

## Multilateralism and International Law for a World in Crisis

World leaders gathered to address pressing global issues at the 77th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), where the UNGA debates took place from 20 to 26 Sep.

On 24 Sep, Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan delivered Singapore's statement to the UNGA, making the following key points:



Image: MFA

### The World is in a Crisis

There is a need for coordinated global cooperation as the world is facing concurrent crises. These crises include:

- **Russia's invasion of Ukraine** which has violated international law and the UN Charter, and weakened the rules-based order.
- **Worsening superpower rivalry** which has weakened the prospects for international cooperation and **unilateralism is on the rise**.
- **Higher and prolonged inflation**, higher interest rates and soaring energy prices.
- **An uneven and fragile recovery from the global pandemic**, and an increased risk of a more deadly pandemic in future.
- **Greater internal division in societies**, with societies finding it harder to address challenges without trust and unity.
- **Our global food supply is at risk**, and the **climate crisis** remains a clear and present threat.



Countries need to urgently enhance resilience in these three areas:

### Climate change and food security

- Climate change, the global pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war have worsened the threat to our food security. **Countries need to cooperate to ensure that food supply chains remain open and operate smoothly**, and pursue innovation and leverage technology to adapt to new challenges.
- Singapore as a small, low-lying, alternative-energy disadvantaged island nation, is especially vulnerable to climate change and rising sea-levels. **The multilateral system is key in sustaining a global response to climate change issues.**





## Global Health Architecture and Pandemic Preparedness



- A more robust global health architecture is required to protect our future generations. **All countries have a collective responsibility to cooperate on and invest in pandemic preparedness.**
- **Singapore has supported multilateral initiatives to strengthen the global health security system,** and will continue to support the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) Facility, amongst others.

## Digital Transformation and Cybersecurity

- We need an **open and inclusive global framework** to harness and optimise the opportunities of digital transformation, while effectively addressing all its challenges.
- Singapore fully supports the Secretary General's proposal for a **Global Digital Compact**, which has received strong support from Member States.



## The Role and Value of Small States

### Forum of Small State (FOSS)

Singapore was the convenor of the Forum of Small State (FOSS), which started in 1992 as a small informal cross-regional group of 16 countries to 108 now. Countries came together because they were small, and they depended on the multilateral system for their security and survival.

At the FOSS' 30th Anniversary Reception on 22 Sep, Minister Balakrishnan gave the welcoming remarks and showed a video of PM Lee addressing FOSS members. These are the key takeaways:



- ✓ Small states face **immense strategic challenges** and are inherently vulnerable.
- ✓ **No country can tackle the problems that we are facing today alone.** Together, we can make common cause, and especially now to protect the global commons.
- ✓ Despite being small, **small states are not without agency.**
- ✓ We can be effective at the UN by **supporting and upholding the multilateral rules-based system.** This means we must participate actively to strengthen the multilateral system, and maintain as level a playing field as possible, to protect the interests of small states.



Images: Min Vivian's Facebook Page



## Importance of the Multilateral System



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

- **The multilateral system has given small states a collective stake and voice, and a means to safeguard our interests.** This is a system where we have sovereign equality and disputes can be settled peacefully in accordance with international law.
- **The importance of multilateralism and international law is why Singapore condemns Russia's invasion of Ukraine.**

- **The security and even existence of small states, such as Singapore, depend 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 or small - to cooperate on an equal footing. **Small states especially must not allow the world to regress to one where “might is right”.**
- The rules-based multilateral system may not be perfect but it is by far the best option in addressing transnational challenges and managing the global commons.

**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 especially adherence to the UN Charter and international law.**

- Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan at the 77th Session of the UNGA, 24 Sep 2022

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