The UNESCO Gandhi Peace Prize:
A Proud Moment
For Guyana

by H.Z. Ally

At a simple, but impressive ceremony in the Promenade
Garden, Prime Minister Janet Jagan received the UNESCO
Gandhi Gold Medal, thus be-
coming the first woman, and
the first Caribbean citizen to
receive this prestigious award
since the medal came into be-
ing in 1994.

The award, UNESCO's
highest accolade for peace and
democracy was officially
handed over to Mrs Jagan by
President Sam Hinds on Au-
gust 5, 1997, in close proxim-
ity to the statue of one of the
greatest men that ever lived -
Mohandas Karamchand Gan-
dhi, after whom the award was
named.

The award is a fitting trib-
ute to someone who has virtu-
ally dedicated her entire life to
the cause of democracy, peace and freedom of the
Guyanese nation and for that
matter for humanity as a
whole. It is, I believe, super-
fluous of me to highlight the
numerous contributions Mrs
Jagan has made over the deca-
dades in the quest for a better
society. Suffice it to say that
she is today the longest serv-
ing member of parliament in
Guyana, and if I am not mis-
taken, in the entire English-
speaking Caribbean.

The conferment of the award
must be a proud moment not
only for Mrs Jagan but for the
total Guyanese nation. Out
of characteristic modesty the
Prime Minister attributed the
award to all those Guyanese
who gave of themselves to-
ward the cause of freedom and
democracy, in particular her
late husband Dr Cheddi Jagan,
whose involvement in the
struggle was inextricably
linked to her own preeminence
in the local and international
areas.

The award comes at a very
propitious moment in the life
of the Guyanese people when
there is a restoration of confi-
dence and hope after over two
decades of despair and hope-
lessness. The PNC regime
which had foisted itself on the
nation, by illegal means, had
during its period of nefarious
misrule, instituted a reign of
terror and institutionalised
fear never seen before since the
days of slavery and indentureship. The peace and
tranquillity so dearly cher-
ished by the Guyanese people
were blatantly trampled upon
by the PNC regime, all in an
effort to consolidate and per-
petuate minority and dictato-
rial rule.

Peace is not simply the
absence of war. It refers to a
state of being in which there is
freedom from fear and the free-
dom to make choices, both
from a political and an eco-
nomic standpoint. There can
be no real peace in an environ-
ment of degradation and want,
where children are malnour-
sished, many dying prematurely
for want of food and medi-
cine. Can one really speak of
peace when children were
deprived of an opportunity for
learning as in fact transpired
during the past PNC adminis-
tration?

True enough, the situation
in some parts of the world are
immeasurably worse. One
only has to reflect on the geno-
cidal slaughter of innocent
lives, in countries such as
Rwanda, Zaire, Bosnia and so
on to appreciate the true mean-
ing of poverty and depriva-
tion. Most of these calamities
are the result of human greed
and lust for power even at the
cost of human lives.

It is to the credit of personal-
ities such as Mahatma Gan-
dhi, Martin Luther King, Nel-
son Mandela, our own Cheddi
Jagan and Mrs Jagan that the
world in which we live today
is a much safer place. There is
a noticeable relaxation of
world tension, especially fol-
lowing the end of the Cold
War. The arms race which con-
sumed an inordinate quantum
of global resources is now
behind us.

Our late President and our
Prime Minister have both
played important roles in the
promotion and preservation of
world peace. Through the
Guyana Peace Council, Guyanese were mobilised and
sensitised as to the dangers of
war. Our late President played
a leading role in the World
Peace Council of which he was
a member of the Executive
body.

There are however still
horbors of tension for which a
resolution must be found if
only to prevent the continued
wanton slaughter of innocent
lives. The situation in Pales-
tine still remains tense. Tribal
conflicts in parts of the Afri-
can continent must be brought
under control. There is need
for conflict management tech-
niques by the United Nations
which need to be much more
proactive and preventive
rather than being reactive and
interventionist.

We in Guyana are blessed
with a society that is in the
main cohesive and peaceful.
Let us continue to keep it this
way. The PPP/Civic govern-
ment is fully committed to the
creation of a democratic, just
and tolerant society in which
there is political and economic
peace for all, regardless of
political or ethnic considera-
ations.

The conferment of the
UNESCO peace prize on Prime Minister Janet Jagan is
testimony to the fact that our
efforts as a nation have not
gone unrecognized. May I take
this opportunity to congratu-
late Mrs Janet Jagan on this
sterling achievement. I have
no doubt that there is more to
come as we strive as a people
to create a just and better soci-
ety.

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