



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

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**UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
59TH SESSION**

STATEMENT BY

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**6th INFORMAL MEETING OF THE PLENARY
TO EXCHANGE VIEWS ON THE PRESIDENT'S
DRAFT OUTCOME DOCUMENT OF THE HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY MEETING OF
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF SEPTEMBER 2005
(A/59/HLPM/CRP.1)**

21 JUNE 2005

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1 My delegation would like to warmly congratulate you and your facilitators for having produced a good draft Outcome Document for our consideration. It is a balanced document which conveys a good sense of where this house stands in general on the various issues. Of course, there will be some amongst us who would have liked the draft Outcome Document to be more ambitious while others might feel that the draft, as it is, is already too ambitious. That itself would suggest that you have succeeded in producing a draft that captures the middle ground. I am sure that after this round of consultations, you and your facilitators will be able to make some improvements to the text. In the meantime, my delegation would like to make a few observations about the draft Outcome Document.

2 First, our leaders had agreed on a **development** vision five years ago, as laid out in the Millennium Development Goals. We set clear targets for eradicating poverty and improving the social and development conditions of countries by 2015. It is clear from available data that there has been slow and uneven implementation of this global development agenda, a point which has also been underscored in the draft Outcome Document. The draft Outcome Document has identified a number of things that all of us, developed and developing countries, will have to do if we are to meet our commitment to eradicating poverty and promoting development. While many of these exhortations and injunctions are not new, the fact remains that all of us need to be constantly reminded of what we need to do to stay the course. In that sense, the draft Outcome Document has captured some of our most important concerns on development. My delegation was also heartened by the recent decision of the G8 Finance Ministers to cancel US\$40 billion of debt owed to international agencies by the world's poorest countries. This is certainly a step in the right direction and one which is consistent with the call in the draft Outcome Document for developed countries to rethink their approach on the debt problem of developing countries.

3 Second, we agree with the point made in the draft Outcome Document that the **responsibility to protect** civilian populations lies first and foremost with each individual State. But, at the same time, it is a fact that not all States are willing or able to live up to this sacred responsibility. We should not allow antiquated notions of absolute sovereignty to stand in the way of the international community using all available means - diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means as well as collective action through the Security Council - to prevent massive killings and crimes against humanity. In this regard, we fully support the need to have frank open-ended discussions in the General Assembly to establish clear rules underscored by clear and agreed criteria on how to prevent and to deal with such crimes, criteria that would at the same time leave no room for abuse of any sort by anyone. We recognise that the discussions will inevitably be difficult and contentious. But, we should not shy away from starting these discussions as soon as possible.

4 Third, my delegation would like to thank you for making some concrete recommendations on the **Peacebuilding Commission**. Here, I would like to make two observations. *First*, it is our hope that we will indeed be able to meet the highly ambitious deadline of 31 December 2005 for the establishment of the modalities for the operation of

the Commission. Some homework has already been done by the Secretariat on the proposed Peacebuilding Commission. I recall that the Secretary-General himself had circulated a fairly comprehensive paper setting out his thoughts on the specific functions, institutional structure, membership and modalities of the Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Support Office. Many of the ideas contained therein are practical and worthy of our support. If we in the General Assembly can display the necessary political will and reach agreement on the modalities by the target deadline, it would not only contribute to a strengthening of the UN system but give new impetus to our ongoing efforts to revitalise the General Assembly. *Secondly*, as the proposed Peacebuilding Commission will be a new project that we will be undertaking, we should be prepared to take a flexible approach and not create a structure within the UN system that is cast in stone. We should be prepared to review the mandate, modalities and performance of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Support Office in a few years' time to make sure that they are indeed functioning effectively. Such a review would allow us to better respond to the needs of the time. The important thing is to make sure that the Peacebuilding Commission lives up to its potential by preventing a country from relapsing into violence and instability while still recovering from the ravages of war.

5 Next, my delegation recognises the need to reform the current UN human rights machinery, and in this context, we believe that there is merit in discussing the proposal to establish a new **Human Rights Council**. We also agree that there is merit in any newly created Human Rights Council (HRC) being a standing body, but one that is a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly. Members should be elected by the entire General Assembly membership by a two-third majority and on the basis of equitable geographical representation. This way, we can try to ensure that those who sit in judgement of the human rights records of others are indeed worthy members of the new body and answerable and accountable to the GA. My delegation can also support the proposal in the draft Outcome Document that the new body be comparable in size to the Commission on Human Rights (CHR).

6 The Secretary-General, in his statement to the CHR in Geneva a couple of months ago, noted that the proposed HRC "will not overcome all the tensions that accompany our handling of human rights. A degree of tension is inherent in the issue". We share this view. Notwithstanding this, we should aim to reduce to the largest extent possible the politicisation and selectivity that have become the hallmarks of the current CHR. Otherwise, we would end up merely switching labels and calling the current CHR by a different name. If so, it will only be a matter of time before the so-called new body is discredited. Hence, it is important that the mandate and working methods of the new body are carefully spelt out. If we get these right, it would go some way towards allowing the HRC to become a more effective body, one that is also more conciliatory and less confrontational in its approach. In short, we need a fundamental change in mindset, replacing confrontation with dialogue. No amount of structural reform will help if countries believe they have the right to impose their views on others. In this regard, it would be important to work out in some detail the specific mandate of the proposed HRC and its modalities, functions, procedures and working methods before the High-level Plenary. Otherwise, we risk having an acrimonious debate on these important details after

the High-level Plenary.

7 My delegation understands fully the logic and practicality of locating a new HRC in Geneva, but is of the view that this would in some ways be to the disadvantage of countries, especially the smaller and poorer developing countries, which are not resident in Geneva. Currently, countries without representation in Geneva can send delegations to cover a CHR session for the fixed six-week period. But, it would be extremely difficult for them to participate actively in the work of a standing HRC, particularly if meetings are called at short notice. It might become a disincentive for these developing countries to seek a seat in the HRC. Lest my comments are misconstrued, let me make it clear that I am not proposing that the HRC be re-located in New York. But, if it is our intention for all Member States to have real opportunities to serve as members of the HRC, we will need to find practical means to tackle this potential problem. Finally, on the HRC, my delegation would like to support the proposal for the proposed new body to conduct periodic reviews of the fulfilment of all human rights obligations by all Member States. We believe that such peer reviews, akin to the WTO's Trade Policy Reviews of all its members, would help to reduce charges of selectivity by making sure that all countries are subject to the same rigorous reviews of their human rights records. In fact, we share the view expressed by the Secretary-General that members of the HRC should be the first to have their human rights records subject to a peer review.

8 Fifth, it is a fact that we have been grappling with the issues of **General Assembly** revitalisation and improvement in the working methods of the **Security Council** for a long time. In fact, the Open-Ended Working Group dealing with the working methods of the Security Council has come to be jokingly referred to as the Never-Ending Working Group. But, the fact is that both General Assembly (GA) revitalisation and improvement in the working methods of the Security Council are like the labour of Sisyphus. We have to keep pushing hard on both these issues. Otherwise, there is the risk of a rollback in whatever little gains we have made over the years. While the September summit might give both these exercises a fillip, we will need to continuously and doggedly pursue our efforts if we are to sustain the momentum.

9 But, the important thing is that on both issues, we can do something about them. It is true that draft Outcome Document does not say very much about both these issues. The best thing may be to aim for the adoption of two separate resolutions on GA revitalisation and UNSC working methods. There is already a draft resolution on GA revitalisation prepared by you, Mr President, on the table. We should aim to get it adopted as soon as possible. We should likewise aim for a separate resolution on UNSC working methods before the September Summit. This issue is of great importance to all of us who are interested in an effective Security Council, and more so in the light of ongoing discussions to enlarge the Security Council. I know that my colleagues from Liechtenstein, the Bahamas and Switzerland have been working on some ideas for an improvement in the working methods of the Security Council. We should encourage them to get these ideas converted into a draft resolution for our consideration. The important thing is for all of us to put our heads together and identify some new ways in which the GA could be strengthened and the Security Council working methods

improved. Often, the tendency is to view any new proposals to strengthen the GA or to reform the working methods of the Security Council with suspicion or with some reservation at best. We need to change our mindsets. We have an opportunity to do something this year. If we succeed, it will provide an impetus for more substantive reforms in the years ahead.

10 Sixth, on the issue of **Secretariat** reform, my delegation believes that the UN, like any other organisation, needs to rejuvenate itself to remain relevant and responsive to the global challenges facing it. The Secretary-General's request to prepare a comprehensive proposal on the general concept of a one-time buy out to modernize and improve personnel structure and costs can be seen in this light. However, since this is the first time that the UN is embarking on such a course of action, the proposal warrants our careful consideration. Two questions come to mind vis-à-vis this proposal. *First*, does the proposal mean that existing human resources policies and practices of the UN are inadequate to deal with the issue of staff who are perceived to be redundant or ineffective in terms of meeting the needs of the Organisation? Or is it a lack of will or an inability to have current human resources policies and rules enforced, especially with regard to training or the hiring and firing of staff? If so, should we not be looking into the root causes of the problem and concentrating our efforts on improving and strengthening existing policies and practices of Human Resources Management (HRM) rather than merely expending additional resources to buy out staff? *Secondly*, there is a concern that the proposal may in fact achieve the reverse effect. We could end up losing the competent staff that the UN would like to retain. These are the people who are "marketable" and who might be the ones tempted to accept the one-time buy-out option. On the other hand, the redundant staff and those whom we are hoping to buy out might very well decide to stay put.

11 Finally, Mr President, my delegation would like to say that we were most heartened by the explicit acknowledgement in paragraph 10 of the draft Outcome Document of "the importance of recognising ethnic, religious and cultural diversity throughout the world and the need to encourage dialogue, understanding, tolerance and respect among different cultures and civilisations as a means to promote international peace and security." This might seem trite to some but it is a powerful statement which embodies the UN and what it stands for. As my Minister noted in his statement to the 59th UNGA on 24 September last year, "What we need profoundly is a respect for plurality in the world, one that is built on a common substrate which defines us as civilized human beings in the 21st century. Upon this shared substrate, however, we must not only accept diversity, we should encourage it. Indeed, like biological diversity, it is essential for human progress that there should be cultural and political diversity in the world. Without diversity, our ability to respond to new challenges will be weakened."

12 For all its imperfections, the UN represents this diversity in unity. Respecting plurality does not mean that we stop recognising strengths and weaknesses. That would be hypocrisy. But no one should force their views on others. We should never stop trying to influence one another, as here in the UN we are always trying to, but we must always be prepared to see the same issues from the perspectives of others. If all of us approach

the draft Outcome Document with this mindset, we will be able to produce a final document that is able to command the broadest possible consensus, a document that truly represents a unity of minds notwithstanding our diversity of views. That will contribute towards a successful summit in September and a better world in general.

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