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SUMMARY OF STATEMENT BY PROF S JAYAKUMAR, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE, AT THE 55TH SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, NEW YORK, 20 SEPTEMBER 2000

BUILDING ON THE MILLENNIUM SUMMIT

Foreign Minister S Jayakumar urged UN members to manage their expectations of the organisation. He was addressing the 55th session of the UN General Assembly. Responding to the call by the UN Secretary-General to "start putting action to the bold pledges that our Heads of State and Government have made" at the recently concluded UN Millennium Summit, Minister Jayakumar cautioned that the UN could not do everything on its own and the responsibility must be shared among national governments, the UN, other international institutions, and important actors such as corporations and non-governmental organisations.

Minister Jayakumar said that the Millennium Summit had provided a good basis on which to begin practical negotiations that would lead to solutions to the challenges of the 21st century. He urged UN Member States to engage in a realistic assessment of the Summit's results. Otherwise, the political will and support for the UN could be undermined.

In this regard, Minister Jayakumar called for a more focussed approach. Minister Jayakumar illustrated this by referring to two core functions of the UN: namely development and security.

Development

Recalling the candid debate that world leaders had at the interactive Roundtable discussions held during the Millennium Summit, Minister Jayakumar noted that there was a common acknowledgement that countries from both the North and South faced serious problems that could be attributed to the pressures of globalisation. Collective solutions must be found to the problems of development. The UN had a critical role to play in helping all countries develop their national capacities to take advantage of the benefits of globalisation while mitigating its downsides. In particular, UN could play a mediating role to help develop “win-win” solutions for both developed and developing countries. The UN is also the natural forum for regular dialogues among multilateral organisations like the IMF, World Bank and WTO to enable them work as a team and co-ordinate programmes.

Security

On security, Minister Jayakumar noted that instant communication through the TV, Internet and NGOs had increased the pressures on the UN and UNSC to take action. This has severely tested the UN’s capacity and stretched its resources. Singapore supports discussions currently underway to ensure that the UN has adequate resources for its peacekeeping activities. At the same time, Minister Jayakumar urged the Security Council to review its current decision-making procedures. He also hoped that the Permanent Members of the Security Council would fulfil their special responsibilities in meeting their financial obligations to the UN and providing peacekeeping forces to UN missions.

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**STATEMENT BY PROF S JAYAKUMAR, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN
AFFAIRS, SINGAPORE, AT THE 55TH SESSION OF
THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, NEW YORK,**

ON WEDNESDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2000

Building on the Millennium Summit

Mr President,

1 First let me warmly congratulate you on your election. Your appointment is doubly significant. Few Prime Ministers have held this post of President of the General Assembly. Your unique practical experience in both domestic and international affairs will stand us in good stead as we try to reform the UN. Let me also thank your distinguished predecessor, His Excellency, Dr Theo-Ben Gurirab, for the excellent work he has done and for ushering the UN successfully into the new Millennium.

2 As a fellow small state, Singapore is also delighted to extend a warm welcome to Tuvalu, the UN's newest member. We hope that Tuvalu will also join the Forum of Small States (FOSS).

3 The recently concluded Millennium Summit confirmed that the UN, whatever its imperfections, remains an indispensable organisation. The overriding theme of the plenary speeches was the need for the UN to be revitalised and better equipped to deal with the global challenges of the 21st Century. Our immediate challenge is to respond with concrete follow-up. Or as the Secretary-General said, to *“roll up our sleeves and start putting action to the bold pledges that our Heads of State and Government have made”*. This may be stating the obvious. But doing it will not be easy nor is it assured. The UN's record of implementation, it must be conceded, has not always inspired confidence.

4 In his report to the Millennium Summit, the Secretary-General drew attention to a 1999 Gallup poll of some 57,000 individuals in 60 countries. One conclusion was that globally, less than half of those interviewed judged the performance of the UN to be satisfactory. We should reflect on this. But it is also an unfortunate fact that the UN has not usually got credit for what it

has done successfully, while continuing to attract criticism for what it has not yet done. Thus, a critical political factor – hitherto inadequately addressed - is how to manage expectations.

5 Managing expectations is a key to success. The window of opportunity opened for the UN by the end of the Cold War was perhaps squandered by an over ambitious agenda leading almost inevitably to disillusionment. We should not repeat this mistake after the Millennium Summit. To resolutely implement the Summit's results, we must not only accurately identify them but engage in a realistic assessment of what is and is not possible. Otherwise, we risk undermining the political will and support needed for the UN to be effective.

6 The UN has suffered throughout its history from the inflated rhetoric of its supporters and critics. Both make the mistake of professing to believe that the UN was intended to or is capable of effecting a fundamental change in the nature of international relations. But the UN did not in 1945 or now signify such a change. Then and now, the UN provides an additional but important instrument for national and international diplomacy.

7 The UN serves two essential functions for the community of nations. It provides all of us with a common instrument to advance our common interests including setting of norms for relations between nations and on human rights. It also provides each of us with an important avenue to advance or defend our national interests. There is no necessary contradiction between these two functions. That which is in the interest of humanity ought to be in our individual national interests. The practical problem is in identifying what is common and reconciling different national interests.

8 This problem will remain so long as the solution depends on the cooperative interactions of nation states. Of course, some very profound changes are underway, both in the nature of states and in the interactions of their people. With IT and the Internet, so many individuals from all over the world are directly connected to each other that the critical role of the State to act as an intermediary between its citizens and the rest of the world may never be the same again.

9 The 20th Century has seen a creative tension between two apparently contradictory sets of ideals: the sovereignty of nation states and the progressive elaboration of international law and organisation. Sovereignty implies the right of each state to determine for itself its own rules. Yet today, states interact within a web of complex relationships, international institutions and regimes, covering an ever-widening range of matters, which implies a serious limitation of sovereignty. We live with this apparent contradiction everyday. The paradoxical experience of the 20th Century was that neither absolute sovereignty nor absolute international law and organisation could triumph over the other, but that each needed the other to remedy its own inherent limitations.

10 We do not have to choose between the two ideals. The real question is how to strike an appropriate balance to move forward.

11 Sir Brian Urquhart, the distinguished former Under-Secretary-General of the UN, is credited with the wry observation: *“The sad truth seems to be that the only time that you have a chance of constructing global organisations that might work in peace is during a war.”* This certainly was the UN’s own origins. But, thankfully, part of the problem of contemporary UN reform is that the challenges the UN faces today are not of such a brutally stark nature. In the long run, their cumulative pressures may prove as or even more decisive or destructive as war. It was therefore timely for the Secretary-General to convene the Millennium Summit. We now have a broad consensus on what to do to meet the challenges of the 21st Century.

12 The question then is how do we proceed from here? Taking a narrower but more focussed approach may be the only practical solution to many seemingly intractable issues. But I do not underestimate the complexities of putting this into practice. Let me illustrate the complexities with reference to two of the core functions of the UN: Development and Security.

Development

13 Earlier calls for a new international economic order fell on deaf ears. The stalemate in North-South negotiations over the last three decades or so, was the direct consequence of the resistance on the part of certain developed countries to admit the necessity of changing the functioning of the world economy.

14 However, I believe that resistance can be easier to overcome and the urgent remedial action that is needed may be easier to take if there is a mindset shift by both developing and developed countries. The candid debate the Leaders had at the recent interactive Roundtable discussions saw a common acknowledgement that both the North and South must find collective solutions to the problems of development. There was agreement that developing countries must be given help to build up capacity to benefit from the forces of globalisation. The developed economies have also pointed out that they too face serious problems that can be attributed to the pressures of globalisation. But there can be no doubt that the problems of the South are of a far greater magnitude and deserve far more attention. Domestic problems at home should not give the North any excuse to ignore their important international obligations.

15 Today, it is commonly accepted that no country, whatever its development status, can afford to opt out of the global economy or go it alone. Whatever happens in one part of the globe washes up on the shores of other parts of the world. We are all connected. Witness how rising oil prices have recently affected both developed and developing countries alike. The issue for all is to develop the national capacity to take advantage of the benefits of globalisation while mitigating its downsides.

16 The UN is now in its fourth “Decade for Development”. A new discipline for both developed and developing countries is needed if the results are to be less disappointing than the first three. The issue for the UN is to help the developing countries acquire the capabilities to deal with the pressures of globalisation and plug in.

17 In this process, difficult domestic structural changes will be

necessary to ensure that policies and institutions meet international best practices. These standards are today largely western, but can and ought to be internationally negotiated. And it is imperative that the developed countries avoid a sterile “one-size-fits-all” prescription. As suggested by the Secretary-General, the UN can play a role in mediating the negotiations so that it will not be undertaken on the basis of categories biased towards zero-sum solutions. Instead, the UN could help develop “win-win” solutions for both developed and developing countries.

18 The UN, however, cannot work in isolation. The UN has a role to play to ensure that the international financial institutions like the IMF, World Bank and WTO coordinate their efforts and work as a team. No other institution is better placed to do this. The UN is the natural forum for regular dialogues among the multilateral organisations to co-ordinate programmes which could help developing nations build capacity. The UN could also help make the decision-making process of these organisations more transparent, consultative and inclusive.

19 The UN’s role is all the more urgent as the explosion in the international private movement of goods, services and capital have not been matched by the development of international norms or effective international institutions to regulate the global market and check the adverse effects of globalisation, especially on the smaller and weaker economies. Various calls have been made in different forums to reform the international financial architecture. Only the UN has the global legitimacy to develop such an international public policy response which takes into account the concerns of all countries, large or small, weak or powerful.

Security

20 Let me turn next to Security. The end of the Cold War has obviously not meant the end to international conflict. In the eleven years since the end of 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell, the Security Council has authorised some forty peacekeeping operations. In the preceding forty-two years, it authorised only seventeen. It has been estimated that the total cumulative amount of the UN peacekeeping budget from 1948 to 1989 was US\$3 billion. Since 1989, it has escalated to about US\$18 billion. Not only

have the numbers and costs of peacekeeping operations risen sharply, but their scope has also changed. Of the forty PKOs authorised since 1989, only five were clearly in response to clear inter-State conflicts.

21 Throughout history we have witnessed oppressive internal conflicts and human rights atrocities perpetuated by a State against its own people. The difference today is that with the advent of technology, instant communication through the TV, internet and NGOs, these are made known to the whole world instantaneously. Very few are purely “local” or “regional” situations. Most are internationalised. This galvanising of public outrage leads to expectations that the international community must act. Often this increases the pressures on the UN and UNSC to take interventionist actions, severely testing the UN’s capacity and stretching its resources. The dilemma is how can the UN be responsive to these pressures if its members are unwilling to give it the required resources. And if the UN tries to be selective, how can it prevent itself from being accused of double standards?

22 In 1995, Professor Paul Kennedy of Yale University, who headed a team of scholars retained by the UN Secretariat to study the future of the organisation, concluded that member states faced an urgent decision: either to reduce their demands on the UN, thereby giving it a “*decent chance*” to carry on at a lower level of activity within existing resources; or to expand available resources so that the UN could meet what Professor Kennedy saw as inexorably growing demands from member states unable to cope with the technological pace, population growth and environmental pressures of the 21st Century. Kennedy concluded that “*in the light of global circumstances*”, opting for expanded resources would be the “*wiser*” choice.

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23 There is a growing consensus now that it is important to ensure that the UN has adequate resources for its current and future peacekeeping activities. Discussions on how this can be best effected are already underway. Singapore supports them. Nevertheless, let us not forget that every prudent accounting must deal squarely with how decisions are made on PKO operations. Let us be honest here. There is no level playing field. Most of the time, most decisions are in reality made by the Permanent Members. And the rest of us have to pay our dues but have a minimal say in the decisions.

24 Hence, when we review the current PKO scale of assessment,

we hope that the Security Council will also review its current decision-making procedures.

25 Recent developments in Africa serve as a sobering reminder of the need to undertake an urgent overhaul of UN peacekeeping. The Security Council met at the level of Heads of State and Government during the Millennium Summit to discuss the need to ensure an effective role for it in maintaining international peace and security, particularly in Africa. Sadly, apart from a general declaration, the Security Council Summit did not produce any new concrete proposals or commitments to further action. The Council can and should do better than this.

26 Fortunately, the Brahimi Panel has come up with a set of concrete recommendations, which when put in place will significantly revamp UN peacekeeping. In a nutshell, the Panel advocated that should the UN decide to send a peacekeeping force to uphold the peace, the peacekeepers must be rapidly deployed with a credible deterrence, and be authorised with robust mandates to carry out their mission and defend themselves, their fellow mission colleagues, and the very lives they were sent to protect. Only then can the tragedies of past peacekeeping operations be avoided. What this entails is that UN peacekeeping missions must be given the necessary resources, including better-trained and better-equipped peacekeepers, and receive better support from the UN Headquarters, in particular an enlarged Department of Peacekeeping Operations. In turn, member states must have the political will to support the UN politically, financially and operationally.

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27 The Brahimi Report has received overwhelming support not only from the Secretary-General and the Millennium Summit, but also from the Security Council Summit, and even the Summit of the Permanent Members of the Security Council. Many who have addressed the 55th General Assembly before me have also lent their strong support for the Report. While the Secretary-General has committed himself to implementing those recommended changes for which he is responsible, the other bodies have agreed to consider the recommendations which fall within their respective areas of responsibility expeditiously. We hope that the Permanent Members of the Security Council will fulfil their special responsibilities in meeting their financial obligations to the United Nations, i.e. paying their dues

on time, in full and without conditions, and providing peacekeeping forces to UN missions.

28 I think I have said enough to underscore the point that a focussed approach is not necessarily an easier or less complex one. But I believe that it is the only practical way forward.

29 The Secretary-General's Report to the Millennium Summit was designed as a guide to action. It should be actively used as such, and not simply praised and forgotten. We have taken the first step at the Millennium Summit by endorsing and adopting many of the proposals of the Report in the form of a Millennium Declaration. The real challenge now is to fulfil the ambitious and wide-ranging promises that we have made to the world.

30 Where are the material, financial and human resources going to come from to fulfil our promises? The UN Secretariat and agencies by themselves obviously do not have them. The UN cannot do everything on its own. As the Millennium Report makes clear, the necessary long-term effort to deliver the solution would have to be shared among national governments, the UN, other international institutions, and other important actors such as corporations and non-governmental organisations. Only then would there be any chance of success.

31 The Millennium Summit has provided a good basis on which to begin the process of practical negotiations that will lead to real solutions, rather than political posturing which will only complicate already complex issues. We must start somewhere. I suggest that we start here and now.

32 Thank you.

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