

ADDRESS TO THE 48TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR CHEDDI JAGAN,  
PRESIDENT OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA

OCTOBER 1, 1993

Mr President  
Excellencies  
Mr Secretary General  
Distinguished Delegates

As I stand today at this rostrum, a flood of memories rushes to my mind. I recall as Premier appearing before the United Nations Decolonisation Committee in 1961 to plead the case for my country's independence. Like so many other colonies after World War II, Guyana was anxious to secure its freedom and to exercise its right to self-determination. The road, however was far from easy. Along the way, there were many stumbling blocks and casualties. It was not until May 1966, long after most subject peoples had been set free, that we became independent and took our place in the family of nations.

The world today is radically different. The total membership of the United Nations has grown significantly. The Cold War which bedevilled international relations since 1947 has ended with a promise of a new and more democratic world order. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, one of the two super-powers, there are severe difficulties for the new structures which have been established. Notwithstanding, hope is alive for the construction of an era of peace, based on respect for all peoples to promote their general welfare. It is an exciting moment in world history and, for the United Nations, a defining one.

Mr President,

Guyana has been honoured by its unanimous election to the Presidency of this forty-eighth General Assembly. This Session will undoubtedly be a challenging one. I would wish to thank the entire membership for its vote of confidence in our ability to undertake this high responsibility. It is after all a recognition that all states - irrespective of their size - can play an important role in the Organisation's work. I am especially grateful to the CARICOM Group and to the wider Latin American and Caribbean Group for their full endorsement of our candidacy. I must also pay tribute to His Excellency Stoyan Ganev for his capable direction of the forty-seventh session and to our distinguished Secretary General for his efforts to promote the continuing success of our world organisation.

Success in these volatile times is often tempered. For, notwithstanding its important accomplishments the United Nations cannot be said to have fulfilled the highest aspiration of its creators. The scourge of war is still rampant in many places. Colonialism is certainly not extinct and today threatens to survive in different forms. Many aspects of colonialism are evident in the ever-widening gap between the developed and developing countries and in the dependence of impoverished millions on the largesse of a few. This prevailing economic and social disparity provides a breeding ground for hunger, disease and poverty, and ultimately constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

As the focal point of multilateralism, the United Nations must continue to explore the full limits of international co-operation in order to eliminate, or at least alleviate, the problems of the disadvantaged. I would like to think that there is now agreement that the grave situation requires collective action. Whatever its limitations, it is still the best forum available to states for diplomacy, dialogue and negotiation, and thus for the avoidance of conflict. We should seek therefore to enhance its ability to address our common agenda.

**Mr President,**

As a small developing state, Guyana is fully committed to the ethos of multilateral co-operation which is embodied in the United Nations.

We have come here to publicly renew our faith in the organisation and to urge that all of us pledge to deepen and strengthen multilateralism as a foundation for inter-state relations. Experience has shown that no nation, however powerful can exist in isolation. Its borders are not impervious to encroachment by universal ills. Ultimately, it must come together with the rest of the world to find common solutions to common problems. AIDS, narcotic drugs, poverty and pollution are striking examples of the pandemic which affects us all. Their control requires concerted action by the United Nations as a whole. Added to these are the natural disasters, such as the recent earthquake in India. Our deepest sympathy goes out to the Indian people and Government.

We note with some disappointment that international conflicts continue to undermine the capacity of the Organisation to promote the co-operation, which is deemed essential for reaching solutions to current global problems.

The real value of the United Nations in this period will depend on its collective ability to respond effectively to this wave of international conflicts, and to find acceptable means of peace-making and peace-keeping which will not be a burden on its membership.

Such a development will inspire confidence among the member nations to refer issues to the United Nations body, and to restore their reliance on the Organisation's ability to resolve disputes before they resort to the battle-field.

Our first effort at constructing a framework for international peace and security through the League of Nations ended in failure. The reason can be found in the inherent weakness of the League, in the resultant inability to contain a rampant nationalism, particularism and insularity and in the lack of respect for its fundamental principles. The United Nations is a second experiment, prompted by the disasters consequent upon the failure of the League. At San Francisco, we vowed to spare succeeding generations from the scourge of war. We have before us, another opportunity to secure an era of real peace and stability, to deploy fully the resources of this Organisation in the service of humanity, and to reach for a broadbased and sustainable development and some measure of prosperity and fulfillment for the peoples of this planet.

In our efforts to bolster international peace and security, the Agenda for Peace, which has been prepared by the distinguished Secretary General in response to the Security Council's request, sets out a number of proposals which merits serious consideration. While recognising the need to provide the Council with enforcement capacity under Chapter 7, we place special importance on preventative diplomacy, which would obviate the recourse to physical intervention. As the experience of some recent peace-making and peace-keeping operations has shown, these measures are fraught with uncertain political consequences.

Moreover, they have proved extremely costly, particularly to small states such as mine which can ill-afford such expenditures.

So diverse are the origins of conflict that each situation must be examined in depth to determine the most appropriate means of peaceful solution. In some cases, the dispute may have legal implications and may therefore be best handled by reference to a suitable judicial body. More often than not, however, the roots of conflict are embedded in a history of complicated political, economic and social factors. In such instances, the ground must be carefully prepared for the cultivation of peace and stability. Fortunately, the advantages of the diplomatic approach are not lost in the United Nations, which increasingly is using the good offices of the Secretary General and his representatives to induce solutions to long-standing conflicts.

We believe that these examples reaffirm the virtue of dialogue and negotiation. However, although promising for the future, other situations remain tenuous and require constant monitoring. Somalia and Sudan must be carefully nurtured back to normalcy. In Europe, Bosnia and Herzegovina stands as a horrific example of man's inhumanity to man, and compels us to search for a quick end to the wanton killing of innocent thousands. Indeed, the United Nations must hasten to devise new strategies to deal with these persistent convulsions in the global body politic.

The Middle East has been embroiled in conflict for much too long. With the recent signing of the Declaration of Principles for Palestinian self-rule, the road ahead is encouraging. Peace and stability throughout the region now seem to be within our grasp. We expect also that the territorial problems between Iraq and Kuwait can be amicably settled.

As far as South Africa is concerned, the announcement of a date for elections coupled with supporting structures gives rise to the hope that majority rule is not far off and we may in the near future welcome back that country into the fold of the international community. We urge all the peoples of South Africa to eschew further violence and to come together for their common good.

I wish to record with satisfaction the view that a return to democratic traditions and respect for good governance and human rights, have helped to further promote peace. Guyana will support any confidence building mechanism which favours dialogue over confrontation, as the means of choice for the specific settlement of disputes. The inherent correlation between peace and development behoves each member of the international community to continue the search where needed, for creative ways to settle disputes, which could otherwise imperil, not only international peace and security, but also national development.

In this hemisphere, of which Guyana is a part, we are concerned that, despite the end of the Cold War, Cuba remains outside the inter-American family. We truly believe that this is a serious anomaly in the context of this organisation's efforts to build a new world order, based on mutual understanding and respect among all states in a united international community. We appeal to the United States and Cuba to demonstrate their goodwill and seek urgently to reconcile their long-standing differences. The Caribbean Community which has a vested interest in the early rapprochement between these two major partners, stands ready to play a role in this process.

We are particularly pleased to Central American region which was for so long entrapped by anachronistic economic and social structures, has emerged from a vicious cycle of internecine violence. CARICOM welcomes the opportunity which this development offers for closer co-operation between two neighbouring regions. We are equally pleased that, after being held hostage by a military dictatorship unwilling to heed the popular will, Haiti is once again free to pursue a democratic path. We offer to President Aristide and his government our ready co-operation in the urgent task of reconstruction for social progress.

Mr President,

Guyana has itself only recently emerged from a difficult electoral process which, under international vigilance, proved to be free and fair. We are particularly grateful for the role which the United Nations played in ensuring that the democratic will of our people was fully respected. After all, the right to choose one's Government is a fundamental human right which should never be denied. We commend the United Nations for providing electoral assistance at the request of those who seek it and with due respect for the principle of national sovereignty. Elections alone, however, do not guarantee the preservation of democracy. They must be accompanied by the establishment of machinery, which protects every individual in our society. I am pleased to report that one of the first steps which my Government took, upon assuming office, was to accede to the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Human Rights Covenants. We followed that with the establishment of an Inter-Agency High Level Committee on Human Rights whose function it is to ensure that Guyana complies with its reporting responsibilities under the Human Rights Conventions.

It is not enough, however Mr President to satisfy the civic and political rights of our citizens. Their fundamental economic and social entitlements to food, clothing, shelter and so on must also be provided. Human rights are indivisible and to prefer one above the other is to deny their essential inter-relatedness. The Vienna Conference appears to have recognised this fact and to have confirmed the need for a holistic approach. My own Government is dedicated to the proposition that human development must be comprehensive if our society's welfare is to be assured. Our stated policy is therefore to create an environment in which democracy will work to fulfill our people's spiritual and material needs. To implement our development programme, however, we will require the co-operation of the international community to supplement our own limited resources.

As I observed earlier this year at a Conference on **"Poverty in Guyana - Finding Solutions"** - 'we are in a crisis situation.' For while we have begun recently to experience relatively high growth rates, the economy continues to be weak. Unemployment is high; human and financial resources are scarce; basic infrastructure has deteriorated, leaving the social sectors vulnerable to all the ills of poverty. We have been somewhat successful in raising production and productivity levels, but are seriously limited by a heavy debt burden. Some 90 cents of each dollar earned now go toward the repayment of national debt. And the proportion of our external commercial earnings for payment of our foreign debt is nearly three times the average of the 47 least developed countries - an unbearably heavy burden. Even though we attempt to manage expenditure primarily through good governance - a clean and lean administration and fullest respect for human rights - and efficient management, we cannot perform miracles. At the end of the day, we must look for assistance to buttress our domestic efforts and to preserve our tender democracy. With nearly 80 percent of our people below the poverty line, we will succeed in consolidating democracy only through economic development with social justice.

At the present time, however, the prospects for such support appear rather bleak. There has been a noticeable contraction of development aid as the economies of some donor countries experience difficulties. Their own electorates appear increasingly concerned with domestic problems such as unemployment and falling living standards. Whatever limited resources are available are allocated by the developed nations largely on the basis of strategic concerns. The international agenda is therefore being set more and more at the sacrifice of the developing world. There is consequently an urgent need to re-order our priorities and to place development at the very top of the Agenda.

At the best however, development aid is no more than a palliative. Significant economic and social progress will only come to the developing countries when inequitable and unjust economic and trade practices in the global system are removed. As the 1992 Human Development Report has pointed out, we are denied some five hundred billion dollars in market opportunities annually, ten times what we receive as foreign assistance, primarily because of protectionist policies still being pursued by the developed countries. We call therefore on these countries to open up their markets to our goods at prices which compensate us fairly for our labour and production. In this context, we urge the industrial nations to expedite the conclusion of trade negotiations, taking fully into account the interest of our small developing economies. We would also ask that the formation of large regional economic groupings - mega-blocs as they are called - should guard against the further marginalisation of our countries.

Additionally, a definite solution must be found to the Third World's crushing external debt problem during the current decade. In Latin America and the Caribbean, with 181 million out of 441 million people living below the poverty line in the mire of destitution, how can human development take place when despite onerous debt payments, the stock of debt grows? A prospective ECLAC study for the region in the 1985 - 1995 period shows a serious aggravation in terms of poverty, unemployment and foreign debt. Between 1981 and 1990, the region's foreign debt payments were US\$503 billion, of which interest was US\$313 billion. However, in the same period, the region's consolidated foreign debt increased from US\$297 billion in 1981 to US\$428 billion in 1991. Little wonder what the UNICEF publication "**Children of the Americas**" commented that this mechanism whereby "the more you pay, the more you owe" is urgent and must be stopped.

Debt relief in the form of debt cancellation, grants, soft loans and rescheduling is urgent, if the developing countries are to eradicate poverty, protect the environment and play their meaningful role in expanding world trade and ending stagnation and recession in the industrially-developed countries. Debt relief must be seen as an investment not only in the development of poor countries but also in the security of the rich nations.

Recognising the link which exists between poverty, trade, population, development and the environment, we must hasten to implement the Rio programme of action outlined in Agenda 21. The developing countries urgently require the resources - both financial and technological - necessary to fulfilling their obligations under that compact. As proof of its commitment to protect the environment, Guyana has set aside nearly one million acres of its tropical forests for research, management and development of our rich diversity. With the welcome of the Commonwealth Secretariat, the United Nations Development Programme and the Global Environment Facility, the Iwokrama project - as it is now known - has been fully launched. At the commissioning ceremony held on World Environment Day this year, I dedicated the enterprise to our Indigenous peoples who are not only the principal inhabitants but also the custodians of our forests. It is fitting, especially in this year of the Indigenous peoples that full recognition be given to the important role which they play in harmonising man's relationship with the earth on which he lives.

We also urge full support for the Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island developing countries scheduled to convene in Barbados in April 1994. We trust that there will be adequate preparation and the widest participation in this Conference.

In a spirit of genuine co-operation, therefore, let us proceed to address the Agenda for Development which we have accepted as a natural concomitant to the Agenda for Peace. Indeed, peace cannot prevail in the absence of development. Our attempts at peace-making and conflict resolution in general will not succeed if inequitable and unjust

economic and social conditions are allowed to persist. Of late, many of the organs and agencies engaged in the development process have had cause to lament the growing diminution of resources available to them - a problem now aggravated by continuing diversion of funding to a multiplicity of peace-keeping operations. Obviously, one recognises the importance of maintaining global peace. However, it should not be at a disproportionate sacrifice of development, which leads to peace-keeping becoming an end in itself instead of a means of encouraging economic and social welfare.

**Mr President, Excellencies, Mr Secretary General, Distinguished Delegates,**

The United Nations - whose universal membership encompasses both developed and developing nations - remains the ideal forum for forging a consensus on the major issues of peace and development. It is evident however that as currently conceived and structured, it cannot adequately perform the role expected of it. This realisation has led us to undertake the exercise of reforming and restructuring the organisation. To this end, we must ensure that the changes we make are not simply cosmetic but serve effectively to enhance its capacity to deal with the challenges of the post Cold War World. Our reforms must therefore seek to establish the United Nations as the principal forum in which macro-political, economic and social policies are collectively and consensually devised.

If truth be told, the United Nations is still widely perceived - notwithstanding its recent successes in the political field - as "a talk shop." Like the old Congress of Vienna which was described as a perpetual dance, it is viewed in the eyes of our peoples - particularly the poor and the suffering - as an endless round of dilatory debate which produces fine resolutions but precious little by way of concrete action. To survive and succeed, therefore, the United Nations must become relevant to the lives of men, women and children everywhere.

Urgent action is required at this explosive period of mounting external debt, falling economic growth, falling Third World commodity prices, increasing unemployment, environmental destruction, underdevelopment and the persistence of poverty. Our troubled planet calls for statesmanship, political will and co-operation or meaningful change. Market forces alone are not providing the people with adequate opportunities to participate in and benefit from economic growth and development. We have a paradox of growing poverty in the midst of potential plenty. Science and Technology have the capacity to eradicate poverty in the not too distant future and to halve it by the end of the century. Instead, we have today both in the developed and developing countries only about a half of the growth rates or a decade ago and the catastrophic phenomenon of "jobless growth" - less and less jobs and more and more poverty and inequality.

It is necessary to ascertain the root causes of global poverty and to develop an integrated strategy for its eradication. This necessitates a comprehensive world view and a recognition of the major contradiction of our time - the tremendous growth of the means of production and the anachronistic relations of production and the collective will to resolve this contradiction.

In the intense competition in the shrinking global market, due in large part to the increasing poverty and the widening gap between the rich and poor both in the North and South, and between the North and the South, the three centres of the industrialised world - North America, West Europe and Japan - are resorting to even more capital-intensive growth and the use of more and more sophisticated technology - computers and robots, cybernetics and automation. How can the poor and unsophisticated in the Third World countries survive

in the "global village" in the "borderless world" when collectively these countries have not attained the long ago projected 25% target in the production of industrialised goods and with the great majority light-years behind in human resource development and burdened by the dead-weight of unconscionable and immoral debt payments? The rapid advance to robots and automation in the North also poses a threat to the advantageous position of competitive wage rates in many countries of the South. And the industrialised countries with budget deficits, growing numbers of jobless and retirees and inadequate welfare funds cannot afford the Keynesian luxury of pump-priming and "workfare."

In a situation of confusion and uncertainty and with no solution in sight, the reactionary ultra-rightists/neo-fascists are getting stronger politically and becoming more vocal and strident. There is no answer to the hopelessness and despair of the more than thirty million unemployed in the OECD countries. Despair is leading to alcoholism, narcotics, crime and suicide. Meanwhile nationalism, xenophobic and neo-fascism are on the rise, leading to racial/ethnic tensions and growing civil strife.

The North/South dialogue has been languishing and has become a dialogue of the deaf. In the South, rising unemployment and abject poverty are inter-relating and interacting with rapid growth of population, urbanisation and overcrowding, diseases, the production and use of narcotic drugs, increased flows of refugees across the international frontiers and an irreversible damage to the environment. Whereas before it was said that "Berlin walls" prevented peoples in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe from travelling to the West, now new walls are being erected to prevent people from entering into the developed, industrialised countries.

It is not enough to treat the symptoms of the global malaise. Radical reforms are urgently needed. Structural adjustment is necessary equally for the developed countries as for the developing countries. But reforms must be predicated with social justice and a human face. Human needs and human security should be the object of development. In this regard, greater emphasis should be placed on human capital and natural capital. And much more must be done to speed up disarmament so that the despairing and hungry of the world can benefit from greatly enhanced savings.

Let us now move fully towards the preparation of a Development Agenda by a panel of distinguished experts and experienced persons to prepare a practical report based on experience in diverse countries and on close, critical analysis of possible options. Such a report must deal with the international competitiveness of the Third World, the basis of new modalities of international co-operation for development and the financing of development. It must also address core problems.

- the alleviation of poverty
- the expansion of productive employment
- the enhancement of social integration, particularly to the more disadvantaged and marginal groups

To attain these objectives, the people must play a central role. They must be fully involved in all aspects of life to take advantage of their initiatives and creativity for the fashioning of a better future, a peaceful and prosperous world.

As the leader of a small nation which continues to believe in the vast potential this organisation has for making the world a better place in which to live, I appeal to this Assembly to devote itself fully to this urgent task. Let us work together to advance the cause of global peace and development.

Thank you, Mr President.