Mr President
Secretary-General
Excellencies
Ladies and gentlemen

The world was changing even before COVID-19. Geopolitical tensions were growing; globalisation was showing fissures; isolationism, protectionism and unilateralism were pushing back against multilateral institutions and international cooperation.

The COVID-19 crisis has sharpened these trends, but it has also reminded us how inter-connected and interdependent countries are, and why we all need to work together to defeat the gravest challenge of our time.

**Importance of multilateralism / Role of the UN**

A rules-based multilateral system, with the UN at its core, is our best hope to build a stable international environment. For all its limitations, it has helped to level the playing field for all countries. It has given small states like Singapore a voice, and a stake in the global commons. Major powers also benefit from a more peaceful and stable global environment, and when they take joint initiatives through multilateral institutions, it enhances their political legitimacy and moral authority.

But recent trends have also exposed shortcomings of multilateral institutions – the inability to achieve consensus on major issues, the conflicts that continue to ravage societies, and the millions who still lack access to food, healthcare and education.

We must work together to update and reform our multilateral institutions – including the UN – to keep the institutions open, inclusive, and fit for purpose, to reflect current economic and political realities, and to respond effectively to
shared challenges of our time, including pandemics, climate change, extremist-terrorism, sustainable development, and cybersecurity. Member States expect a lot from the UN, and it is only right that we give the UN commensurate latitude, resources and mandate to fulfil its demanding mission.

When Singapore was admitted into the UN in 1965, our first Foreign Minister, the late Mr S Rajaratnam, said: “Despite the cynics who focus attention on its many shortcomings, my country has faith in the future of the United Nations, simply because without it there is no worthwhile future for humanity”. That statement still holds true today.

Singapore is committed to the future of the UN, and the values and ideals of the UN Charter. We are equally determined to work with all countries, including through the Forum of Small States which we helped to establish, to strengthen the UN. I wish the UN a happy 75th birthday, and many more successful years. Thank you.