

Mr President, Excellencies,

Let me first congratulate His Excellency Csaba Kőrösi (*Cha-ba Ke-re-shi*) on assuming the Presidency of the 77th session of the General Assembly.

I also commend His Excellency Abdulla Shahid for his stalwart leadership of the 76th session during a most challenging year.

This General Assembly is taking place in the shadow of multiple concurrent crises.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine flagrantly violates international law and the UN Charter and undermines the rules-based order.

We are also deeply concerned about the potential annexation of more Ukrainian territory. The multilateral system, which has contributed greatly to global peace and security, is now being severely tested.

At the same time, superpower rivalry continues to sharpen. As we have seen in theatres from Europe to Asia this year, the risks of accidents, miscalculation, confrontation, and outright conflict have escalated.

The prospects for international cooperation have weakened and the temptation for unilateralism has become stronger. But the need for concerted global cooperation has never been greater or more urgent, given the range of transnational challenges we face today.

Our recovery from COVID-19 remains uneven and fragile. The risk of a future and even more deadly pandemic, “Disease X”, has risen.

The global economy is entering a period of higher and prolonged inflation, and higher interest rates. Energy prices have soared. It will become harder to generate the resources to address long-term issues.

Societies continue to grapple with greater division, disruption, and polarisation. Without cohesion, trust, or even an ability to agree on facts, the will and unity needed for societies to confront our challenges will be undermined.

The climate crisis is a clear and present threat.

Our global commons such as water and biodiversity are also deteriorating rapidly.

Our global food supply is at risk.

To make things worse, all these threats and crises are occurring concurrently; interacting with and compounding each other.

For instance, the Secretary-General has spoken of a triple crisis of food, fuel, and finance. The impact of these crises on ordinary people and their livelihoods has been severe, especially in developing countries. We see this in the devastating impact of the floods in Pakistan to worsening food insecurity in parts of Africa.

The post-World War II era of relative stability and prosperity has come to an end. A new world order is being shaped, and the moment of delivery is always the most dangerous.

Will we have a more divided, less prosperous, and less peaceful world?

Or can we strengthen multilateralism and the UN to deal with the challenges of the future, uphold and strengthen the rules-based international system, and jointly harness the opportunities offered by new technologies – digital, biology and renewable energy – to create a new era of peace and prosperity?

Singapore believes that the only way forward is to uphold the inclusive and rules-based multilateral system that has underwritten peace and progress since World War II.

This is also why we worked with a cross-regional group of countries to establish the Forum of Small States, or FOSS, in 1992.

We started with 16 countries. This year, we celebrate the 30th anniversary of FOSS. 108 countries – a majority at the UN – are proud members.

FOSS has always been a champion of the UN and rules-based multilateralism.

It gives us a collective stake and voice in the global commons, a means to safeguard our interests, and a system where we have sovereign equality and disputes can be settled peacefully in accordance with international law.

Indeed, the profound importance of multilateralism and international law is why Singapore has strongly condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The security and even existence of Singapore – and many others – depends on the international community upholding the fundamental principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

If we do not protect these principles, there is no basis for countries – big and small – to cooperate on an equal footing. Small states especially must not allow the world to regress to one where ‘might is right’.

While the rules-based multilateral system is not perfect, it is by far our best option in addressing transnational challenges and managing the global commons.

This was exemplified by the pivotal adoption of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, or UNCLOS, 40 years ago. It brought order and predictability to the governance of our oceans and provided a universal legal framework in which all States can work together.

The geopolitical reality today makes it harder to forge consensus on such a framework.

But as our experience with COVID-19 has shown, multilateral cooperation is the only way forward.

Ultimately, we share this planet. Despite our differences, our destinies are inter-woven, and no one is safe until all of us are safe. This holds for pandemics, as it does for climate change, the conservation of the oceans, and many other shared challenges.

Singapore will do our part.

We are honoured that Ambassador Rena Lee serves as the President of the BBNJ conference, which is negotiating a treaty under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.

We call on all delegations to expedite the conclusion of a robust and future-proof BBNJ treaty.

There is much more we can do to re-energise and transform the UN-based multilateral system to new realities and challenges.

I commend the leadership of the Secretary-General in putting forward a bold and ambitious “Common Agenda” to do so.

I will focus on three areas in our global commons where there is an urgent need to build resilience:

Climate change and food insecurity, global health and pandemic preparedness, and digital transformation and cybersecurity.

Climate change remains the most pressing challenge confronting humanity today, as we have seen from the more frequent occurrences of extreme weather events and the devastation that they have wrought.

We need a sustained and ambitious global response. Continued commitment by countries to the Paris Agreement and Glasgow Climate Pact is critical.

We also need to step up cooperation in the transition to net zero. This will likely be the biggest socio-economic transformation since the Industrial Revolution.

Both will require considerable economic restructuring, technological breakthroughs, investments, and behavioural changes.

The UN-led multilateral system will be key in pulling everyone together to row in the same direction and not leave anyone behind.

Singapore, as a small, low-lying, and alternative-energy disadvantaged island nation, is especially vulnerable to climate change and sea-level rise.

Our impact on global emissions is very small, but we take our climate action obligations seriously.

We have just raised our climate ambition to achieve net zero emissions by or around mid-century. A comprehensive strategy to green the economy is taking shape, and we will raise carbon taxes progressively from 2024.

We will do our part to build a comprehensive green finance ecosystem and facilitate the regional journey to net zero.

We are supporting industry efforts to build the infrastructure for a voluntary carbon credit market in Asia.

We are also building capabilities in environmental risk management in the financial sector and providing grants to defray the costs of green and sustainability-linked loans and bonds.

An adjacent issue is food insecurity. Climate change, the pandemic, and the war in Ukraine have all exacerbated the threat to food security.

According to a UN report, as many as 828 million people were affected by hunger last year — 46 million more from 2020 and 150 million more from 2019.

We must reverse this concerning trend.

First, we need to ensure that food supply chains remain open and operate smoothly.

Second, we need to pursue innovation and leverage technology to adapt to new challenges. For example, working together to develop climate-resilient food systems, while developing the necessary precautions on food safety.

There is much scope for multilateral cooperation on capacity-building and the development of global norms and standards.

Next — it is essential to build a more robust global health architecture to protect future generations.

After COVID-19, there will be other pandemics and major health emergencies. In my view, COVID-19 is perhaps a dress rehearsal for a worse pandemic to come.

We must be better prepared to predict, prevent, detect, assess, and respond to pandemics in a coordinated and effective fashion.

We have a collective responsibility to rectify the longstanding under-investment in pandemic preparedness, amongst other global public goods.

Singapore has supported multilateral initiatives to strengthen global health security.

We will continue to support the COVAX Facility, and we have contributed to the establishment of a financial intermediary fund for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response hosted by the World Bank.

Lastly, we must enhance international cooperation to harness the opportunities of the digital revolution.

Digital transformation does not take place in a vacuum. It must be navigated in the context of intersecting issues — geopolitical tensions, technological bifurcation, cybersecurity threats, and the digital divide.

The world has made significant progress in development by operating on a single technology stack.

Interconnectedness and interoperability brought us together, lowered costs, and spurred innovation and the cross-fertilisation of ideas.

But a fractured world threatens to undo all our good work.

We need an open and inclusive global framework to harness and optimise the opportunities of digital transformation, while effectively addressing its challenges.

A zero-sum, exclusionary, bifurcated approach benefits no one. An erosion of trust and an atmosphere of confrontation will only breed cyber threats and malicious cyber activities.

We must also ensure that all States, particularly small states, developing and least developed countries benefit from the digital revolution and not be left further behind.

Singapore fully supports the Secretary-General's proposal for a Global Digital Compact, which has received strong support from Member States.

We are honoured that Ambassador Burhan Gafoor serves as Chair of the Open-Ended Working Group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies.

The consensus adoption of the Working Group's first Annual Progress Report in July is a welcome sign that multilateralism can still deliver meaningful progress on the global commons.

Mr President, Excellencies,

To conclude— this is a moment where multilateralism must be defended and fortified.

Our responses to these myriad opportunities and challenges must remain rooted in the foundational tenets of multilateralism, including adherence to the UN Charter and international law.

I remain an optimist and believe that we are actually on the cusp of an era of profound technological breakthroughs, one that will equip humanity with unimaginably powerful tools.

It is in the world's interest – and in our own long-term interests – to set aside our differences, address the challenges of the global commons, and harvest the emerging opportunities provided by technology.

Ultimately, as Member States, we have as much responsibility to each other and to our citizens:

To work together, and to improve, adapt, and strengthen the multilateral system that we have painstakingly built over the past 77 years, so that our people can lead better, more secure, and more peaceful lives.

Thank you.