



**PERMANENT MISSION OF SINGAPORE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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**UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
58TH SESSION**

STATEMENT BY

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PERMANENT MISSION OF SINGAPORE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**IN THE GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE**

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Mr Chairman,

At the outset, please allow me to join other speakers in congratulating you on your election to the Chairmanship of the First Committee, as well as the other members of the bureau on their election. My delegation is confident that under your leadership, this committee will work assiduously towards the successful completion of our work. We would like to assure you of our fullest cooperation and support. At the same time, we would like to welcome and congratulate Ambassador Nobuyasu Abe on his appointment as Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, and thank him for his lucid statement last week.

Mr Chairman,

2 These are challenging times. Even as technological advances and globalisation bring about rapid and positive changes to the world we live in, these same driving forces bring about new threats and vulnerabilities. These new threats know no boundaries or nationalities. No one is immune; everyone is vulnerable.

3 To many of us, September 11, 2001, was a watershed that brought to the forefront the threat of global catastrophic terrorism. Sadly, it looks likely that we will have to live with the threat of terrorism for some time to come. In the past few months alone, we have seen tragic and despicable terrorist attacks against innocent victims from Baghdad to Jakarta and Mumbai to Riyadh. Through these and other past attacks, we have seen how ordinary aircraft, seacraft and vehicles can be converted into devastating bombs. But just imagine the consequences if the terrorists had somehow managed to obtain and utilise weapons of mass destruction. This is not some unlikely scenario, but a very real threat.

4 At the same time, in various parts of the world, the threat of large-scale conventional war is always looming. If the parties are armed with nuclear, chemical or biological weapons, these conflicts could escalate with the deadliest of consequences. In addition, many parts of the world today are

plagued by violent civil conflict. Often fuelled by the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons, these conflicts kill thousands, displace many thousands more from their homes, devastate economies, and frequently have knock-on effects that could destabilise the surrounding region. And these are just some of the threats to international peace and security that we have to contend with.

Mr Chairman,

5 This is the climate that the First Committee has to work in. Our work involves not some abstract problems that can be dealt with at leisure, but most pressing challenges that can have the most severe of consequences, affecting everyone from all walks of life, regardless of nationality. Unfortunately, the gravity of our responsibilities frequently seem not to be reflected in the pace of our work, the attention we pay to an issue or in the willingness of member states to act collectively when necessary. Indeed, one would have some difficulty in reconciling the agenda and output of the First Committee – a key multilateral forum for the consideration of disarmament and international security issues – with the urgent security concerns that the international community has today.

Mr Chairman,

6 Many speakers before me have already touched on the issue of the revitalisation of the General Assembly and reform of the work of the First Committee. This is a substantive and important issue. At a time when the continued relevance of the United Nations appears to be in doubt, there can be nothing more important than to work towards the revitalisation of our organisation and to regain the confidence of our peoples in the United Nations. It is time for us to consider how we should reinvigorate this Committee and ensure that it can rise up to the challenge and make a real contribution towards international peace and security. This is not the first time that my delegation has sought to highlight the need for the First Committee to challenge and, if need be, re-think our existing paradigms. Those of you who remember our statements over the last few years at this very forum will recall that we had made this same point.

7 However, challenging existing paradigms are never easy. Coming to a consensus on how we can reinvigorate our Committee will be even harder. And even harder will be moving beyond cosmetic reform to a real invigoration of our Committee and progress in our work. As we all know, the calls for the revitalisation of the General Assembly and the now-clichéd suggestions for reform, such as the streamlining and rationalisation of our agenda, are not new. Yet few delegations seem to have taken them on. Perhaps the necessity of these reform measures, or the need for us to deal effectively with the threats we face, has not yet sunk in. In some cases, I suspect that this is due to narrow political interests riding roughshod over the broader interests of the international community as a whole. Whatever the case, it may be that the debate has become too politically charged and has become bogged down in combative and polemical repartee.

8 But now, more than ever, it is vital that we do not allow the process to be stymied. We should not simply go through the motions year after year, but seriously address the real concerns. We should consider each issue with an open mind, based on its merits and the broader interests of the international community to which we all belong. As with almost all UN issues, the key ingredient to success is political will – the political will to engage in some give-and-take and to exercise greater flexibility and understanding. Perhaps if we could bear these thoughts in mind as we consider the issues in the days ahead, we can make some progress, whether in terms of the revitalisation of our Committee, or on the disarmament and international security issues we deal with.

Mr Chairman,

9 Revitalisation does not only mean pursuing reform measures or new initiatives to tackle the pressing threats of our time. We should not forget that we need to consolidate and improve on our achievements and ensure that these accomplishments can stand the test of time. Taking stock of the existing disarmament regimes that we have today, I am not sure how many of them can be truly considered success stories. New initiatives should not come at the expense of efforts to entrench and effectively implement existing regimes. In addition, we should be wary of over-extending ourselves. The perfect is the enemy of the good. Instead of pursuing initiatives that may be overly

idealistic or extremely divisive and fritter away valuable time and resources, it may be more appropriate to take a practical approach that can enable us to move forward.

10 In this regard, dealing with the complex, multi-faceted security challenges of today will oftentimes require that we adopt a practical, multi-pronged and multi-dimensional approach. The United Nations has a vital role to play. But it is by no means the only actor or the only arena where these pressing challenges can be addressed. Where appropriate, we may need to approach the challenges from various levels – whether at the global, regional, sub-regional or national levels – and recognise that everyone, be it international or regional organisations, individual states or non-governmental organisations, has a role to play. We may also be most effective when we tackle the challenges from all angles – from strengthening international legal regimes to putting in place the stringent measures necessary to prevent terrorist attacks and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, for instance. Moreover, such an approach allows for each state or region's unique circumstances to be taken into account so as to ensure that it leads to a truly effective and durable solution that all states can subscribe to. Whether to eradicate the scourge of terrorism, or the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons, a practical, multi-pronged and multi-dimensional approach may well afford us the most flexibility and prove to be the most effective approach. Whatever the case, the United Nations' role is central.

Mr Chairman,

11 Surmounting the challenges we have will not be easy, but it will never be easy. In this new era, it has become even more critical that we intensify our efforts to ensure that those who seek to wreak death and devastation on innocent victims do not get their hands on the tools and resources they need. This is the heavy responsibility that we have and it is imperative that we do our best to ensure that we discharge our responsibilities successfully. Let us use the weeks ahead wisely to consider how we can deal effectively with the challenges we have. This may not necessarily be something that we can accomplish over the course of this session of the General Assembly, but let us genuinely try to lay the foundations for a

durable and comprehensive solution to the security challenges we face. Perhaps some years later, we can look back and claim that we have made real progress in making the world a safer place. Thank you.