



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE  
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**STATEMENT BY MR MARK SEAH,  
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SINGAPORE,  
ON AGENDA ITEM 83, ON THE RULE OF LAW AT THE NATIONAL  
AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS,  
SIXTH COMMITTEE,  
17 OCTOBER 2023**

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Mr Chair,

1 I wish, at the outset, to reaffirm Singapore’s unwavering support for the rule of law at the national and international levels. The rule of law is an existential matter for small States like Singapore. It is also fundamental for the maintenance of international peace and security, which is a precondition for achieving sustainable development.

2 My delegation takes note of the report of the Secretary-General under this agenda item. The Philippines, on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, had earlier made important remarks on the report, which my delegation fully aligns with. My delegation objects to the inclusion of paragraph 89 of the report, which reads as follows: “The United Nations continued to promote the universal abolition of the death penalty, including by encouraging the establishment of moratoriums.”

3 Paragraph 89 is irrelevant, and its inclusion was improper. First, the use of the death penalty in itself is not a rule of law issue. Portraying this otherwise is wrong, disingenuous and unacceptable. The use of the death penalty *per se* neither undermines nor is contrary to the rule of law. All countries have the sovereign right to develop their own legal systems, including determining the legal penalties most suitable for their respective circumstances, in accordance with their international law obligations. This sovereign right was reaffirmed by the General Assembly in operative paragraph 1 of its resolutions 71/187, 73/175, 75/183 and 77/222 entitled “Moratorium on the use of the death penalty”. Second, by including paragraph 89 under the section of the report on “[p]romotion of international instruments, norms,

standards and rules”, the aim is to imply that the use of the death penalty is contrary to international instruments, norms, standards and rules. This is incorrect, misleading, and inappropriate. There is no international consensus against the use of the death penalty and no international law prohibition against its use. Third, it is, fundamentally, highly improper for the Secretariat to be promoting the abolition of the death penalty or encouraging the establishing of moratoriums. The United Nations has not given its Secretariat any mandate to engage in such activities, which are not supported by international law and are in blatant disregard of the right of sovereign Member States to determine their own legal systems.

4           The inclusion of paragraph 89 is particularly disappointing as Singapore and other Member States have raised similar concerns at previous sessions. However, our concerns have again been ignored by the Secretariat, in particular, the Rule of Law Unit, and it is disturbing and disappointing to see that the report is again being used as a vehicle to unilaterally impose a single ideology that is not founded in international law on the entire UN membership. Apart from disregarding Member States’ sovereign right to develop their own legal systems, the Rule of Law Unit also ignores the explicit request, reflected in General Assembly resolution 77/110 and other previous resolutions, that the report of the Secretary-General under this agenda item is to address the national and international dimensions of the rule of law in, and I quote, “a balanced manner”. The report again falls short of this standard. Future reports must be presented in an objective, neutral and non-partisan manner, in keeping with resolution 77/110.

Mr Chair,

5           I now turn to the sub-topic of the debate, “Using technology to advance access to justice for all”. Reflecting Singapore’s longstanding commitment to the rule of law as well as our broader push to digitalise public services, we have leveraged digital tools to enhance the delivery of civil legal aid, advice and assistance.

6           Allow me to share some initiatives in two areas. First, we have rolled out online or automated systems to enhance information delivery to the public. One such tool is the Intelligent Legal Assistance Bot, or iLAB – an online chatbot which provides tailored legal information on civil law matters and recommends online resources and other avenues for help. In addition, the public can be apprised of the most accurate and up-to-date developments of the law through the Singapore Statutes Online website.

7            Second, we have also digitised a number of legal services to enhance access. For example, persons in need of civil legal aid have the option to submit applications online using the Applicant Portal, and may also receive legal advice via videoconferencing from various community touchpoints. In addition, the Singapore Police Force’s online e-Services Portal ensures the public has convenient access to various police services, including lodging of police reports. A police report can be lodged online in just under 15 minutes.

8            Moving forward, Singapore will continue to review and refresh our digital solutions to enhance our people’s access to justice in a rapidly changing operating environment.

9            Thank you, Mr Chair.

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