any other form of imperialism or domination. We must make it clear that we reject the right of any nation to violate the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of another nation to impose or preserve communism, capitalism or any other system of government. We must reject the notion that either a capitalist or communist state or any other type of state has a moral right to pursue an expansionist policy. The world may have changed, but the principles of the Movement are immutable and cannot and will not be changed by an ambitious minority who seek to impose their will and their views on the many.

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