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Remarks at Singapore Management University: The Ho Rih Hwa leadership lecture

Ban Ki-moon

Mr. Ho Kwon Ping, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Singapore Management University,
Professor Arnoud de Meyer, President of Singapore Management University,
Professor Lily Kong, Provost of the Singapore Management University,
Honourable members of the Singaporean Government and civil service,
Distinguished members of the diplomatic corps,
Distinguished faculty,
Dear students,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you all for being here. What a big and wonderful audience!

I am delighted to be back in Singapore for the third visit during my tenure as Secretary-General.

I am eager to enjoy another taste of rojak!

It is a pleasure to spend more time here in this diverse and dynamic “little red dot” on the map.

Since my last visit, you celebrated the 50th anniversary of Singapore’s independence.

I was unable to attend the celebrations. But I was here in spirit.

You may be aware that I am often referred to as “SG” -- the same as Singapore’s Internet domain name.

So imagine my surprise when I saw the logo that was developed for Singapore’s milestone: “SG50”!

You are now 51. I am 71. But still, I hope that someone can find a button or a banner for me to take home as a souvenir!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to join you at this distinguished university. I know many eminent people have delivered the Ho Rih Hwa Lecture, established in the name of the esteemed businessman, diplomat and patriot.

I would like to thank Singapore Management University for its outstanding efforts to train new generations of global leaders.

Allow me to start by offering condolences to the people of Singapore on the passing of former President S. R. Nathan, a much-admired global statesman.

Beyond his role in Singapore, he was also a good friend of the United Nations. As he once said:

“The importance of the United Nations to a small country like us is obvious. We are plugged into the global economy and consequently are highly dependent on international stability for our growth and prosperity. The United Nations has made for a safer and better world”.

We thank him for his service.

And we thank all Singaporeans for their contributions to the United Nations and to global peace and prosperity.

Singaporean nationals have served with distinction in many capacities, across the world. I was especially pleased to appoint one of Singapore's most distinguished women, Ms. Noeleen Heyzer, as the first woman to head the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

Singapore continues to show that a small state can have a big impact.

Thanks to far-sighted investments in education, health care, jobs, housing and public transport, you rank high in global lists that measure human development and gender equality.

You are a leader in sustainable urbanization through pioneering efforts encompassing water management, green buildings and much else. I look forward to my visit tomorrow to the Gardens by the Bay. We will count on Singapore to contribute its expertise towards a successful Habitat 3 conference in October in Quito, Ecuador.

You are on the cutting edge of innovation, energy efficiency to waste management.

And at a time of global divisions, you continue to build a prosperous society of tolerance and co-existence.

Singapore is also a force for regional stability and solidarity through its involvement in ASEAN.

You have amplified your voice through the Forum of Small States and the Global Governance Group.

Most recently, you have partnered with the UN Development Programme to establish the Global Centre for Public Service Excellence.

We are working together towards the "Responsible Business Forum" scheduled to take place here in Singapore in November. Next week, Singapore will host a major international conference on responsible investing. Responsible business practices are at the heart of the Global Compact initiative, and I welcome the network of important Singapore-based companies that is active pursuing this agenda.

Thank you for this wide-ranging global citizenship. I am here to express my appreciation -- and to explore, together, what more Singapore can do across our agenda.

In that spirit, I would like to highlight a number of areas where your contributions can make an important difference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Singapore strongly supported the shaping and adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development -- our new landmark framework for ending poverty and ensuring lives of dignity for all on a healthy planet.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are universal. They cover all people, in all countries. Even the wealthiest and most powerful societies have yet to conquer inequality, discrimination and environmental degradation.

Now I am calling on all countries to align their policies, programmes and spending behind the new Agenda. That is the message I will bring to the G20 meeting later this week in Hangzhou, China.

Asia's robust economic growth helped the world cut poverty by half. But there is so much more to be done. Two of every three of the world's poorest people call Asia home. That is why Asia must embrace the 2030 Agenda.

We need a true global partnership of nations, organizations, businesses and communities to fulfil the Agenda's core promise to leave no one behind.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tackling climate change is essential for sustainable development. The actions needed to reduce emissions and build climate resilience are among those that are needed to implement the 2030 Agenda and set the world on course for prosperity and security.

I welcome Singapore's commitment to stabilize emissions, Singapore is an increasingly green city, generating both cleaner energy and lessons for others.

Singapore was among the record number of Member States that signed the Paris Agreement in April. Now we need to bring that Agreement into force. When 55 countries, representing 55 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, have joined, we will cross the official threshold. I very much hope we can see the Paris Agreement enter into force before the end of the year.

Many major economies, including the United States and China, have committed to join or ratify the agreement this year. I will press for more support from other countries at the G20 later this week. On September 21, during the annual General Assembly meetings in New York, I will convene an event aimed at building further momentum for rapid entry into force. I invite Singapore to attend and deposit its instrument of ratification.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At a time of significant global challenges, the 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement have been a boost to multilateralism, and have given us hope that we can overcome other global divisions in the name of the common good.

We must turn that hope into results in addressing today's vast agenda of unresolved conflicts and unending suffering.

Conflicts and protracted crises pose grave risks to our ability to deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda.

From Syria to South Sudan, from the Sahel to Libya and Yemen, violence is shattering lives and forcing millions from their homes.

Violent extremism is on the rise. The increasing links between terrorist groups, organized crime syndicates and drug traffickers have made conflicts less amenable to negotiated settlements, and more catastrophic for civilians.

At least 130 million people need humanitarian assistance – the largest such caseload the United Nations has ever had to address.

More than 65 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes, more than at any time since the Second World War.

Nearly half these people in despair are children and youth. Is there anything more urgent than saving these young people from becoming a lost generation?

In May, we held the first ever World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul.

Humanitarian and development partners agreed on a new way of working aimed at reducing the need for humanitarian action by investing in resilient communities and stable societies.

Governments committed to do more to prevent conflict and to uphold international humanitarian law. I continue to press all Member States to find the political solutions that are so vital to reduce humanitarian needs around the world.

On September 19, we will be convening a UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants. This will be an opportunity to come up with a blueprint for a better international response.

We must do more to save lives, crack down on smugglers and counter those who seek votes by exploiting fear and divisiveness. Crucially, we must convey a key message: far from being a threat, refugees and migrants contribute to the growth and development of host countries, as well as their countries of origin.

Meeting these peace and security challenges is our common goal. I encourage countries such as Singapore, with their expertise and prosperity, to engage actively in UN peace operations and help us to address the roots of conflict, prevent violent extremism and address other threats.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to offer a few thoughts on a number of regional matters of mutual concern to Singapore and the United Nations.

In the days ahead, I will be visiting Myanmar to meet with the country's new leaders and attend the opening of the 21st Century Panglong Conference, an important step in the country's transition.

Last November's elections opened the potential for an inclusive, harmonious, multi-ethnic and multi-religious democracy. The new leadership must now overcome discrimination, ensure equality and promote inclusive development for all, with full respect for human rights.

The recent establishment of a Commission on Rakhine state headed by my predecessor, Kofi Annan, is an encouraging step. I thank Singapore for supporting Myanmar's new path. Continued backing by Singapore and the wider international community will be critical.

In the South China Sea, tensions remain a source of serious concern. Provocations and misunderstandings could escalate and put the harmony the region has sought for so long at risk.

I have consistently called on all involved to resolve these disputes through peaceful dialogue, in accordance with the universally recognized principles of international law. I have also expressed the hope that a Code of Conduct may be elaborated to lead to increased mutual understanding.

ASEAN, for its part, continues to make progress towards an integrated, peaceful and stable community in Southeast Asia, including through closer ties with the United Nations. Next week, I will be travelling to the Lao People's Democratic Republic to attend the ASEAN-UN summit. The United Nations will continue working with Singapore in that context as well.

It will be important to align ASEAN's Vision 2025 behind the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. I welcome the establishment of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on human

rights, and the development of an ASEAN human rights declaration. This can help strengthen the region's response to troubling instances of rising intolerance and shrinking democratic space in a number of Asian countries.

The situation on the Korean Peninsula is a further challenge. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues to take very worrying actions, including missile tests. The country's pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles casts a shadow over the region. Not only are such actions a clear violation of relevant Security Council resolutions, but they also undermine peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in the greater Asia-Pacific region. We must find the path back to denuclearization through sincere dialogue. I stand ready to contribute in any way that might be helpful.

More broadly, I hope that the region will move beyond long-standing differences, border disputes and conflicting interpretations of history. It would be tragic for Asia to let the past hold it back. The region must look ahead to our shared common future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have set out a full agenda, for Singapore, Asia and the world.

Your esteemed institution will continue to play an important role in helping young people contribute their talents to our common enterprise. My hope is that, along with the leadership and managerial skills acquired here, students will also be schooled in compassion and solidarity. Those are the qualities that will enable Singapore and the United Nations to secure the future we want.

Thank you.