

Mr President,
Secretary-General Ban,
Dear colleagues,

1 Your Excellency Vuk Jeremic, my congratulations on your election as President of the 67th General Assembly. I wish you success in the year ahead.

Mr President,

2 The global economic situation remains uncertain. Europe is in recession and growth in other places is weakening. There is increasing concern that this combination of weak consumer demand in developing countries and a continuing crisis in the Eurozone may lead to a global recession. An even greater danger, especially to small states like Singapore that depend on global trade, is the risk of increased protectionism.

3 Populist pressures in countries affected by austerity and economic crisis can cause further instability, as politicians become unwilling or unable to deal with long-term, structural economic problems. While emerging economies focus on maintaining economic growth, developed economies are preoccupied with both immediate and structural socio-economic problems. Understandably, there is less focus on strategic regional and international issues. However, serious, long-term, challenges remain. Rising income disparities, climate change, and worries about food security are not adequately addressed at the global level.

UNCERTAIN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

4 Amidst this uncertainty, no state or group of states currently has the power to definitively set the international agenda. Decision-making and governance on global issues have and will continue to become increasingly complicated. The multiplicity of interests makes finding consensus in international fora that much harder.

5 Growing frustration over the inability of existing multilateral institutions to deal with these global challenges has given rise to a greater tendency for countries to turn to smaller and exclusive groups outside of the UN multilateral framework for solutions.

6 The G-20 is one such example. The G-20 has been able to deal with some of the pressing global macroeconomic problems. Without the G-20, the 2008

economic crisis may have well led to a global depression. However, the G-20 is an exclusive grouping that leaves out the vast majority of the UN membership, particularly small states. It is a self-selected group but one that is here to stay in the foreseeable future. The Global Governance Group (3G) was therefore established to strengthen the engagement between the G-20 and the general membership of the UN.

7 Even as we work with the G20, we should look for ways to strengthen and reform existing multilateral institutions such as the UN, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation so as to achieve greater efficiency, rather than continuing to invent smaller groupings.

STRENGTHENING OF THE UN

8 Many of us fault the UN, including the UN Security Council, for its inability to act to resolve ongoing conflicts, such as in Syria.

9 However as frustrations mount, let us not forget that the UN and its organs, including the Security Council, can only do what its members choose to do. The UN is an organisation of sovereign nation states and has no more authority than its members give it. Any failure of the Security Council and the UN in maintaining peace and security represents a failure of the Member States themselves.

10 We should, therefore, support ongoing and new efforts aimed at strengthening the UN, instead of denigrating it. The UN is unique in its ability to come up with global solutions because of its universal membership, legitimacy, experience and presence on the ground. No other organisation is as equipped to do so. A significant expansion of the UN's mediation capabilities, good offices, and peacekeeping efforts has made the UN central to international crisis prevention and the mediation and settlement of disputes. We should continue to support the strengthening of these aspects.

11 The P5, with their veto powers, have the primary responsibility to make the Security Council more effective. This is why Singapore has consistently called for an improvement in the Security Council's working methods. The Security Council is not a rubber stamp for the interests of its individual members. Its power, if not visibly and openly wielded for the greater good and to discharge its mandate in all instances, will eventually undermine its legitimacy and leadership role in the international community. This is in no one's interest.

12 Singapore believes that the long-term goal of the UN should be an effective system of international law and resilient mechanisms for peaceful dispute settlement. This will provide a platform for states under threat to bring their problems before these mechanisms with confidence, rather than trying to resolve them by force.

PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES AND RESPECT FOR THE RULE OF LAW

Mr President,

13 You have selected an important theme for this general debate – “the peaceful settlement of disputes or situations”. In a fast-changing environment, where the global governance structure is fragmented and coordination is difficult, the parameters of the dialogue among states become crucial.

14 In this dialogue among states, respect for the rule of law by all parties is crucial. If this were not the case, small states will lose their independence and autonomy and even the larger and stronger states can never feel entirely secure. A stable international system is critical to our collective security.

15 Small states such as Singapore are vulnerable even at the best of times. And these are not the best of times. It is, therefore, particularly important for small states to be in an international environment where international law and institutions based on law can flourish. We need a predictable and stable, rule-based international system in order to survive.

16 Singapore firmly believes in the importance of safeguarding the international rule of law. We have participated actively in various multilateral negotiations, and used international dispute mechanisms such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) to resolve disputes. Our view is that disputes, including those over territorial sovereignty can and should be resolved peacefully and in accordance with international law.

17 As major beneficiaries of a stable international system, it is incumbent upon small states to not only support the international rule of law but to also speak up against its violation. This year, the 105-member Forum of Small States (FOSS) will commemorate its 20th anniversary with a High-Level Conference on Small States on 1 October. The Conference will discuss the role of small states in international relations, including our commitment to the rule of law and the

peaceful settlement of disputes. We welcome all member states to attend the Conference. We hope that the Conference will be a platform for small states to share our experiences with and remind the international community that we too have contributions to make to the maintenance of an international system that benefits all nations, of any size.

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