



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

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**STATEMENT**

**BY**

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## **DIVERSITY IN UNITY**

5 Untrammelled economic competition can also lead to grave injustice. Without rules, ruthless economic competition will return us to the jungle. Without the WTO, globalisation can become a means through which the strong dominate the weak around the world. In an earlier period, this resulted in entire continents being carved up by imperial powers.

6 Global organisations like the UN and the WTO give us hope that this century can be better than previous ones. We need rules which put limits on our competitiveness in the political and economic arenas. Like the Olympic Games, clear rules and the rigorous policing of the rules enable individuals to compete fiercely and triumph within a framework of sportsmanship and fairness. The rules are not there to dampen our competitive spirit, which is in the nature of man, but to channel it towards positive achievement.

7 The rules have to be determined by common consensus. Their legitimacy is derived from shared values which bind participants together. The rules have evolved over the years along with our collective sense of what is fair and proper. They cannot be imposed. If they are imposed, what we have will not be the Olympics but the gladiatorial pits of the Roman Colosseum.

8 At the most fundamental level, discussions and debates in the UN and the WTO are really about the values which bind us together as human beings.

9 As the world grows smaller, our sense of inter-dependence grows. As we interact more, we discover that we are more similar than we think. So many problems like global warming, epidemics and terrorism can only be overcome if we work together. So many opportunities made possible by new scientific discoveries can only be fully exploited if we combine our efforts.

10 Yes, we have become closer. We celebrated together when for the first time the entire human genome was mapped a few years ago. We grieved as one when September 11 happened. The slaughter of children at Beslan outraged us all. But will we ever become the same? That is not possible. It is neither in our biological nature nor in the nature of the historical process for human societies to converge and become identical. Even the same society changes over time in response to changing conditions.





17 For all their imperfections, the UN and the WTO represent this diversity in unity. The idea of subsidiarity in the European Union acknowledges the diverse origins of the European peoples. In my own region of Southeast Asia, ten countries with different histories, speaking different languages and practising different religions are also embarked on a similar journey of moving closer together while respecting each other's differences. At the WTO, however complicated and arduous the process of multilateral trade negotiations, this is still a more civilized method of resolving conflicts and harmonizing national differences than erecting protectionist walls and fighting trade wars.

18 Respecting plurality does not mean that we stop recognising strengths and weaknesses. That would be hypocrisy. Some cultural values are more suited to modern times than others. Some economic systems are more productive. Some political systems are better able to mobilize the creative energies of their people. We must be honest enough to recognise that others can be superior to us in this or that area, and that it is therefore in our interest to learn from them. But no one should force his views on others. We should never impose a particular political or economic system on societies with different histories and traditions. What we need instead is an environment which encourages mutual learning and healthy competition. For this, we need to respect one another.

19 Recognising the need for diversity, the UN's Millennium Development Goals make no policy prescriptions on how countries should achieve those goals. Each country is free to choose its own path to the future. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the challenge of human development.

20 When Singapore became independent in 1965, there was no ready solution which fitted us. We had to seek our own way forward. Many countries helped us with aid and advice for which we remain grateful to them. The UNDP provided valuable assistance. With no natural resources, we had to organise ourselves in a practical way, add value and be of service to others. Little by little, we worked out pragmatic solutions to specific problems like job creation, ethnic differences, social security, education, housing and healthcare. Good governance was a precondition to all our efforts. We were tough on corruption and crime. When we saw attempts by international drug dealers to target young Singaporeans in the 1970s, we passed draconian laws. We were criticized for some of our actions by the Western media but we persisted with the support of the majority of Singaporeans, always acting with their consent and in their

