

Fellow Guyanese, Friends of Guyana!

On this morning of the 4th Anniversary of Guyana's victory in its long, hard struggle for democracy, I want to share some thoughts with you.

Many, many years ago, when I was just a boy, I saw so many atrocities committed against our parents by the colonials that made my soul sick. I thought then what a sweet thing freedom from this and any type of oppression would be.

I dedicated my life to pursue freedom for all Guyana's oppressed and denigrated people.

The fight was long and hard and is now part of our history. But, make no mistake, it is interwoven very much into our present and our future.

Friends became ambitious and turned out to be enemies who sold out the rights of this nation for their own aggrandizement.

Friends are still becoming enemies in pursuit of the same goals. Ideology is still a ball being played in a game where every new player hits below the belt in efforts to win the soul of Guyana.

It may be true chronologically, I may be justly called an old man - but I am an old man whose visions are as fresh as the day when I first conceived the idea that we, the descendants of slaves and semi-slaves, could become a free people - a people free to pursue our dreams and to grow both in the individual as well as the national sense - and I promise you here today that I will spend whatever years, I mean them to be long years that remain to me in trying to create a situation where the dreams of every Guyanese can be converted to reality - once they pursue those dreams without trampling on the rights and dignity of others.

October 5th marks the true anniversary of the advent of democracy in Guyana.

February 23rd and May 26 gave us independence from the colonials and the right to rule ourselves - but, in truth, the Guyanese people have only experienced real freedom in Guyana since October 5th, 1992.

Granted, we have not attained a Utopia - and we are still battling on terms dictated by others in our struggle to restore prosperity to this dear land of ours.

I hold no grudge against the colonials. Without them there would not have been this

rich blend of people that moulds the Guyanese nation into such a colourful tapestry that exists nowhere else in the world.

What will always anger me is the treachery of our own people who laid waste to our potential for prosperity and financial integrity.

The Guyanese people lost sight of their goals and their high ideals. Family and community life began to crumble. Our youths lost their sense of direction.

Our once beautiful and prosperous country, our once hospitable and caring people, began to crumble.

Standards in environmental care, indecent human behaviour, in pride in our communities, standards in everything began to drop at the rate of the water gushing over Kaieteur Falls.

Criminals took over our country. No rules or laws were observed. Our people were divided onto themselves - looking at each other with suspicion and even hatred.

Today, slowly but surely, Guyanese are regaining their pride in themselves and in their country. They are beginning to dream once more. They have even begun to regain their fighting spirit in pursuit of those dreams.

I would be a fool if I tell you today that we have achieved perfection in this country since my government took office.

Criminals are still giving our country a bad name. Some unpatriotic people are still bent on oppressing the poor. We still have quite a way before our infrastructural works can be completed. Salaries and working conditions, though much improved, are still not what we would like them to be. But we are getting there.

We are seeing the return of the community spirit where everyone comes together to lay pipelines, to clean canals, to help build roads, to help each other in so many different ways.

And I have seen it - overwhelmingly displayed - when floods ravaged parts of this land and the heart of Guyana bared itself for the world to see that it is a clean and healthy and vibrant force that no destructive element can cajole, or coerce, or bribe into hatred anymore.

The love of Guyanese for Guyanese was abundantly poured forth from rich and poor alike and I was moved beyond words to see the caring and sharing become part of the national soul and not part of a politician's rhetoric.

Humanity can only survive if we all recognise our inter-dependence on each other.

At all levels - individually, in the family structure within the community, nationally, regionally, internationally, we all need to understand that there is a crying need for systems where we support one another in the areas where the others fall short.

Indeed, this is the basis of my struggle for a New Global Human Order - where human beings and nations can pool resources to help each other build and grow rather than subjugate and destroy.

Look around you, think for yourselves with clear eyes and minds. Guyana is taking shape into what we ultimately want it to become.

We are still overwhelmingly short of human and financial resources, and lifestyles are a far way from our ideal - but we are getting there - and we are doing it together.

When I visit our different communities people show me proudly what they have done to improve their communities.

Guyanese are no longer a lethargic, disoriented people. October 5th gave them hope - it was truly the dawn of a new era.

Enjoy this day. Share the happiness with everyone. We are on the freedom road walking towards prosperity. No one can divert us from this path but our own selves because today we have truly become "masters of our fate and captains of our soul."