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SPEECH BY PRESIDENT WEE KIM WEE AT THE DINNER FOR THE
PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL MR CHAIM HERZOG AND MRS HERZOG,
AT ISTANA ON 18 NOVEMBER 1986

On behalf of the Government and people of Singapore, I extend a warm welcome to Your Excellency and Mrs Herzog to Singapore. I wish you a pleasant stay during your visit here.

Singapore's bilateral relations with Israel are cordial. When we became independent in 1965, Israel was one of the few countries that responded to our request for help in building up our defence forces. Other friends had said they were unable to assist us. We remember this help.

Our cooperation has extended to other fields, especially in education and health. But our trade and investment links remain marginal. Singapore's trade with Israel accounts for less than 0.2 per cent of our total trade. Investments are negligible on both sides. I hope the economic ties between us can improve.

Singapore has good relations with our neighbours, the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). For 20 years, we have lived peacefully with our neighbours and cooperated in many fields. This has been possible because of our overriding common interests and our adherence to the principles of mutual respect, friendly cooperation and non-interference in the internal affairs of each other. We, the members of ASEAN, are motivated by the shared objective of giving our peoples a better life through economic advancement. And we have emphasised the factors

that strengthen regional cooperation, peace and stability, which are essential for economic progress. We have played down the factors that divide us.

It is regrettable that peace and stability have so far eluded the countries of Middle East. We noted the visit of Mr Shimon Peres, who was then Israeli Prime Minister, to Morocco in July 1986 to meet King Hassan. We welcomed the visit to Egypt in September this year of Mr Peres to meet President Mubarak. We had hoped that peace talks could resume. We believe that the question of Palestine is one of the root causes of conflict in the Middle East. Singapore's stand on this issue was stated by my Foreign Minister, Mr S Dhanabalan, in the United Nations General Assembly in September 1980. This was what he said, and I quote:

"Singapore has always stated unequivocally that Israel has a right to exist. We agree that Israel is entitled to exist within safe and secure boundaries recognised and accepted by its neighbours. However, if there is to be peace between Israel and her Arab neighbours, Israel must be prepared to do three things. First, Israel must give back to the Arab countries the territories which Israel occupied as a result of the June 1967 war. Secondly, Israel must be prepared to recognise the right of the Palestinians to self-determination and to a homeland of their own. Thirdly, Israel must rescind the illegal measures it has taken recently to alter the character and status of the city of Jerusalem."

Sooner or later, the peace process must be restarted. It is in Israel's interest to extend its process of reconciliation with Egypt to Jordan and Syria. Eventually, a state of peace can prevail in the Middle East.

You are a talented people. You have many achievements in science and technology, and also music and the arts. As a friend, we can wish you no greater achievement than that you reach a just and durable peace with your neighbours. You are talented enough to achieve this, provided you are also courageous enough, when the time is opportune, to give up enough of your gains in past wars to make peace possible.

May I now invite Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, to rise and join me in a toast to the health and happiness of His Excellency President Herzog and Mrs Herzog.

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