

Committee on Trade and Environment
Committee on Trade and Development

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STATEMENT BY PRIME MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE AT THE 19TH SPECIAL SESSION
OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ON TUESDAY, 24 JUNE 1997

Communication by Singapore

1. Since the Rio Summit, there has been considerable progress in the codification of international environmental law in many areas, including climate change, desertification and biological diversity. There is also deeper awareness that we must work together to meet the global problems that affect all of us.

2. But recognizing the problems does not guarantee their solution. The "Grand Bargain" struck at Rio may unravel. Many industrialized countries are today struggling to restructure their own economies and cope with slow growth and high unemployment. Global environmental problems are remote to many of their ordinary citizens who are more concerned with threats to their own standard of living. The political will to provide assistance that developing countries urgently need to implement Agenda 21 is weakening. Commitments made at Rio have not been fulfilled.

3. Even when a far-sighted vision exists, it has often proved difficult to forge a clear consensus for action. For example, Vice President Al Gore took the lead to push for the greening of American foreign policy which could generate new international momentum. But the Senate also recently voted to deny US funding for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. This illustrates the complexities faced by the North.

4. The South feels, correctly, that sacrificing growth will only perpetuate injustice. Developing countries deem it unreasonable that they are required to address long-term environmental problems at the expense of immediate needs. It is unfair to expect the poor to alone bear the costs of reducing global environmental risks, especially when most of those risks are attributable to past actions by the affluent. Without adequate funding, sustainable development is only a slogan. The concept has also become entangled with broader debates over issues that are not directly relevant to the protection of the environment. This has fuelled suspicion that environmental issues are now being used by the North as disguised protectionism to keep developing countries down.

5. Singapore is in between the developed and developing worlds. Our economy today has relatively sophisticated service and industrial sectors. But we are vulnerable to unfavourable external developments. We define our international identity as a member of the Group of 77 and the Non-aligned Movement. We watch the post-Rio re-emergence of North-South divisions over the environment with deep and growing concern.

6. Environmental interdependence is a stark and inescapable reality. We have no illusions about the necessity for a concerted and continuing international effort. Singapore played a role to forge a

North-South consensus before and during the Rio Summit. But we are realistic in understanding that those circumstances were unique. What a small country can do alone after Rio is insignificant.

7. Only the leadership of a major global economy can renew and reinvigorate the global impact. So when Chancellor Helmut Kohl invited Singapore to join Germany, South Africa and Brazil in launching a new initiative at this Special Session, I did not hesitate. Germany faces the same immediate challenges as other developed economies. But Chancellor Kohl has the conviction and courage to act upon a larger vision. He deserves support. It is in our interest to give him support.

8. We are four countries from four different continents, at different levels of development, facing different environmental problems. Our modest initiative addresses the priorities of both North and South. We hope that our ability to work together can catalyse broader international action and a continuing North-South partnership.

9. Singapore, a small, densely populated urbanized island, takes the environment seriously. Otherwise our country will not be liveable. We aim to make our quality of living even better. Our experiences may not be directly transferable to other developing countries. But our success in achieving high standards of environmental protection in an urban setting may be of interest to some.

10. The new proposals that we launched yesterday with our partners for a "Decade for the Sustainable Production and Use of Energy", for a "Conference on Sustainable Urban Development", and for "Environmentally Acceptable Transport", are areas in which Singapore pays great attention.

11. No country has all the answers. Singapore learns all the time from others, their successes and mistakes. Cooperation is necessary to solving global problems of sustainable development.

12. It is in this spirit that I now announce the Singapore Technical Assistance Programme for Sustainable Development (STAPSD) for developing countries [see Annex I]. The Technical Assistance Programme will include urban planning, management of parks and transportation. We hope this Programme will help developing countries implement some aspects of Agenda 21. What a country with a population of three million can do globally is only a drop in the ocean. But we offer the Singapore Technical Assistance Programme on Sustainable Development as a tangible token of our seriousness to promote greater cooperation in sustainable development. We hope that it will encourage the larger and more prosperous countries of the North to fulfil their commitments and join us in what must be a global endeavour.

ANNEX I

THE SINGAPORE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (STAPSD)

1. Consisting of US\$3 million over the next three years, the STAPSD is a programme of technical assistance to help developing countries implement Agenda 21. The training will be conducted in Singapore and cover a wide variety of areas, including solid waste management, coastal marine environment management, urban environmental management, environmental health, air pollution control and waste water treatment.
2. Among the courses are:
 - (a) building services;
 - (b) water supply engineering;
 - (c) urban industrial environmental management;
 - (d) hydrological monitoring in environment impact assessments;
 - (e) operation and maintenance of refuse transfer station and incineration plant;
 - (f) planning and construction of urban drainage system;
 - (g) environmental monitoring and assessment; and
 - (h) pollutant standard index.

Developing countries are invited to submit application for the above programmes to:

Technical Co-operation Directorate
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
#07-00 Raffles City Tower
North Bridge Road
Singapore 179101
Tel: + 65/336.1177
Fax: + 65/330.5900

or through:

Singapore Permanent Mission to the UN in New York
231 East 51st Street
New York, N.Y. 10022
Tel: + 1.212/826.0840
Fax: + 1.212/826.2964

We expect a class size of about 20 participants for each course. Depending on the response to the STAPSD, the number of training places can be increased for future courses.

3. What a small country like Singapore can do is necessarily limited. But the STAPSD is a concrete token of our commitment to South-South cooperation for sustainable development. We hope that the STAPSD can have a catalytic effect to encourage other larger and more prosperous countries to fulfil their commitments and help developing countries meet environmental challenges.