

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY ASEAN SECRETARY-GENERAL  
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**LAUNCH OF THE RSIS CENTRE FOR  
NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY (NTS) STUDIES**

**6 MAY 2008**

**TRADERS HOTEL, SINGAPORE**

Dr. Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister of Environment and Water Resources Singapore,

Ambassador Barry Desker, Dean of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies,

Mely [Anthony] Head of the new Centre, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Ambassador Desker, you have the best of both worlds today. ASEAN Secretariat paid for my trip here, they paid for my hotel room because there is a Senior Officials Meeting over at the Shangri-La Hotel and you have me here for free. But this is such an important issue that I have been part of this very important institution from the beginning.

A year ago in January as Ambassador Desker referred to, the Consortium of Non-Traditional Security Studies (NTS-Asia) was established. I was asked to give also a keynote address there. They wanted me to talk about my own experience in the Commission of Human Security which issued its report “Human Security Now” on the 1st of May, 5 years ago, 2003. And my involvement in another commission earlier called the Commission on State Sovereignty and Intervention. Later on that Commission issued a report entitled “Responsibility to Protect/R2P”. The two commissions complemented each other. The one on security and intervention focused on violence, focused on child soldiers, landmines, small arms, small bombs which together killed more people around the world than major wars. But they were focusing on the issue of violence and protection and they were hinting towards an idea that would be perceived to be eroding state sovereignty. You know since the 1600s, the theory of sovereignty emanating from the

Congress of Westphalia stipulated that states have their own absolute rights within their own defined borders. No interference... non-interference from outside. Well, that was 1600s.

Now as Minister Yaacob and Ambassador Desker have described to us, the world has changed. We are now living in an integrated world. We are now working and living in a world of globalisation. While we benefited a lot, we were also exposed to each other's problems—diseases, violence, terrorism, climate change—all these calamities are now having more severe impacts on human lives across the world because of our integration, because of our globalisation.

Last Saturday, May 2nd in the delta of Irrawaddy river, we were told that Nargis cyclone killed 300 people in Myanmar. Yesterday we were told 4,000. This morning the BBC said over 10,000 and I have been told by friends it is still rising. Why is the impact so severe? This is because of the increase of the population, the invasion of the low lands, because of the encroachment into what we called the mangrove forests which used to serve as buffer between the rising tides, between big waves and storms and the residential areas. Now all of those buffers, all of those lands have been destroyed. Human beings are now the direct victims of such natural forces. On behalf of ASEAN, I certainly would like to express my profound sympathies for the people of Myanmar.

I believe, a Centre like the Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies, at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University has been focusing on such potential calamities for the last few years. You have inspired a network, a Consortium of similar centres within the Asia Pacific region to look into these non-traditional security issues. Because the traditional security issues have their own mechanisms, their own fora, their own systems to manage, it is these non-traditional issues that are eluding our management, our control and certainly our understanding.

In 1998, I raised similar issues that the Centre or the Consortium have been working on. When financial crisis hit South East Asia, millions of people were driven down the

poverty line because of the financial crisis. We found out that in spite of the continuous growth for the previous three decades, ASEAN societies were not prepared to cushion the impact of such manmade economic calamities. I proposed something called “the ASEAN social safety net system”. I was criticised for bringing a Western concept into ASEAN. I further proposed that we should be looking into the issue of human security, at that time it was still a very vague concept. I proposed that there should be a caucus on human security during the Post-Ministerial Meeting, ASEAN and our dialogue partners. I was also viewed as bringing too much of an alien concept into the ASEAN language. I proposed that we should look differently in our constructive engagement, the absolute non-interference principle at that time, because I sensed the crisis that occurred in Bangkok, in Thailand, and it was called the Tom Yam Gung crisis, the next day it was Malaysia, the next day it was Indonesia, the next day the Philippines, the next day even South Korea. We are no longer living in isolation. As John Donne said a few centuries back, “no man is an island”, no woman is an island, entire of himself or herself. We are all part of this global network of lives, of societies, of communities, of nations.

Well, flexible engagement was rejected, it was turned down to become enhanced interaction. Whatever... But two years ago, there was a new idea called ASEAN political and security community, which is much more intrusive, much more aggressive, much more alien to the ASEAN mental perception than my initial idea in 1998 about flexible engagement.

In 1999, I inherited the chairmanship of ASEAN from Singapore, Prof. Jayakumar and you know what happened in 1999? East Timor exploded. The image, the confidence, the very legitimacy of ASEAN was at stake if we could not do anything in response to the human calamity, tragedy occurring on the island of East Timor. We were at the APEC leaders meeting in Auckland. President Kim Dae Jung said tomorrow I’ll bring up the issue of East Timor in the retreat. President Jiang Zemin of China said, if you bring out the issue of East Timor I will walk out. APEC is not such a place to talk about security and politics. I flew out of Auckland into Jakarta and I had to tell the media waiting there I was a foreign minister of a neighbouring country who happened to be the chairman of

ASEAN at the same time. I could not say that I was there as ASEAN. Well, we went to help East Timor individually, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, not as ASEAN.

But things have evolved, now we are creating what we called the ASEAN Political and Security community and your school, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies has played a major role in conceptualizing that idea of ASEAN political and security community. We are now talking about Peacekeeping force in ASEAN. We are now talking about training centre in ASEAN. We are now talking about initiatives that would require rethinking, recalibration of the idea of the concept of state's sovereignty among us and between us here in ASEAN. So, things have evolved, things have changed. We have to evolve and change in order to catch up with the events within our region and in the world. Now food crisis is upon us, energy crisis is upon us, climate change is upon us, pandemics diseases are with us, silent or un-silent tsunamis of many diverse kinds are upon the international community.

The world is changing and evolving in its concept of cooperation and security coordination – ASEAN can do no less. The Asia-Pacific can do no less. And I'm glad that this centre is serving as the nucleus of those evolving thoughts and conceptualization about non-traditional threats which are affecting and eroding our human security in the region.

Human security needs a new mindset, requires a new look at the issue of security. Before we only think of security as security of the state – national security. To shift from national security to human security requires a major shift of mindset of policymakers. Human beings or individuals are now the focus of analysis. And the definition that the Commission on Human Security gave in 2003 is this – the Human Security concept aspires to adopt policies and measures “to protect the vital core of all humans from critical pervasive threats in a way that is consistent with long term human fulfillment”. There are two concepts there. One is protection – people on the move, unusual non-traditional migration without papers – as Dr Yaacob referred to. People who run away

from catastrophe – human or otherwise. The other part of the concept is empowerment – human fulfillment. Because if we only focus on protecting, we have to do it forever - it's an unfinished business. But if we empower, if we help to improve upon the quality of the human beings themselves, they will be the guarantors of their own human security. So the two co-chairs, Ogata coming from protection because of her experiences in the UNHCR and Professor Amartya Sen, coming from development, coming from empowerment, coming from fulfillment of human potential.

So I do hope that focusing on non-traditional security threats, you will adopt this concept of Human Security as the core of your research, of your analysis, of your debate, of your policy advise because we are actually talking about the same classical mission – that the state was expected to do since the conception of the idea of civil society and civil state.

At the launch of the Consortium last year I also referred to this fact, that in the theory of social contract, Thomas Hobbes, an English philosopher in the 1600s, said if you live in the state of nature, life there is rash, nasty, brutish and short – full of violence. Men and women opted out by coming into civil society; transfer their own individual power to the sovereign. The rule of law is established to protect people to protect every member of that civil society, of that state. Well in the age of globalization and integration, protection is not only by the state. Oftentimes it is protection from the power of the state itself, in many cases in many countries; 1994 Rwanda, 1998 Kosovo, and many others in our region too. The state has become the main violator of human rights and human security. And we go on claiming because of my absolute sovereignty, you cannot interfere. That's why the Commission on State Sovereignty and Intervention just rephrased it from the right to intervene to the responsibility to protect.

So it is the same objective and purpose of the state, as Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau conceived of it, to provide protection and defense to the members of the society. Now, we have to shift and make sure that protection and defence of the security of the people may require their own empowerment, may require lesser power of the state through the rule of law, not the rule of men or the rule of the powerful. So whatever you are discussing,

Ladies and Gentlemen, from now onwards, whether its climate change affecting security, whether its pandemic diseases affecting the health of our public, whether its international crime, illegal migration, trafficking of men and women, all these issues have direct bearing on human security. You will have to come up with new ways, new ideas and new thinking. And you will have to realize that this is an interconnected world. One human insecurity somewhere, is a global insecurity everywhere”. As [with] Afghanistan, the original issue is not the way in which it’s being managed... Insecurity there is insecurity everywhere, even in New York, even in Washington.”

So this interconnectedness is something that we have to keep in mind very closely. And I want to end by saying that this idea is not new either. It was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a French Catholic philosopher who said that “*the age of nations is past*”. If we don’t want to perish together, he said, it remains for us to set aside our ancient prejudices. About me better than you, about this state better than that. About I have my absolute right, you have none to come in and interfere. And then he said “go and build the earth”. Building a state is not adequate anymore. Not just building a society because we are on this planet Earth together.

Sixty million years ago there was a calamity hitting the earth. It was supposed to be that meteorite that created climate change. All life forms disappeared including the dinosaurs. But there was no moral dimension to that calamity because it was natural, inter-galactic, something we could not avoid, part of the making of the universe. Now, Minister Yaacob has been describing for us this man-made calamity called Climate Change. If we are not careful, the result is going to be the same. It will affect all life forms on earth, including our human species. But this time, there is that moral dimension to it because we are the cause; we are the other of our own extinction. It is therefore important that you are engaging in this issue. In the end, it is not only human security; it is the security of all living beings that we have to take care of [together] with this Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies.

Congratulations and thank you very much.