



S T A T E M E N T

BY

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OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA

IN

THE PLENARY DEBATE OF THE
48TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

ON

AGENDA ITEM: 20

FORTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL
DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

10 DECEMBER 1993

Please check against delivery

PERMANENT MISSION OF GUYANA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Mr. President,

We are today commemorating the proclamation of the 10th December 1948 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which remains a beacon for the international community, lighting the path towards human rights and dignity for all.

That declaration was born out of the devastation and slaughter resulting from the systematic violation of human rights and many factors arising out of World War II. It chronicled the concern for man's inhumanity to man and was intended in large measure to enshrine the respect for and the protection of the rights of individuals, including organised groups, within the context of inter-state relations.

Those who fashioned the document had witnessed the extermination of entire peoples in pursuit of twisted racist ideologies. Like those who drafted the United Nations Charter three years earlier, they were resolved to put an end to such atrocities. They knew that human rights and peace were indivisible and that in order to safeguard these rights it was essential to have universal principles of lasting validity.

Yet four decades and five years later, violations of human rights continue to weigh upon the conscience of humanity and the United Nations. Day after day, without a ceasing moment, in many parts of the world, flagrant abuses are committed. The record of human rights in our time is besmirched by summary executions, arbitrary arrests, disappearances and torture, the killing of defenceless demonstrators and detention for reasons of belief or conscience.

Guyana cannot remain indifferent to such outrages against the most fundamental concepts of justice and human dignity. These are attacks against each and every one of us. We cannot waver in our solidarity nor give way in our struggle to ensure the freedom and dignity of our fellow man.

Mr. President. Human rights can only be guaranteed when they help shape and are interwoven into the legal fabric and political practices of our society.

Guyana is proud since the election of its new government in October 1992 to have affirmed by its quick action, its unswerving commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights. We have unhesitatingly acceded to the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and we have also made the relevant declaration under Article 41. Of signal importance, is that these steps afford the Human Rights Committee to receive and consider communications from individuals and states ^{in relation to} ~~claiming to be affected by~~ violations of any rights set forth in the Covenant.

This is significant for my delegation, as in the past, we in Guyana for twenty-eight years have had our own share of bitter experiences with the denial of the fundamental right of free and fair elections and a free press; we had been subjected to racial and political discrimination, assassinations, the loss of property and the mass exodus of Guyanese to foreign lands.

Fortunately these experiences are now a thing of the past.

As we look to the needs of the future, we have established an inter-agency committee inclusive of non-governmental organisations to compile information for the preparation of human rights reports under the various United Nations Conventions. Guyana has acted to protect the human rights of its citizens.

It is our goal to create a universal culture of human rights which guarantees the dignity of all.

In our hour of need to strengthen human rights worldwide, non-governmental organisations also played a critical role, creating awareness and providing information. They continue to be our true allies in the universal struggle for human rights. The dignity and well-being of mankind are the very essence of this direction leading to peaceful co-existence among the peoples of the world.

Mr. President. We have read and wish to commend the distinguished Secretary General for his report on the Forty-Fifth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Guyana is especially concerned that the human rights of officials of the United Nations Secretariat and accompanying representatives, should be afforded special security protection in the field for the effective and proper performance of their responsibilities. Of equal importance is the need to safeguard and uphold the Human Rights of the people in those countries which are being visited.

The work done by the United Nations for the last forty-eight years in its constant vigilance has been vital for the protection of the human rights of the peoples of the world. We commend the United Nations for its achievements so far. By its action this organisation has saved the lives and enhanced the well-being of countless numbers of people who for no fault of their own were denied the basic rights due to all those living on this planet.

For us the Vienna Conference on Human Rights which was held in June this year has charted a commendable new course. In seeking to strengthen old mechanisms and institute new ones for the protection of human rights, it has addressed the censorship of the transgressor of those rights. Its activation can provide immediate guidance in the coming years as well as new vision for global action for the next century.

The most significant outcome of the Vienna Conference is the clear signal which the United Nations has sent. The issue of human rights has now been moved to the forefront of its agenda. Denial of human rights distracts from harmonious nation building, witnessed in fresh upsurges of post Cold War conflicts. It lends proof that human rights must be the overarching linkage between democracy and development. Guyana therefore welcomes the decision to establish a High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Mr. President. The rights of many continue to be trampled by relentless genocide while the rape of innocent women and "ethnic cleansing" haunts Bosnia and Herzegovina; Angolans bleed from a civil

war perpetrated by those who never learned to respect the democratic will as expressed through the ballot box; Somalia's people continue to suffer while Haiti still writhes in the agony of organised institutionalised tyranny.

Yet, it is in their domestic human rights standards that some reveal their truest colors. Every platitude, every resolution, every noble sentiment is used to camouflage home grown tyrannies.

The former President of the Philippines Mrs. Corazon Aquino summed up the double standard best when she said:

"It has become convenient for some to invoke their sovereignty when their human rights' records are criticised, but we are members of the human race first and individual sovereignty is by definition without geographical boundaries. For a nation to invoke its sovereignty while depriving its citizens of theirs is the worst kind of tyranny."

International vigilance on these issues can still prove to be the most appropriate methods for assuring the fulfillment of obligation which the state should assume for the protection of the individual.

Mr. President. When human rights are denied to anyone, anywhere in the world, it should become United Nations business. When it is so close to us it assumes special significance.

Because of Guyana's geographical proximity, denial of human

rights in the Caribbean are of much importance to us. Since the **coup d'etat** by the military forces against the democratically elected government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti, Guyana and Caribbean countries have been outspoken in addressing the issue of the rape of democracy and the denial of fundamental human rights in our sister Caribbean country.

Guyana is committed to the return of the democratically elected Government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. We remain concerned at the suffering of the Haitian people at the hands of the Haitian military. These actions of the Haitian military run counter to the spirit of democracy sweeping the region and should cease.

Mr. President. The universal adherence to the highest ideals of human rights cannot have its moorings in resolutions and conventions alone. We are convinced that noble sentiments will find fertile ground when effective action is taken to eradicate the meanness of spirit, racial bigotry, ethnic intolerance and the scourge of poverty.

We know that, in the final analysis, if the United Nations is to mean anything it is in its dedication to the simple idea that among the teeming millions of the world each man, each woman and each child has a unique value, and that each individual's very humanity gives an inalienable right to freedom and dignity.

It is in the hearts of men that the genesis of human rights has to begin. Its starting point has to be internalisation of the virtues of accommodation and tolerance, an acceptance of the rights of others to

their chosen way of life and a recognition that accommodation, not insularity, is the best guarantee of our survival as nations and human communities.

Guyana knows that the forty-fifth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights is occurring at an important time, especially when the President of Guyana Dr. Cheddi Jagan, recently promulgated at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Summit in Cyprus, his vision of the New Humanitarian International Order. The particular issue of human rights formed the corner stone of the subject and featured prominently as an important matter which was discussed.

Today, more than ever, we must reaffirm the truths as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for the dignity and freedom of humanity. As we prepare to meet its challenges, we shall give genuine attention and unceasing devotion to human rights in order to attain our objectives of a better world.

Our warmest congratulations to the recipients of the 45th N. Human Rights Prizes -

I thank you, Mr. President.

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