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STATEMENT BY

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23 SEPTEMBER 2017

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**MULTILATERALISM, AN OPEN GLOBAL
ARCHITECTURE AND
INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH**

**SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
DR VIVIAN BALAKRISHNAN AT THE
72ND SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY
NEW YORK, 23 SEPTEMBER 2017**

Excellencies

Distinguished delegates

1 I congratulate His Excellency Miroslav Lajčák on his election as President of the 72nd session of the General Assembly. I also congratulate Mr Peter Thomson of Fiji for his leadership as President of the 71st session.

2 We are meeting at a time of great uncertainty and complex challenges globally. The old fault lines of race, language and religion remain active. There is renewed anxiety about jobs and inequality. New technologies and non-state actors are challenging the international order. Terrorist groups are using the internet to spread their radical ideologies, including in Southeast Asia. Cyber-attacks and fake news have

proliferated. Conflicts in many regions of the world remain and new ones have emerged.

3 In Northeast Asia, the DPRK's reckless actions are raising tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Singapore strongly condemns the DPRK's missile and nuclear weapon tests in violation of UN Security Council resolutions. We call on the DPRK to avoid further provocative actions and to fully implement the resolutions adopted by the Security Council.

4 In Myanmar's Rakhine State, a humanitarian disaster has occurred in the aftermath of a terrorist attack on 25th August 2017 and related acts of violence. This is a complex inter-communal issue with deep historical roots. It is the responsibility of every government to protect civilians regardless of their ethnicities and religious beliefs. I visited Nay Pyi Taw last week and had a frank discussion with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. ASEAN Foreign Ministers will be meeting later this afternoon. ASEAN supports Myanmar seeking a long-term solution to restore stability. Singapore will work with ASEAN and Myanmar to extend humanitarian assistance to all affected communities.

Mr President,

5 Every country seeks to achieve the same thing: to ensure the security and prosperity of our people; and to create a better future for our children. But no country, no matter how wealthy, big or powerful, can achieve this alone. Multilateralism, international law, constructive interdependence and win-win cooperation are crucial for the sustainable growth and prosperity of all our countries. A strong multilateral system reinforces the resilience of individual countries. This is particularly true for small states, which depend on a rules-based multilateral system for our survival and success. Today, I will speak on the importance of multilateralism, an open global economy, and inclusive economic growth.

Mr President,

6 My first point is that a universal, rules-based multilateral system is essential to solving the complex challenges facing the world. No nation can solve trans-boundary problems alone. We need to work with each other to

build consensus and find solutions to global problems. The United Nations (UN) plays a critical role, as a platform for cooperation, based on the principles of mutual respect, mutual benefit and international law.

7 In fact, the UN remains the only universal body best placed to address problems of the global commons. A good example is the adoption of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982, which is an enduring testament to what collective political will can achieve. Today, UNCLOS is the “constitution” that governs the use of the oceans.

8 The recent adoption of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) showed that multilateralism can respond to new challenges, especially when there is political will and collective commitment. When dealing with global issues like climate change, there is no alternative to multilateralism. The UN must also deal with emerging global challenges such as cybersecurity, counter-terrorism, and the economic disruption caused by digital technologies, including artificial intelligence.

9 If the UN is to remain relevant and effective, it must also become “fit-for-purpose”. There is much scope to optimise synergies and minimise inefficiency. In this regard, Singapore strongly supports the Secretary-General’s efforts to reform and restructure the UN. We welcome his management reforms and his efforts to review the UN development system as well as to streamline the peace and security architecture.

10 As a small state, Singapore has always been a strong supporter of an effective UN. This year, we are proud that the Forum of Small States (or FOSS), founded by Singapore in 1992, celebrates its 25th anniversary. Singapore is committed to working closely with all states, including small states, to support the work of the UN and to enhance its effectiveness.

11 Regional organisations are an important part of an effective multilateral rules-based system. They help to reinforce the principles of the UN charter and underpin international law at the regional level. Equally important, they help to build confidence and encourage habits of cooperation.

12 In Southeast Asia, ASEAN is celebrating its 50th anniversary. ASEAN has not only fostered regional economic integration, it has secured regional peace and strengthened national resilience by creating a sense of common identity in the midst of great diversity. The prospects for ASEAN are bright. Indeed, we have ambitious plans to do more, under our vision of a united, resilient and innovative ASEAN Community.

Mr President,

13 My second and related point is that an open global architecture is essential for growth and sustainable development. We have to make a choice between two models. The first is a world divided by rival blocs, mercantilist economies, proxy wars and zero sum competition. The second model is an open interdependent world characterised by enlightened national interests, win-win collaboration and sustainable development. Singapore believes in the latter model. In particular, an open, rules-based multilateral trading system allows every country to prosper. For many countries, especially small states, international trade and investments are

the primary pathway to growth and resilience. It is therefore important to remain steadfast in the face of rising protectionist sentiments. An open trading environment allows developing countries to export their goods and services and grow their economies. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is indispensable as it underpins the rules-based multilateral trading system and provides the framework for resolving trade disputes.

14 The G20 is an important platform for discussing global macro-economic and financial issues. However, it is important that the G20 works closely with the UN and with non-members of the G20, in order to strengthen the multilateral system and to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We welcome the efforts of successive G20 Presidents to reach out to non-members, in particular members of the Global Governance Group, or 3G. As a grouping, the 3G will continue to be an advocate for a more accountable and inclusive framework of global governance.

Mr President,

15 My third and final point is that inclusive economic growth is a prerequisite to building resilient societies. Indeed, the 2030 Agenda is fundamentally a vision for achieving long term inclusive economic growth, not only at the national level but also at the regional and global level. It is a vision shared by all countries. However, the challenge for every government is to generate higher growth and create more jobs while ensuring that no one is left behind.

16 In Singapore, we believe in hard work and self-reliance. However, we also believe in taking care of the weak and vulnerable in every segment of our society. Our policies on women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities, are designed to protect and uplift the most vulnerable. We place great emphasis on racial and religious harmony, and in building social cohesiveness.

17 Beyond resilience, successful societies have to embrace new technology and encourage innovation. The digital revolution is fundamentally changing the way we work,

the way we communicate and the way we live. We cannot wish away the change caused by disruptive technologies. We have to restructure our economies and create new and better jobs for our people. But this will not be an easy process.

18 The transformation caused by the digital revolution will only be positive if we find ways to share the benefits widely and reduce inequality. In Singapore, we have invested heavily in education and skills training for our people, for both the young and old, to give everyone an opportunity to build a meaningful life. We want every Singaporean to have a stake in our growth and success as a nation.

Mr President,

19 Let me conclude by saying that the UN has been a catalyst for peace and development for more than seventy years. It has made a significant difference to the lives of people around the world. In an environment of increased uncertainties, the case for multilateralism becomes stronger, not weaker. Now more than ever, we need the UN to help us find solutions to difficult global issues. We need to safeguard and strengthen

our multilateral, rules-based system so that even the smallest country can survive and thrive as an independent, sovereign nation. We need an open global architecture based on interdependence to secure sustainable prosperity for all. But most of all, we need inclusive economic growth to empower all our people to lead a good and meaningful life.

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