

**LECTURE BY HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE NANAIA MAHUTA
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, NEW ZEALAND
ON
"FOREIGN POLICY FOR SMALL STATES"
AT THE
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Secretary General Dato Amran

Ambassador Shazelina

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

Whakataka te hau ki te uru, Whakataka te hau ki te tonga

Kia maakinakina ki uta, kia maataratara ki tai

Kia hii ake ana te atakura,

He tio, he huka, he hauhu

Tiihei Mauri Ora!

Good morning, selamat pagi, kia ora koutou. Thank you for your warm welcome.

I opened my speech with an ancestral prayer to clear the way so that the messages carried over land and sea can be heard and embraced with purpose and good intent.

Māori convey history through story telling, reciting of kin connections or whakapapa, linking to place, time and context in a manner that makes sense of why things happened and how our belief system informs what we do – even to this day. Centuries ago, my Māori ancestors sailed from this

part of the world to Aotearoa New Zealand there are strong cultural ties with Malaysia and the region.

Linguistically we share the same word for eye – mata. There are many other similar words: ear – taringa/telinga; to cry – tangi/tangis; fish – ika/ikan; fire – ahi/api. I'm told we even have the same word for headlice – kutu.

We also share a strong sense of family/whaanau, and respect for our elders. When there is a shared sense of connection it is easy to form relationships.

Defining Small States and Their Challenges

We also share a perception of ourselves as small states. New Zealand's population is five million; Malaysia's is six times bigger, so we do not generally think of you as small. Visiting the KLCC mall over the weekend makes it even harder to believe!

Aotearoa New Zealand is a small island trading nation and we have always looked outwards recognising that our fate is linked to the action of others and that we are in and of the Pacific family or whanau.

There are many definitions of a small state but perhaps it is easier to define what it is not. A big power has the ability to exert influence through its economic, political and military strength. Its opinions must be taken into account by others. By contrast, a small state needs to call on other tools or skills that require communication, understanding, dialogue and diplomacy. We know we are not a superpower which is why we defend the need for international rules and norms that govern behaviour and responsibility and provides for nations large and small to work responsibly together towards common or shared objectives. In the past size or might has often determined the outcome – and to a large degree that mindset

continues to dominate – but in the future we need greater co-operation, call it multilateralism because the existential challenge we face - that is Climate Change - cannot be responded to with force or sheer size it requires global collective responsibility – our existence depends on it.

The Current Context: Global Challenges

In an increasingly polarised and contested world, how does a small state conduct its foreign policy? Particularly if that state chooses to follow an independent foreign policy, like New Zealand?

As you are students of foreign policy, I don't need to describe in detail the challenges that both our countries face in our region: strategic uncertainty and rising tensions, economic pressures, pressures in our societies. The impacts of climate change also loom large, and are becoming more intense.

Conducting diplomacy in this era is also challenging because it is so fast paced. News gets to people's phones, a plethora of social media channels before diplomats even have a chance to report. Our public demand actions immediately. Often there is way too much information. And not all of it is true.

The Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern recently said in one of her speeches, "the world is bloody messy" and I support that description.

The importance of clear principles and priorities

With all these pressures on us, how do small states act when we don't have the resources of larger states? When we cannot be everywhere at once? It is important to be clear about who we are, what we stand for, and what we want to achieve. Then we can focus on approaches and outcomes that reflect our principles and priorities.

New Zealand sees itself as a young nation in the Pacific and part of the broader Indo-Pacific region. Our founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi, is based on principles of partnership between the State and the Māori people. We believe in inclusiveness, transparency, openness, the rule of law, good governance and human rights. We also believe in respect for international law and the peaceful settlement of disputes. It goes without saying that we support the ASEAN-centred regional architecture that is so critical to our own future. Our goal is to ensure a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable Indo-Pacific. That approach means that we engage in regional architecture to advocate and progress our interests but we also listen to the views of the region to understand how best to reach our common outcome. However as global tensions increase we are finding it even more challenging to build and maintain relationships, remaining true to our values and call out blatant disregard for establish norms. That has meant that sometimes we add our voice with others and sometimes we need to speak out on our own.

Values are at the core of our foreign policy

We also need to be clear about our values, which determine how foreign policy is conducted. As an indigenous Foreign Minister, I believe New Zealand's foreign policy can benefit from drawing on values from the Māori world, many of which may be familiar to this region.

Manākitanga is about respect and generosity of spirit. Whanaungatanga is about forming and maintaining relationships to foster a sense of community. Kotahitanga is about unity and working together for the good of all. Kaitiakitanga or guardianship is about caring for people, our planet and holding an intergenerational perspective.

I would love to hear from you later about Malaysia's core values.

There can be a price to be paid for commitment to values – and for having an independent foreign policy - so values must go hand in hand with courage and that then informs what action you take. But just as our ancestors navigated the unknown oceans by using the stars, values are critical aids for navigating strategic challenges. For example, there will be times when we need to speak out, but we should do so respectfully, predictably and consistently. More often than not however a critical diplomatic tool is “seek first to listen and understand the perspective of others”. There is always something lurking way back in a historical context that has shaped the outlook and informed the actions that are challenging and difficult to reconcile. Colonisation and the baggage it has created is a case in point.

Ultimately, our values are about prioritising people and relationships – the importance of showing respect to others, the importance of working together to address shared challenges, and the importance of protecting the interests of future generations.

Use of soft power to achieve goals

How do small states move others to action? We have to make use of our soft power. That is, getting others to want what you want through appeal and attraction. They might admire your values or prosperity or openness. In this way, a small state can exert leadership and get others to follow its example.

For New Zealand, we are ranked as one of the most democratic countries in the world. Our public sector is regularly ranked by Transparency International as the number one least corrupt. And the World Bank says New Zealand is the best country in the world for ease of doing business.

Having this kind of reputation means there is much interest from other countries in learning more about us, allowing us to leverage opportunities.

While our democracy continues to evolve in a manner that is bespoke to our historical context with the Treaty of Waitangi recognised as the founding tenet of our nation. Nonetheless the principle of open and transparent government, freedom of speech, protection of rights, freedom of association, equality are strong and consistent features of our democracy.

Working collectively to uphold the rules-based order

To achieve our wider goals, we as a small state must of course work closely with others. Upholding the rules-based order through multilateral institutions offers us the best chance of having our voice heard. It ensures that all states are treated equally, large and small.

Malaysia has been an important partner in this multilateral effort. We served together on the UN Security Council in 2015-16. Our close cooperation in a pressure cooker environment is something that we still remember today.

Disarmament and arms control is another area where we work closely. We also cooperate on international law issues, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Last year New Zealand joined others in setting out our legal position on the South China Sea, in support of Malaysia's stance.

But as PM Ardern said recently, multilateral institutions are imperfect, and they have and will fail us. Our response must be to find ways to make them stronger. Equally there will be times when we cannot wait for those institutions to act, in which case we seek partnerships and approaches based on our values.

Why does New Zealand feel so strongly about the situation in Ukraine, when it is on the other side of the world from us? Because what happened is an example of a country resorting to power, rather than rules, in an effort to shape the international environment in its own favour. As history shows us repeatedly, when large countries disregard sovereignty and territorial integrity with a sense of impunity, it does not bode well particularly for small countries.

This is why New Zealand will intervene as a third party in Ukraine's case in the International Court of Justice. New Zealand has opposed the use of the veto by Security Council members since the UN was established. We must reform the UN so that we don't have to rely on individual states imposing their own autonomous sanctions.

The implications of the war are felt far from Europe, including here in the Indo-Pacific. In response to increasing tensions or risks in the region – be they in the Pacific, the South China Sea, or the Taiwan Strait – New Zealand's position remains consistent – we call for adherence to international rules and norms; for diplomacy, de-escalation and dialogue – rather than threats, force and coercion.

Investing in our region

But we should not assume that what is happening in Europe will happen in our region. We must not allow the risk of a self-fulfilling prophecy to become reality.

New Zealand has invested heavily in this neighbourhood for decades to build peace and prosperity. From the early 1950s, many young Malaysians studied in New Zealand under the Colombo Plan, while Malaysia hosted New Zealand teachers and agricultural experts. Our defence ties are even

older, and Malaysia today is one of our closest defence partners in the region.

We are ASEAN's second oldest dialogue partner, after Australia. We need trusted friends who share our commitment to multilateralism and working together to address shared challenges.

Last week in Phnom Penh, New Zealand strongly supported ASEAN's efforts on Myanmar, joining with Malaysia and others to call for the full and prompt implementation of the Five Point Consensus. We also raised our concerns on the situation in the South China Sea, calling for a peaceful resolution and for international law to be upheld. We called too for action on climate change, which poses a grave threat to low lying ASEAN countries as well as to Pacific Island states.

As the Indo-Pacific faces rising tensions, New Zealand and others must strengthen the intensity of our engagement to build even greater resilience. We do this through our relationships and, importantly, economic architecture that we believe is the key. Trade is more than a vehicle for economic growth. It is a bridge-builder, and creates shared interests, obligations, and benefits.

Members of the region's trade architecture, both large and small, have a stake in its success and therefore a role to play in upholding that order.

Malaysia and New Zealand have four free trade agreements in common: our bilateral agreement, one with ASEAN, RCEP and CPTPP. Now we can add a fifth grouping, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework.

Investing in our people

While investing in the region and its architecture builds resilience, we must also invest in our people. Diplomacy is our strongest tool so our people must be our best asset as the world changes around us.

As small states, we rely on being smart, innovative and strategic. It's about being invited into the rooms where major decisions made will affect our future, because we have something worthwhile to say.

You're all familiar with CPTPP but how many of you realise that its origins were dreamt up by New Zealand, Singapore and Chile? Brunei then joined us to make the P4, after it was clear that the big powers could not agree on how to establish a regional trade agreement.

That is the value that small states can bring – curiosity, good ideas, adaptability and a willingness to take calculated risks.

That is why I was delighted to be invited today by Ambassador Shazelina. IDFR has a well-earned reputation for providing excellent training for young officers and equipping them to operate effectively in the world.

Strength in our uniqueness

Finally, small states need to draw strength from their unique attributes. I mentioned our founding document earlier, the Treaty of Waitangi. This includes obligations by the Government to have a bicultural approach, including in foreign policy. The lessons we've learnt on our ongoing journey towards indigenous empowerment, including giving a greater voice to Māori, gives us a unique advantage when we operate internationally. So too are the skills we acquire as we learn what consultation truly means, and how to work in genuine partnership.

What is Malaysia's unique strength? As we see it, your history and your geography mean you have a distinctive perspective on the region. You straddle so many worlds and operate in so many different fora – ASEAN, the Commonwealth, the Organisation of Islamic Countries, the UN and so on. Malaysia's rich diversity of peoples means you possess a natural ability to move easily between different cultures. So you are able to interpret and explain what is happening in one world to those from another world.

This means the way you operate diplomatically and the voice that you have internationally is very unique indeed.

Conclusion

To conclude, when we harness our core strengths, and work collectively as constructive and principled actors on the international stage, we can – and do – have an impact. The example Malaysia and New Zealand can set is a powerful demonstration of how small states can work together bilaterally, regionally and globally. We will continue to work with you and others to uphold the rules and norms that have served us so well, and are essential for ensuring that our region remains peaceful, open, prosperous and sustainable.

There is a saying in Māori: *He iti te mokoroa, nana i kati te kahikatea* - the grub worm may be small but it eats through the kahikatea tree. That is to say, there is power in small things.

No reira, thank you, terima kasih.