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## **UN crucial in multilateral world, South-East Asian officials tell General Assembly**



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South-East Asian officials today stressed the crucial need for multilateralism in solving the world's crises, from peace and security to sustainable development and climate change mitigation, with the United Nations providing the essential cornerstone.

“The UN remains the only truly universal and international organization. There is no alternative to the UN,” Singapore’s Foreign Minister K. Shanmugam [told](#) the General Assembly on the closing day of its annual general debate, citing a host of immediate crises such as the global economic crisis, the risk of a double-dip recession and food security, and long-term issues such as sustainable development, climate change and water security.

“These are issues that require urgent joint action by the global community... The UN must play an important role in dealing with these challenges,” he said, warning against protectionism. “As the preeminent multilateral institution in the world, the UN should take a strong stand, make a united pledge against trade restrictive measures and continue to push for free trade.”

The philosophy of common enrichment imbuing the UN Charter must replace short-sighted strategies of survival, he stressed, also highlighting the part economic groups such as the so-called G-20 and G-8 have to play.

“There is scope for the UN to play a meaningful role by ensuring that all groupings take into account and promote the greater interest,” he said. “The UN must also act together with these groupings as complementary parts of the international system, not as mutually exclusive competitors.”

Thai Foreign Minister Surapong Tovichakchaiku [called](#) the UN an important cornerstone of his country’s foreign policy in relation to all three pillars of the world Organization – peace and security, development, and human rights.

“In order for sustainable development to be realized, cooperation from all sectors of society and partnership with the international community are of the essence,” he told the Assembly.

Viet Nam’s Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh [cited](#) the UN’s crucial role over the past year in ending conflicts, mobilizing resources for development, facilitating multilateral negotiations on climate change, disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, providing solutions to desertification, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and nuclear safety and security, and responding to the global financial and economic crisis.

“As rightly pointed out by the Secretary General, never has the UN been so relevant, so urgently needed by so many people around the world, and it must deliver concrete results that make a real difference in the daily lives of the world's people,” he said. “It is without any doubt that with its universal membership, the Organization enjoys a unique legitimacy to be at the forefront of global governance and multilateral cooperation.”

Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty M. Natalegawa also [stressed](#) the UN’s central role but called for reform to address new and emerging challenges, such as strengthening the Assembly, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Human Rights Council, the Peacebuilding Commission and an enlarged Security Council.

“That is the only way the United Nations can remain relevant, the only way to ensure that multilateralism will flourish,” he told the Assembly at an earlier session. “Through reform, we must ensure that the United Nations and its decision-making processes are more effective, efficient, transparent and inclusive.”

Malaysian Foreign Minister Dato Sri Anifah Aman cited his country’s call for the creation of a “Global Movement of the Moderates,” to counter Islamophobia and the divide between the broader Muslim world and the West.

“The real issue is not between Muslims and non-Muslims but between the moderates and extremists in all religions, be it Islam, Christianity or Judaism,” he [said](#).

He also called for comprehensive reform of the Security Council to make it more legitimate, representative, democratic and transparent, and no longer beholden to the veto of five permanent members – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Papua New Guinea’s Prime Minister Peter O’Neill [noted](#) that his country provided uniformed UN military observers and cited [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon’s “heartfelt comments” at a recent Pacific Islands Forum leaders’ summit in Auckland, New Zealand, where he described his experiences on witnessing the effects of climate change on low-lying atolls in Kiribati and the developmental challenges faced by many small island developing States (SIDS) in the region.

Timor-Leste, which was shepherded to independence by the UN in 2002 after voting to secede from Indonesia, noted the benefits of multilateralism.

Timorese Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão [said](#) his country continued to build on its relationships with its friends in Asia and the Pacific, including China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia and New Zealand, as well as enhancing its membership of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) and its ties with the European Union, which provides significant assistance.

Brunei’s Crown Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah [voiced](#) concern that the dynamics of the 21st century could exclude many from the common ground that is necessary for successful mediation of conflicts, the theme of this year’s general debate.

“It could become the exclusive territory of great unseen globalized forces, whether in the market, the workplace or in the world of great decision-making forums,” he said. “These have the potential to be so divisive as to destroy any common ground.”

Ambassador Libran N. Cabactulan of the Philippines [cited](#) his country’s participation in UN peacekeeping, with 800 men and women stationed in various missions around the world. “As we look to strengthen the ramparts of peace, we recognize the important role and contributions of peacekeeping and peacebuilding at the United Nations,” he said. “The Philippines stands ready to do its part to ensure that the lines of peace are fortified and continuously expanded.”

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