

Poverty and Its Elimination

by Janet Jagan

Poverty is, of course, and unfortunately, a global problem. Practically all countries of this world we live in, suffer from the scourge of poverty, even the so-called developed countries.

In Guyana, the PPP/Civic government, despite violent and destructive opposition forces, has significantly reduced poverty since it took office some eight years ago.

The PPP/Civic government met horrific poverty, manifested in a high rate of infant and maternal deaths, serious malnutrition in children, horrendous housing conditions and, an inevitable expectation, widespread hopelessness. All this has changed; not to say that poverty has been abolished, but poverty has been substantially reduced.

The housing programme, for example, which no longer existed during the PNC years, began with the election of Cheddi Jagan as President.

This programme has helped alleviate poverty by providing the means for thousands to have a decent roof over their heads. The tens of thousands who squatted and lived in these slums without water or sanitation or roads now live in regularized housing areas.

The housing programme plus improved medical services, massive extension of pure water supplies and safe and clean schools have also contributed to improved conditions of life for the poor. The death rates for infants and mothers, as well as malnutrition, have been drastically reduced.

These improvements, along with a specific poverty amelioration programme by the government, have all contributed to the lowering of the level of poverty in Guyana. And all of this, despite the efforts of a ruthless opposition, was determined to stop the elected government from governing.

In his various writings on his concept of a New Global Human Order, the late President of Guyana, Cheddi Jagan, called for a reversal of the gap between the developed nations and the developing ones, between the richest and the poorest. He expressed alarm at the incidence of poverty across the globe. "Poverty", he said, "atrophies the sign and initiative of the individual and deprives the society of incalculable human resources at a critical time. Its elimination will enrich our community and release a harvest of energy and skills. If left unattended, the expansion of poverty with hunger, will undermine the fabric and security of the democratic state."

His aim was for a new global order to develop international co-operation in the humanitarian field. And his dreams are coming true as the United Nations recently adapted a resolution for the Promotion of a New Global Human Order to deal with the challenges of development and poverty eradication and to arrest the growing disparities among and within countries.

While in Guyana, we are conscious of the problems of poverty and the need to reduce further the degree of poverty, we are not alone. Most nations face the same problems.

In Canada, for example, considered to be a prosperous and wealthy nation, the Mecca of many Guyanese desiring to live abroad, poverty is a grave problem. The Toronto Star, last month reported: "In more than 100 neighbourhoods in Toronto, the poverty rate is above 30% In some areas of Toronto the poverty rate climbs to more than 60%".

Those who are poor are getting poorer, the number of poor is growing and the depth of poverty is growing. These latter remarks are reported by the president of a group known as the 'United Way.'

The article in the Toronto Star reports that Toronto's manufacturing sector dropped from 23.7% in 1987 and 1995, thus throwing large numbers out of work.

"Poverty has grown by 67% in Toronto since 1991," states the Toronto Star. "One in every four people and one in every three children live below the poverty line - more than twice the provincial average."

Other information in the lengthy newspaper report rates the severe housing shortages in Toronto and "the highest proportion of substandard housing".

From these quotations about a country most Guyanese consider to be a prosperous one, we can see that poverty hits a section of people everywhere.

That is why a global approach, as recommended by Cheddi Jagan is necessary to tackle this serious problem of poverty, which millions of people living miserable and unhappy lives.

In Guyana, we must strive to eliminate all obstacles to the reduction and final elimination of poverty.