



TEXT OF ADDRESS BY DR CHEDDI JAGAN  
PRESIDENT OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC  
OF GUYANA  
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE  
SPECIAL SESSION OF THE  
CARICOM HEADS OF GOVERNMENT CONFERENCE  
PORT-OF-SPAIN, TRINIDAD & TOBAGO  
OCTOBER 28, 1992.

Mr Chairman; fellow Heads of Government of Caricom; Mr Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community Secretariat; Deputy Secretary General; other distinguished guests:

I am touched by the cordial welcome which Prime Minister, Hon. Patrick Manning and the people of Trinidad and Tobago have extended to me and my delegation. I wish to record our deep gratitude.

Mr Chairman, I wish also to acknowledge your presence and that of the representative of Prime Minister Hon. James Mitchell at my Inauguration and the many fervent good wishes which my colleagues have transmitted to me following the victory of the PPP/CIVIC at the recent poll. I am delighted to know that such an enormous fund of goodwill has been placed at my government's disposal.

When I was sworn in on October 9, the same date when British troops had overthrown my first government thirty-nine years ago, I said it was a new beginning -- a beginning to attain national, racial/ethnic and working class unity, which we had then achieved.

Today, I can say that for the region, it is also for me a new beginning. It is like home-coming. For it was in 1945, as a youthful trade unionist and political aspirant, that I had adopted the Caribbean Labour Congress resolution at Montego Bay for Federation with dominion status and internal self-government for each unit -- a position which I recorded in 1948 in a debate in the Legislative Council on regional integration, a position for which I was attacked by the plantocracy and vested interests.

Regrettably, the unity achieved in the then British Guiana and in the Caribbean was shattered by the cold war. We were the principal victims. But the region also suffered immensely. Our dreams for national and social liberation evaporated.

We were caught in the cold tug-o-war between the East and West. Ideals, principles and solidarity were often jettisoned for pragmatism and self-interest. We talked

endlessly about unity and independence but in reality we became more and more divided and dependent.

Federation came; Independence came; CARIFTA came; CARICOM came. Also came strategies for development -- the Puerto Rican industrialisation by invitation model; the import-substitution model; the alliance for progress; regional integration; the Caribbean Basin Initiative; the Brady Plan, and so on...

We were examined and over-examined by "wise men". At every step, the people were told that the next step would be better. But betterment never came. And the masses of the people have become disillusioned with independence and the trappings of sovereignty and power.

Today, we are faced with seemingly insurmountable problems -- stagnating economies, indebtedness, declining living standards, unemployment, poverty, crime, a huge import food bill, exodus of skills and, the drug menace -- a paradox of regional hunger in the midst of potential plenty.

While there is talk of globalisation and one global village, let us not forget that our crisis is only part and parcel of a more universal phenomenon - the collapse of the socialist camp; prolonged recession and stagnation in the west; the disintegration of the underdeveloped Third World or the Last World; the development of trading blocs and tendencies towards protectionism and trade wars.

The ending of the cold war has not made life easier for us. In the one hand, we witnessed the collapse of the socialist world because of over-centralisation and concentration, bureaucratic/command type government and management. On the other hand, the West does not hold out any ready-made solutions to our predicament.

The rate of growth in the industrialised world's output in the 1980s is less than half of that of the 1960s, and the rate of world trade has fallen even more. Meanwhile the gap in living standards is growing in every country and between the North and the South. The richest 20 per cent have incomes 150 times greater than that of the poorest 20 per cent. And the prospects for our region are not as bright as they may sometimes seem. And as usual, it is the working people who have to pay the price.

A prospective 1985-1995 study for the Caribbean and Latin America by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) shows that by 1995, poverty will become more widespread, unemployment will increase by nearly 50 percent, and the region's foreign debt will nearly double!

It is necessary to analyse and under the anatomy of

hunger and to seek the root cause of poverty. And certain relevant questions must be asked: Why do we have to import a billion dollars(US) of food into a predominantly agricultural community? Why did the significant earnings from oil not lead to the development of this country and the region? Why can't we have a single air carrier? How can we have Inter-Caribbean trade without a proper shipping service? Why can't we have, poor as we are the short of foreign exchange, joint or shared overseas diplomatic representation and services? Why did Guyana, with all its bountiful natural and human resources, become a liability rather than an asset to the region? Why did we see it fit to proceed in the manner which we did without consulting our Caribbean people? Why?

If we are thinking of development, and I mean not simply economic growth (which I concede is tremendously important) but human development -- then we need answers to these fundamental questions. We have to expand the frontiers of our vision and if needs be, have the courage to reform and/or change what exists. We need quickly to deepen and widen our regional integration movement for overall planning and territorial specialisation and, a basic needs strategy. We need capital investment but this must serve to enhance human development. We need structural adjustment but with a human face.

We now confront the challenges of the 21st century during which those who are left behind will find little or no sympathy from those who prepared themselves and took resolute actions and are in the lead.

As a priority we have to look at what we produce and what we consume. We cannot forever produce what we do not eat and eat what others produce.

(I am not saying we must change our eating habits or that our habits are "colonial". Such exhortations have dangers. I come from a country which almost starved itself to death because of wrong food policies. I must thank our Caribbean brothers and sisters who fed us throughout these years. I know you were somewhat impatient with us at times. Today, however, we are sure all Guyanese will regain the respect they deserve for their struggles and tolerance under trying circumstances).

But what I am speaking of is for us to produce the same commodities we use and eat but which we instead import. We can do it. Just take another look at Guyana and you will see that we can do it. I invite the Caribbean to come to Guyana and invest in such endeavours so that we can reduce our import food bill.

As regards free trade and protectionism, a famous economist once said that Third World countries should be great advocates of free trade for the industrially-developed countries and protectionism for themselves. This indeed was what had



informed the thinking of the American Founding Fathers and the participants of the Boston Tea Party.

Considering that the viability of the North is dependent on the development in the South, as renowned statesmen, Willy Brandt, Olaf Palme and Julius Nyerere, among others had noted, the United States and the other industrially-developed countries should view with sympathy our plight and should make the necessary sacrifices to ensure that we do not drift to the position worse than the "hungry thirties" and become a permanent and explosive liability.

As for ourselves, our primary aim must be the eradication of poverty. We must set our face sternly against corruption and extravagance. We cannot have cadillac-style living with donkey cart economies. Our leaders must set the example of democratic, accountable, clean and lean governance and efficient administration.

Guyana over the past 28 years, with lack of democracy, extravagance, corruption and discrimination, is a good example of how not to do it.

The voice of CARICOM must be stridently heard whenever democracy is threatened. We must establish a Regional Convention and Commission on Human Rights.

We must with concerted efforts approach the United Nations to take necessary action for the restoration of democracy in Haiti and the reinstatement of the democratically-elected President, Bertrand Aristide.

We must ensure that the Caribbean is a Zone of Peace and that our environment, thus our future will be safeguarded. We want no more cold wars and trade wars.

We must ratify and fully honour the UN Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Optional Protocol to those Covenants.

We must actively deepen and widen our integration movement. We have to properly situate ourselves in the wider world and our immediate neighbours. Towards this end, Guyana can be the instrument of closer ties with the countries of South America.

I think there is a lot of sense in considering the possibility of seeking debt relief including write-offs as a collective. Going together holds out prospects for greater gain.

There is no lack of vision among us. We who are close to our people know of their toils and dreams. Their aspirations have been recorded thousands of times, most recently through the



West Indian Commission.

What we need is effective leadership with the will to take difficult political decisions and see that these are implemented with the resoluteness and speed which the situation demands. We have to give more effective powers and resources to our executive arm, the CARICOM Secretariat and the Secretary-General, so that policies are carried out with skill and urgency. We have to work as a collective and consult our respective constituencies so that we march, not ahead or behind, but together with our people.

Mr Chairman, my humble advice to this august collective is this: Time is of the essence. I have come here fully aware of the difficult issues that confront us, and to play our part, however modest, in their resolution. Many of them will be discussed in the days ahead. I know that in many ways are not starting from scratch. Many things have been achieved and for this we are extremely grateful to the many men and women who have made tremendous contributions at all levels to bring us to where we are. I am confident that in future our cumulative efforts for the good of our Caribbean nation are sure to be attended by success.

My predecessor, Mr Desmond Hoyte, was charged with certain mandates. I have taken the opportunity to brief myself on these even though time was limited. I intend to carry on which these matters in a manner which is expected of me.

I bring you greetings from the people of a Free Guyana!

We have a common destiny!

It is time for action!

I THANK YOU.

Office of the President  
Georgetown.  
October 28, 1992.

Copyright © Nadira Jagan-Brancier 2000