

**MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**SINGAPORE**

**28 SEPTEMBER 2025**

---

**NATIONAL STATEMENT BY  
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE DR VIVIAN  
BALAKRISHNAN TO THE  
80<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY,  
NEW YORK, 27 SEPTEMBER 2025**

***“Renewing Our Commitment to Multilateralism in an Era of Turbulence”***

---

Source: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore - Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan's National Statement at the General Debate of the 80th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, 27 September 2025](#)

---

Mdm President, Your Excellencies,

**Eight Decades of Peace and Prosperity**

1        The 80 years since the end of the Second World War has been a unique period in history. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was amongst the bloodiest periods known to mankind.

2        However, the victors of World War Two were most unusual. Instead of collecting the spoils and imposing their wills on the vanquished, they decided that it was in their own

enlightened self-interest to build and underwrite a system where sovereign equality, territorial integrity and political independence of each nation, big or small, would be protected. Where the interactions of states – in security, trade, development – were founded on a set of commonly agreed rules, international law, and trust. The ultimate goals were peace, prosperity and progress for all. And the centrepiece of this was the United Nations and the UN Charter.

3 The UN Charter provided the framework to govern the interactions between sovereign states. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) stood as the principal judicial organ of the UN, offering states a forum to settle disputes under the rule of law, peacefully. For small states, it was a world that operated on principles and international law, where might did not make right.

4 The stability and predictability offered by this system allowed all countries to develop their economies, leverage on one another's strengths, and to accelerate development. There was unparalleled dissemination of technology, ideas, and intellectual property. Trade grew significantly, and companies built global supply chains based on the principles of comparative advantage and efficiency. Singapore, as a tiny city state in the heart of Southeast Asia, a small and open economy – we rode on these mega-trends. That is why in 60 years a hardworking and disciplined people have built our per capita GDP from US\$500 in 1965 to around US\$85,000 today.

5 This multilateral system, founded on international law, also helped us to manage the global commons. For instance, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out. It grants freedom of navigation and overflight as a universal right – crucial for an island city state like Singapore which depends on trade. It also provides the foundation for coordinating global efforts on sea-level rise, pollution, and the loss of biodiversity.

6 Meanwhile, specialised UN agencies, such as the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO), set common rules and standards to enhance safety and efficiency of all these essential arteries.

7 Of course, the system was not perfect. The rules were not always applied equally, and international law was not always respected. But nevertheless there was a clear framework, and people and states knew what was right and what was wrong.

8 The first few decades after 1945 were marked by decolonisation and the expansion of the membership of the UN. The Cold War spawned several proxy wars around the world, including some in our region. But thankfully, as a world, we avoided another world war between superpowers. Mutually assured destruction deterred the use of nuclear weapons – although we all know there were a few close shaves.

9 For small, newly independent states and especially for those of us who were able to achieve national cohesion and effective governance, the last 80 years, on the whole, was a favourable period of peace, prosperity, and progress.

### **A Dangerous and Uncertain Era**

Mdm President, Excellencies,

10 However, the post-War world order that I have just described has come to an end. The current distribution of economic weight, technological sophistication and military strength today is very different from the world of 1945. It is obvious that the UN and the other international organisations have not evolved to keep up with the times.

### *A More Turbulent World*

11 Add another factor – the primary underwriters of the old world order have now decided to take a more transactional, a narrower view of their national interests, and are less willing to provide public goods. The sharper strategic context between super-powers has also made them less able to cooperate, less able to underwrite, less able to manage the global commons.

12      Consequently, today the world has become more turbulent, more uncertain, and in some places, more violent. The erosion of respect for the principles of the UN Charter; the egregious violations of international law and international humanitarian law have unfortunately become more common; as have violations of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

13      The current wars which we all witness in the Middle East, Ukraine, and parts of Africa reflect this tragedy. In all conflict zones, too many innocent lives are lost, preventable famines occur, and impunity abounds. The humanitarian situation in Gaza is dire and shocking. Singapore hopes there will be an immediate ceasefire, an immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, and for immediate access to humanitarian aid, food, and medical care for the civilians in Gaza.

14      Singapore will recognise the State of Palestine when it has an effective government that accepts Israel's right to exist and categorically renounces terrorism. Singapore cannot recognise any unilateral annexation of occupied territory because this would be a flagrant breach of international law. If the situation continues to deteriorate, or if Israel takes further steps to extinguish a two-State solution, we will then have to reconsider our position on when to recognise a Palestinian State.

15      In Ukraine, a permanent member of the Security Council has to comply with the UN Charter. We must also not forget the victims in Sudan and other conflict zones throughout the world.

### *Multilateral Trading System Disrupted*

Mdm President, Excellencies,

16      The geopolitical shifts have also disrupted the multilateral trading system. Decades of progressive trade liberalisation and investments expanded opportunities and prosperity all over the globe. But today, those are at risk. The tariffs and export controls are being used

as levers to secure unilateral advantage, including sometimes, to address non-trade related issues. The repudiation of the principle of Most Favoured Nation (MFN), which is a cornerstone of the WTO and GATT systems, erodes a transparent rules-based multilateral system, giving way to a system where trade agreements approximate bilateral arm-wrestling matches. It is obvious that this will be to the detriment of small, trade-dependent states everywhere.

### *Management of Global Commons Hamstrung*

17 In such a fragmented world, we risk compounding the tragedy of the commons because collective action for long term good becomes even more elusive. Climate change and pandemics are existential problems that no single country can resolve on their own. If I may add, all of us need to base our decisions on scientific evidence and a commitment to fairness – both to current and future generations.

### **Doubling Down on Multilateralism**

18 Notwithstanding this prevailing pessimism, Singapore believes that the multilateral system and international law, underpinned by the UN, still remains the best way to uphold global peace and prosperity in a fair and inclusive way. As a small state, we cannot afford to be passive, or fatalistic, or pessimistic. In fact, we are here to call on all of us to double down on multilateralism founded on international law.

19 Even small states and middle powers have the agency and we have strategic autonomy to collectively protect our long-term national interests and the global commons. Singapore will support the UN80 process to strengthen this institution and the multilateral system.

### *Continued Commitment to Multilateralism*

20 The good news is that actually the multilateral system still works. Let me cite a few success stories.

a. The BBNJ Agreement will enter into force on 17 January 2026. Earlier this week, we exceeded the 60 ratifications necessary to bring this into force. It is a legally binding treaty to conserve and sustainably use marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction. We congratulate Ambassador for International Law Rena Lee of Singapore who presided over these very difficult negotiations that led ultimately to the consensus, and I emphasise the word consensus, adoption of the historic BBNJ Agreement in June 2023.

b. In July, to cite another example, we achieved consensus on the Final Report of the Open-Ended Working Group on Cybersecurity, which strengthened the normative framework for responsible State behaviour in cybersecurity. We also agreed to establish the Global Mechanism on Cybersecurity as a permanent home for this work at the UN. Mr Burhan Gafoor, the PR of Singapore to the UN, had the honour and the burden of chairing this Open-Ended Working Group over the past five years.

c. To give you a third example, in 2024, two World Intellectual Property Organization Treaties on IP, the Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge (GRATK) and the Riyadh Design Law Treaty (RDLT) were concluded under the leadership of Mr Daren Tang.

21 These three examples demonstrate that even in these fractured, fractious times, it is possible to come together to manage our global commons, and to achieve agreement and consensus. This does not mean that we will always reach agreement on every issue but it is vital that the UN remains an arena for continued dialogue and discussions so that compromises can be reached, solutions can be found, even for the most hotly contested issues.

22 The key to the multilateral system for small states is international law. On this note, I am proud to share that Singapore will nominate Ambassador Rena Lee as a candidate for the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which is the principal judicial organ of the UN. Our nomination underscores Singapore's deep commitment to upholding international law,

and support for the ICJ. If elected, Ambassador Lee will only be the second person and the first woman from Southeast Asia to serve on this Court.

## **The Imperative for Reform**

Mdm President, Excellencies,

23 Just as the world has changed dramatically in the last 80 years, it is also clear that the UN needs to reform to be fit for the next stretch. We need a more representative and a more inclusive UN that reflects current realities.

24 The UN Charter confers on the UN Security Council the “primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security”. It clearly needs reform to better fulfil this mandate. The increasing, and if I may add, cynical use of vetoes by the P5 must be constrained and the wider UN membership must reach agreement on how this veto is to be exercised in the future. We commend the role played by the Elected Members of the Council, which gives the wider membership of the UN greater agency in addressing the pressing issues of the day. We also believe it is important to strengthen the relationship between the Security Council and the General Assembly.

25 We need a UN that delivers for real people on the ground. Clean water. Education. Pandemic preparedness. Social mobility. Jobs. And an international financial architecture that delivers stability, prospects of progress for all. These are the building blocks for sustainable development and human dignity. The commitments made at the Summit of the Future last year signaled our collective resolve to implement the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals).

26 The UN needs to be future-ready and to harness the potential of emerging technologies like AI as a force for good, for all. Early, constructive and inclusive multilateral engagement is essential. AI’s transformative force can aid conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and humanitarian operations. But you all know that there are also downsides and dangers, and it requires guardrails, so that it can be harnessed responsibly.

## **Our Collective Responsibility**

Mdm President, Excellencies,

27      The first Foreign Minister of Singapore said it best sixty years ago in 1965: “Despite cynics who focus attention on its many shortcomings, Singapore has faith in the future of the United Nations simply because without it there is no worthwhile future for humanity.”

28      These words still ring true today. So together, let us ensure that this institution continues to serve as humanity's best hope for peace and prosperity for all of us.

Thank you, Excellencies.