

Opening statement at the summit meeting of the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership

Jakarta, Indonesia, 22 April, 2005

Your Excellency Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, President of the Republic of Indonesia;
Your Majesties,
Your Highnesses,
Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government,
Your Excellencies Ministers and Ambassadors,
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

The historic gathering in Bandung in 1955 was a product of the victorious struggles waged by those whom the colonisers had defined as sub-human. If there had been no struggle, Bandung would not have taken place.

The historic gathering in Bandung in 1955 was a conclave of fighters for the liberation of those whom an entire epoch in human history had defined as dependent peoples, who had been condemned to occupy a position of subservience at the feet of those who had appointed themselves our masters.

The historic gathering in Bandung in 1955 was a celebration of the dawning of liberty for those that had been oppressed, and a council of war convened to determine what those who had been oppressed together should together do with the freedom they had won.

The historic gathering in Bandung in 1955 met to answer the question of what we meant when we spoke about the exercise of our right to self-determination.

When it answered that question, it said - all Asia shall be free! all Africa shall be free!

It said that regardless of the might of those who had appointed themselves our superiors, the sovereign peoples of Africa and Asia would evolve their own political, economic and social systems, and defend their right freely to determine their destinies.

It said that free Asia and free Africa would not revisit the denial of human rights on their peoples, whose fundamental rights had been denied by the system of colonialism and imperialism from which they had liberated themselves.

It said that the peoples of Asia and Africa would rebuild their cultures and identities, refusing to accept that these were primitive expressions of a barbaric past that had to give way to what was fondly described as Western civilisation.

When the historic gathering in Bandung in 1955 sought to answer the question what we meant when we spoke about the exercise of our right to self-determination, it said we will never allow that humanity itself should be obliterated from the face of the earth through the use of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

It said there should be war no more, no wanton wastage of human life by resort to the murderous thunder of the guns, and therefore that all international disputes should be solved by negotiation, by mediation and arbitration, by peaceful means.

It said that no longer should the people of Asia and Africa be condemned for all time to suffer from the pain and indignity of poverty, deprivation and underdevelopment, which resulted in these masses being described as the wretched of the earth.

When the historic gathering in Bandung in 1955 projected the vision we have described, it did not count on the benevolence of others to bring about this outcome. It was confident that acting in unity, the peoples of Africa and Asia had the strength to create the new world order born of their liberation and their ability to be makers of history.

Expressing this determination, Jawaharlal Nehru sounded the clarion call when he told his fellow freedom fighters at Bandung - "If we have to stand alone, we will stand by ourselves whatever happens...and we propose to face all consequences...I know what my people are. But I know also that if we rely on others, whatever great powers they might be, if we look to them for sustenance, then we are weak indeed..."

The liberation fighters who met in Bandung in 1955 did not want to look others for sustenance, whatever great powers they might be, in the same way as they had not looked to others for sustenance, whatever great powers they might be, as they fought to free their countries and peoples from the heavy yoke of colonialism and imperialism.

The very fact of the historic meeting in Bandung in 1955 made the bold statement that the liberated peoples of Asia and Africa would stand alone if they had to, and face the consequences, and that they would not impose on themselves the celebration of their own weakness by underestimating their own strength, awed by the might of others.

We have gathered in Jakarta and will conclude our work in Bandung, exactly 50 years after the generation of freedom fighters who brought us our liberation met in Bandung.

The masses of our people will presume that we took the decision to revisit Bandung on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the historic get-together of 1955 because we are determined to walk in the footsteps of the great apostles of liberty who defined the objectives that Africa and Asia had to achieve.

Accordingly, they will be entitled to ask of us whether we made a serious assessment of the progress we have made to realise the goals set in Bandung in 1955. They will be right to demand that we tell them what we have decided to do to achieve such progress if none has been made.

They will be correct to inquire from us what we have resolved to do to consolidate the unity of the peoples of Asia and Africa, to use our combined strength to give life to the vision that emanated from Bandung in 1955.

They will be correct to ask whether we have not relied too much on sustenance by others, having even sub-consciously defined ourselves as being too weak to rely on ourselves to bring about a new world order that would be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the billions we represent, the same masses who were represented by the freedom fighters who gathered in Bandung in 1955.

The obvious need for us to respect our obligation to account to the people will require that we answer all these questions honestly. We will also have to do this because our decisions will have to give real meaning to the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership we have convened to establish.

Surely, the objectives we seek to achieve demand of us that we should be frank and open about the reality we face, estimate our capabilities as accurately as possible, and set ourselves achievable goals, consistent with the vision spelt out by the giants who met in Bandung in 1955.

There is no doubt that we can report to our peoples that we are today stronger than we were 50 years ago, that we have much better possibilities to achieve the vision of 1955 than the generation of '55 had.

Today, the peoples of Asia and Africa are free. That said, we continue to face the serious and urgent challenge to help realise the aspirations of the people of Palestine and a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Whatever the difficulties, we have succeeded to defend the independence of our countries and thus entrenched the possibility for us to determine our destiny.

The threat of the immolation of humanity through the use of weapons of mass destruction in a Third World War has receded, even as we continue to face the challenge of ensuring universal disarmament and the destruction of all weapons of mass destruction.

A good number of our countries have made important strides towards building modern economies capable of incrementally meeting the goal of achieving a better life for the billions of people we represent. Present among us are representatives of countries of the South that play an important part in shaping the world economy.

We have made significant strides towards giving real meaning to the critical objective of South-South co-operation, the co-operation visualised by the freedom fighters who met in Bandung in 1955, which we seek radically to expand through the establishment of the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership.

We have built some of the institutional mechanisms we need to enable us to act together to achieve our common goals. These include the African Union, its development programme NEPAD, ASEAN and others.

Despite all this progress, we continue to face the daunting challenge to eradicate the poverty and underdevelopment that afflict millions of our peoples, which coexist side by side with the availability of sufficient resources in the global economy to make poverty history.

Furthermore, everyday the process of globalisation emphasises the gross imbalance in the global distribution of power, making it imperative that we use our collective strength urgently to achieve the restructuring and democratisation of the United Nations and other multi-lateral organisations.

When he spoke in Bandung in 1955, Jawaharlal Nehru said: "I speak with the greatest respect of (the) Great Powers because they are not only great in military might, but (also) in development, in culture, in civilisation. But I do submit that greatness sometimes brings quite false values, false standards."

President Sukarno said: "Perhaps now more than at any other moment in the history of the world, society, government and statesmanship need to be based upon the highest code of morality and ethics. And in political terms, what is the highest code of morality? It is the subordination of everything to the well being of mankind. But today we are faced with a situation where the well being of mankind is not always the primary consideration. Many who are in places of power think, rather, of controlling the world..."

"What can we do? We can do much! We can inject the voice of reason into world affairs. We can mobilise all the spiritual, all the moral, all the political strength of Asia and Africa, 1,400,000,000 strong, far more than half the human population of the world..."

I am honoured to wish this historic second Asian-African Conference success, convinced that we have the will to advance the cause pioneered by some of the greatest sons and daughters of Africa and Asia. We are most grateful to President Yudhoyono, the government and people of Indonesia who have opened the hearts and home to all of us, despite the heavy burdens imposed on them by the recent natural disasters that have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and caused incalculable destruction.

Thank you for your attention.

