

All Nations Share A Common Home

Following is the full text of an address by Dr Cheddi Jagan, President of the Republic of Guyana to the General Conference of UNESCO, delivered on Thursday, November 16, 1995:

Guyana feels honoured to have been invited to address the General Assembly of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, in this historic year when UNESCO celebrates the 50th anniversary of its founding.

Mr President, let me offer to UNESCO warmest congratulations on the achievement of a most significant milestone in its interesting history.

I am reminded that UNESCO was founded as one of the Specialised Agencies of the United Nations, in the wake of the ravages of World War II, with the intention of making possible what was envisaged in the Charter of the United Nations. That vision was: "To achieve international co-operation involving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character."

Mr President, the aims and objectives of UNESCO are indeed noble and visionary. What is more: they are achievable. We must believe that they are achievable in the foreseeable future.

Today, with the Cold War behind us, it does seem as if the establishment of a new global human order on the basis of mutual respect, equal opportunities of all peoples, democracy and sustainable human development, is within the reach of the world's peoples.

But first, there must be the resolve on the part of nations and the leaders of the comity of nations to bridge the gap that has developed between the richest and the poorest countries. You must be aware, Mr President, that the divisions between the rich and the poor in the industrialised North and in the impoverished South, as well as the disparities in development between the North and South, have been widening considerably since the early 1980s. The stark reality is that poverty is increasing in a world which has the resources to eradicate this scourge.

The consequences of poverty are unemployment, urban disorder and decay, increase in crime, ill-health, and, in some parts social fragmentation accompanied by racism and ethnic strife. In the South, in addition to illiteracy, disease and degradation, we have environmental degradation, emigration, the illegal traffic and abuse of narcotic drugs, in an atmosphere pervaded by despair. Nor are these things peculiar to the South.

In any country, and, indeed in the Caribbean and Latin America, our persistent poverty has stemmed from a multiplicity of sources including the bane of colonialism and the pursuit of developmental models that were seriously flawed. These, in turn, have left us with the dubious legacy of an onerous external indebtedness which robs us of the capital needed for growth and the grave economic crisis which has, for more than a decade, exacerbated the already impoverished condition of our underprivileged and marginalised classes.

The single most critical barrier to human development in my part of the world is the External Debt. In the Anglophone Caribbean - a community of some seven million persons - the Debt stands at some US\$10 billion. My country Guyana, is probably the worst of these externally-indebted countries, with some 50 per cent of government revenues being consumed to service debt repayments. Like those developing countries which together have an External Debt of some \$1.2 trillion, we need, debt forgiveness.

Mr President, I agree with the Carnegie Commission on Science, Technology and Government that: "Now is a rare moment of historic opportunity to promote peace, liberty, and global prosperity through co-operation. It is a time for creativity comparable to the period immediately after World War II, and the chances of success are even greater."

In seeking to prepare for the twenty-first century and to meet the challenges ahead, my government wholly endorses the main objectives of UNESCO's Medium Term Strategy, as has been devised for the years 1996-2001. Mr President, human development must be comprehensive if society's welfare is to be assured. Democracy can only prosper in an environment of stable economic, social and ecological development.

Poverty atrophies the vigour and initiative of the individual and deprives the society of incalculable human resources. If left unattended, the expansion of poverty, with hunger, will undermine the fabric and security of the democratic state.

A development strategy for the eradication of poverty must be global and positive, not South against North and North against South but the North and South in interdependence, co-operation and partnership. In this regard, the call for 1996 to be designated the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty could not have been more timely.

We must however, be mindful of past difficulties to deal effectively with such fundamental problems. A New World Economic Order, proposed in the mid-1970s, after the first "oil crisis" did not achieve its desired goals. The war against poverty was not won. After the Gulf War, President George Bush declared a New World Order but within a short period of time, order has given way to disorder. What is urgently needed is a New Global Human Order.

While all our countries are individually searching for more aggressive and innovative ways to cope with the growing interdependence, globalisation and liberalisation taking place, there are fundamental issues which can be addressed only by new global initiatives. These issues include:

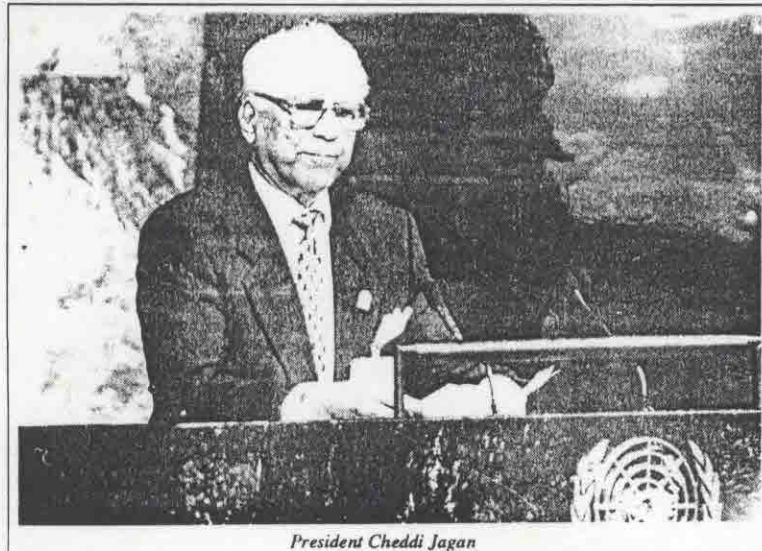
** Unacceptably high unemployment and underemployment even in the period of economic growth, referred to as 'jobless growth'

and 'jobless recovery';

** Budget and balanced-of-payments deficit problems of the majority of the OECD states, leading to the dismantling of the welfare state and cuts in

** administration of the Development Fund by a reformed and democratised United Nations for allocation without undue conditions to the developed and developing countries. With such assistance,

peaked to US\$383 billion. The UNDP's Human Development Report 1994 has proposed that all countries should agree to reduce military expenditures in the 1990s by at least 3% a year. By the year



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welfare benefits in the North, and cuts in aid to the South - the phenomenon now deemed 'donors fatigue' or 'aid fatigue';

** Social, including family, disintegration;

** Increase in refugees due to strife and convulsions based on race, ethnicity, tribe, culture and religion;

** The grave danger from the drug menace, money laundering, terrorism, crime, etc;

** Demagoguery and confusion, leading politically to the rise of the extreme right, the religious right, national chauvinists, xenophobists and neo-fascists; and socially, to racism and racist attacks.

Cumulatively, these factors pose a grave threat to international and individual security and peace. As an adjunct to the UN Agenda for Development a New Global Human Order must have as its goal human development: meeting the basic needs of the people and attaining cultural upliftment and a clean and safe environment.

To attain a New Global Human Order, it is necessary to establish a sound and just system of global governance based on:

** a genuine North/South partnership and interdependence for mutual benefit;

** a democratic culture of representative, consultative and participatory democracy and a lean and clean administration;

** a development strategy free from external domination and diktat;

** application of science and technology for increased production and productivity;

** a global development fund, embracing cuts in military expenditure - the peace dividend - which with only a 3 per cent saving can realise \$460 billion in the 1995-2000 five-year period; pollution taxes; a tax of 0.5 per cent on speculative capital exchange movements, which can yield \$1,500M annually;

a Works Programme can be carried out as under the Roosevelt New Deal administration at the time of the Depression of the 1930s, and to create more opportunities for employment with a shorter work-week, without loss of pay. For the developing countries, aid can be given in the form of debt cancellation, long-term rescheduling of debt, soft loans and grants.

Additionally, we are anxious for the implementation of the 20:20 compact suggested by the United Nations Development Programme. Its Human Development Report 1994 points a way forward that is highly commendable.

The UNDP proposal is that developing countries, as well as donor-countries, should earmark 20 per cent of their budgets for priority human development concerns. The financing of this compact will demand a radical rethinking and reshaping of priorities in existing expenditures in the developing countries in the South as well as in the industrialised donor countries of the North.

When my government assumed office in October, 1992, the percentage of the budget allocated to the social sector was less than 8%, now, it is in the region of about 16%. In another two years, we should be climbing towards 20%. Specifically, in relation to education, our government has placed special emphasis on education to prepare Guyana to meet our human resource needs as we progress towards modernisation. The figures speak for themselves.

In 1991, spending on education as a percentage of the national budget was 1.9%; in 1993, the PPP/Civic budget expenditure for education was 6.2%; in 1994, that increased to 7.3%, in actual figures about 720 million dollars (Guyana). This year we will spend on education about 1.35 billion dollars (Guyana), and 89% increase over last year's expenditure. And next year, we plan to increase that amount even more significantly.

If commitment of the 20:20 compact is desirable, urgent action to utilise the gains occasioned by the cessation of the Cold War is required. By 1987, military expenditure had

2000, this exercise in demilitarisation would yield a "peace dividend" of US\$1.5 trillion.

All this, in turn, would mean more money for projects and programmes related to UNESCO's mandate - Education, Science and Culture.

We are reminded of that mandate, Mr President, in the preamble to UNESCO's Constitution which states: "The wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all nations must fulfil in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern."

In relations to Education, we have subscribed to the World Declaration on Education for All articulated at Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. According to that Declaration, basic education is the fundamental right of all the world's peoples. It is indispensable for achieving higher levels of quality in the upper levels of the educational system, in the advancement of scientific and technical capacity, and in the comprehensive, sustainable human development of any country.

We believe that the objective of education must be to prepare children for life in a rapidly changing and complex social milieu, and in an environment that will be heavily influenced by scientific and technological developments. Education must help to inculcate in children knowledge, skills, discipline, values, adaptability, and the capacity to think critically and act creatively in the interest of their personal growth and development, as well as that of their society and nation.

We note with interest that the war on global illiteracy is being slowly won, although we are concerned that in many countries, mainly in the South, in large sections of populations, mainly among females, illiteracy with its attendant ills, is still pervasive. We are concerned that in some countries, again in the South, so many girls do not have access to basic education.

We have taken careful note of the efforts of UNESCO to focus increasingly on new and socially just models of development

through which poorer nations can enter the age of modernisation without suffering the structural defects as others have experienced. We are supportive of new approaches in governance where the educational and cultural development and the involvement of women and the younger generations is assured.

My country is rich in natural resources. For the ecologically-responsible exploitation of these resources in the national interest, we believe that education of a scientific and technological orientation is vitally necessary. Increasingly, we believe, global education will have to have this orientation; as it will have to capitalise on the development in communications technologies to make available information and an expanding body of knowledge accessible to the world's peoples through the distance mode of education.

Guyana is contributing to the education on sustainable utilisation of natural resources.

The country has extensive forest cover and there is an urgent need for the improvement of the technological capability for monitoring the utilisation of these resources. Sensitive to the need for developing global models for sustainable development of tropical forests, Guyana has donated nearly one million acres of virgin Amazon forest for the development of an international programme for sustainable forest management. The project, known as the Iwokrama rainforest Programme, is being conducted by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the UNDP. We invite the international community to participate in this project.

Mr President, permit me to express my country's profound gratitude to UNESCO for the kind assistance to Guyana. My Government is highly appreciative of the agreement by UNESCO to institute a Chair on Sustainable Development at the University of Guyana. May I also express sincere gratitude to the Director General for his kind spontaneous gesture in contributing financially to the Guyana Environmental Protection Agency for the training and employment of a task force of 'Guyanese' to assist in the policing of mining and logging operations.

Mr President, the globalisation and liberalisation of the world's economies and the shrinkage of that globe made possible by telecommunications technologies, make the question of national cultural identities urgent and pertinent. In many countries, the quest will have to be to find national balance in the face of growing internationalism and transnationalism. And, at the same time, to find a national cultural focus across racial and ethnic divides. All of this will have to happen with a consciousness that all the nations share a common earth home, with the concomitant responsibility of ensuring that its welfare is not jeopardised by ecologically and environmentally irresponsible exploitation.

UNESCO's mandate makes it imperative that this body assist the nations in their project of cultural development.

Thank you very much