



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE
UNITED NATIONS | NEW YORK

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR BURHAN GAFOOR,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEM 161, ON THE REPORT
OF THE COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH THE HOST COUNTRY,
SIXTH COMMITTEE,
6 NOVEMBER 2023**

1 Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am delighted to be here with you today in the Sixth Committee as you continue your very important work. I would also like to thank Ambassador Andreas Hadjichrysanthou of Cyprus, for his service, as Chair of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, and his able stewardship of the Committee and his presentation of the Committee's report this morning. It is also my understanding that this is Ambassador Hadjichrysanthou's last report to this Committee in view of his imminent departure from New York, and I take this opportunity to put on record my delegation's deep appreciation to the work done by Ambassador Hadjichrysanthou and for his very dedicated leadership in chairing a very challenging committee and his commitment to finding solutions to the many issues raised in the Committee. Thank you very much Ambassador Hadjichrysanthou.

Mr. Chairman,

2 Singapore has followed the work of the Committee closely. We agree with the Committee's recommendations and conclusions that the maintenance of appropriate conditions for ensuring normal functioning of delegations and missions is in the interest of the United Nations and all Member States. And we have listened carefully to the issues that have been raised in the Committee and have also listened carefully to the responses made by the host country in the deliberations of the Committee. And in this connection, we wish to make three points for our discussions today.

3 First, my delegation wishes to reiterate that the United Nations is at the center of the rules-based multilateral system. Therefore, all aspects of the

organisation and its work, including the relationship that the host country has with the organisation and that the host country has with Member States, must necessarily be consistent with international law. The host country representative had spoken of its “ironclad commitment” to the rule of law in a statement that the representative made to the Sixth Committee during the debate on rule of law. And it is the hope of my delegation that this ironclad commitment will extend to the issues that have been raised in the Host Country Committee. The relevant body of international law, which includes the Charter of the United Nations, the Headquarters Agreement, and the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, must be fully respected and implemented by all relevant parties, including the host country.

4 Secondly, my delegation is particularly concerned that there continues to be issues with respect to entry visas. And this relates to meetings of the United Nations referenced in the report of the Host Country Committee, and I am also familiar in my capacity as Chair of the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021-2025 that entry visas remain an issue for some delegations, especially capital-based representatives who are not always able to attend meetings. Now, we appreciate the action that has been taken in 2023 that led to a relative reduction in processing times of visas for certain delegations and we note that there was a relative decrease in the percentage of visas that were not issued. However, we also note from the recommendations and conclusions of the Committee that serious concerns in relation to entry visas remain unresolved. My delegation wishes to emphasise that entry visas are not favours that are granted by the host country. Rather, the issuance of entry visas is the responsibility of the host country that is founded on its international law obligations under the Headquarters Agreement. Any failure by the host country to issue entry visas that is contrary to its obligations, as with any other breach of international law, undermines the rule of law at the international level. Any such failure may also affect the proper functioning of the organisation should delegations be unable to be fully represented at meetings of the United Nations. Entry visa issues therefore must be addressed as a matter of priority, including, and in particular, for the effective functioning of the rules-based multilateral system, because entry visas have the potential to lead over time to the gradual weakening of the multilateral system by not allowing the possibility for every delegation to be represented at the table, and such weakening would not be in the interest of any delegation, including the host country.

5 My delegation reiterates its call on the host country and other relevant countries to resolve issues regarding entry visas, as well as other matters raised in the Committee, in accordance with international law and in a spirit of cooperation.

We note in this regard that the host country and the Russian Federation had met at deputy permanent representative level in the middle of the year to discuss a range of issues, with the host country having facilitated visas for several officials from Moscow to attend this particular meeting. We encourage the host country and other relevant countries to build on this development by continuing their engagement.

6 Thirdly, my delegation also wishes to express our appreciation for the Secretary-General’s leadership on and personal involvement in host country issues. We note that the Secretary-General had discussions with the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation as well as with the Secretary of State of the United States in April 2023 to discuss host country issues. This is referenced in the report of the Host Country Committee. Such leadership by the Secretary-General on host country issues is welcomed and also necessary, given the central and direct role that the Secretary-General plays as representative of the United Nations, a party to the Headquarters Agreement, in ensuring the effective implementation of that Agreement.

Mr Chairman,

7 My delegation will continue to follow the work of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country very closely from the perspective of rule of law, from the perspective of international law, and from the perspective of the proper and effective functioning of the multilateral system. Now to conclude, I wish to also take this opportunity to put on record my delegation’s deep appreciation to the host country for shouldering what is evidently an immense burden of serving as the host to the United Nations. It is also, of course, a great privilege. We wish to thank, in particular, the United States Mission to the United Nations for all the assistance that it has provided to the diplomatic community in New York, and I should say, in particular, all the assistance that it has provided to my own mission.

8 I thank you very much for your attention.

.....