

Inaugural Address

by

Her Excellency Mrs Janet Jagan,
President of the Republic of Guyana.

at the

Presidential Investiture Ceremony,
State House, Georgetown, Guyana,
December 19, 1997:

Chancellor of the Judiciary,

Former President Mr Samuel Hinds and Members of
his outgoing Cabinet,

Excellencies & Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Heads of the Disciplined Services,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Fellow Guyanese,

Today is the beginning of yet another important day in the history of Guyana.

Our people have made our country proud once again in the eyes of the Caribbean and the world.

We have voted in free and fair elections. These elections have been declared as being most transparent. Guyanese and overseas observers have readily attested to the fairness of these elections.

The Chairman of the Elections Commission has made an official declaration on the outcome of the elections and we have to accept this as the expressed will of the electorate. This now forms part of our democratic culture, which was restored in 1992.

In all elections there are winners and losers. Monday's elections were no different, as far as the contesting parties are concerned.

However, in addition to this, the exemplary way in which voters went about their business on December 15 has also assured that we, all the people of Guyana, are the winners.

We are all winners -- never mind which party we voted for

or against -- because it is our country that has won the acclamation of the world for having assured our complete return to the democratic fold. We -- all of us -- have therefore passed the test with flying colours.

Fellow Guyanese,

The elections are over and we have a country to continue to build.

This challenging task is ours. It is not a task for any single party, any one section of the society or any one social interest group. In the words of our late distinguished poet Martin Carter: "All are involved."

We cannot escape this challenge of nation building by moving separately. We have to build together and benefit together. Indeed, we must not allow ourselves to fail in that task. We are all in this together. This is my plea, this is my commitment.

My Dear Fellow Guyanese,

The problems facing our country are well known to all.

The government led by my husband, the late President Dr Cheddi Jagan, inherited these problems when his government took office five years ago.

During the past five years, we worked hard to pay our debts even while increasing expenditure on social programmes; restoring economic buoyancy while increasing the pace of social and infrastructural development; taking care of our people while contributing to the search for solutions to the problems of our world.

President Jagan -- who entered parliament for the first time fifty years ago this week -- launched an appeal for a New Global Human Order that has won the support and backing of governments, institutions and individuals throughout the world.

We achieved very much during these past five years, which is why Guyanese of all races and classes have responded positively to our plea for a second term.

Our victory was possible because of the multi-racial support, as well as greater unity and co-operation in Guyana.

This does not mean that I am unaware of the serious challenge of social cohesion that we still face; of the need to inspire greater national efforts; and of the need to destroy the monster of racial insecurity.

Mistakes have been made in the past by parties and governments. I do not seek to absolve my own party and the PPP/Civic administration of blame. But now is not the time to harp on the errors and suffering of the past.

We must look forward to the future with confidence and a determination to resist the errors of the past; to be inclusive instead of exclusive; to reach out to all, irrespective of different political concepts and persuasions.

We have a nation to build. Let us get on with the task.

Dear Fellow Guyanese,

The results of the elections indicate that our nation has spoken across traditionally divisive lines. This is very significant.

It therefore requires that we take note of this reality and allow it to influence our decisions.

It also means that this reality will make us in government strive more to be more all-inclusive.

It has never been our policy as a party or government to discriminate. Therefore, let me give you the assurance here and now, today, that we will never discriminate against anyone or any community.

We are a government elected by the Guyanese people to serve all the people.

My Dear Fellow Guyanese,

The call I make today for national renewal should not fall on deaf ears.

The local, regional and international situation today demands that we in the Caribbean -- in the words of one Caribbean leader, "either swim together or sink together."

The same applies to our nation. If we as a people don't swim together, we can sink together -- and our nation with us.

Let me take this opportunity, not only to re-emphasise the need for national unity in the national interest, but also to re-assure the governments and people of the Caribbean Community of my government's continuing commitment to advance the process of regional economic and political integration.

The government I will lead will continue to be very much aware of the vital role Guyana can play in the fulfilment of the policies and programmes of Caricom.

My government will continue to stand ready to share our

experience and our resources to enhance the welfare of all the people of the Caribbean region.

Finally, My Dear Fellow Guyanese,

On a personal note, let me say that I intend to be a President of all the people.

I regard this as a serious job that will afford me an opportunity to serve the people of Guyana -- as I have been doing for many years -- at a higher level.

I pledge to continue to do my best as President of the Republic.

I also pledge that my government will work with all who are prepared to play their positive part in continuing to rebuild our country, to consolidate our democratic gains and to unite our people for the national task of walking together, side by side, hand in hand, towards the dawn of the 21st century.

Long Live the people of Guyana.