

Address to the World Food Summit in Rome by His Excellency Cheddi Jagan,  
President of the Republic of Guyana

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Presented by President Cheddi Jagan

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Heads of State and Government, Secretary-General of the World Food Summit, Distinguished Delegates.

The 1974 World Food Conference proclaimed that “every man, woman and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition in order to develop their physical and mental faculties.” This was to have been achieved “within a decade,” but we have failed, despite improvements in science and technology. Today, hunger, poverty and social disintegration stalk the globe, not just in the South but also in the North, and the gap in living standards between the North and the South continues to widen.

As we approach a new century, the South is faced with aid cuts and the North with “jobless recovery” and “jobless growth.” Consequently, we need a new global partnership for sustainable human development, good governance and a development strategy, which will provide the world with sufficient food to have such food resources equitably distributed. Poverty is the root cause of food insecurity and only its rapid and permanent elimination will produce improved economic and social relations for a more equitable world order.

In an increasingly globalised environment of disorder and confusion, there is little room for concepts of development which place prime emphasis on the promotion of narrow national interests above the common good of humanity. A stop must be put to an unjust global economic order; an order which robs the South of about US\$500 billion annually in unjust, non-equivalent international trade; an order where the poor South finances the North with South to North capital outflows of US\$418 billion in the 1982-90 period as debt payments - a sum equal to six Marshall Plans which provided aid for the rehabilitation of Europe after World War II. Those payments did not even include outflows from royalties, dividends, repatriated profits and underpaid raw material.

In this decade, for the eradication of poverty, we need an Agenda for Development, with the right of nations to development, and, as His Holiness the Pope said, the right of the individual to food. Democracy must mean not just civil and political rights, but also economic, social and cultural rights. We must eliminate underdevelopment, which threatens to undermine the very foundations of the global economy and society.

A new North/South partnership must be fashioned in the search for more positive and innovative ways to cope with the effects of globalisation and liberalization, which are marginalizing millions of people and even many nations.

Many are of the opinion that these economic strategies constitute a panacea for development, but I stand here to say that the facts do not support such a view. The distinguished Gustave Speth, Head of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), exposed the myth that privatisation, free markets and foreign direct investment will obviate the need for development aid. If the real decline in aid to poor countries is allowed to continue, he says, the world will pay dearly through the tragic consequences of joblessness, environmental decay, conflict and violence.

During the 1980-1993 period, total official development assistance to agriculture fell by 55%. But there was also a reduction in the share of such assistance to such key areas as land and water development, research, rural development initiatives and agricultural extension. In this regard, I applaud the new emphasis by the World Bank on more development aid to the agricultural sector.

To stave off the danger of marginalisation and to prevent being submerged by the rising tide of free trade, my Government at the 1994 Miami Summit, which approved a Free Trade Area of the Americas by the year 2005, proposed the establishment of a Regional Development (Integration) Fund, debt relief and a corps of development specialists/volunteers. Regrettably, the view is generally expressed that these realistic proposals would not materialize.

Poor Third World countries, such as Guyana, recognize the symbiotic links between the environment, economic development, food security and human existence. We cannot therefore expect to eliminate starvation and food insecurity while so many countries continue to be ensnared in debt and thus lack the means to provide the basic services, which underpin economic development. For example, the attraction of foreign direct investment is dependent on civil peace, a basic productive infrastructure and a healthy and educated population. Yet my country has spent a total of US\$308 million on foreign debt servicing over the last three years - an amount which was greater than all our capital inflows, a sum which was US\$200 million greater than if debt payments did not exceed 10% of export income. As is the case in so many other debt-distressed countries, this situation has prevented my Government from channelling much-needed resources into such critical areas as poverty alleviation, rural development, agriculture, health, education and law enforcement. The Pope's call for a solution on moral and ethical grounds to Third World debt must be heeded.

My friends, we need a scientific, realistic and people-centred development strategy. This is why I have advocated the need for the development of a New Global Human Order, premised on sustainable economic development, equity, social and ecological justice, and based on the creation of a separate Global Development Fund for assistance to both the North and the South. We must put in place a system whose objectives will be to invest directly in the poor, to seek out opportunities for entrepreneurship among the marginalized, and to provide the social and infrastructural services which would enable the poor to become self-reliant and productive members of the global community. Specifically, I wish to advocate the following:

1. a limit on debt repayment equivalent to not more than 10% of export earnings;
2. the creation of regional integration funds to enable small economies to withstand the effects of globalisation, liberalization and the formation of regional trading blocs. These funds would be used to invest in physical and social infrastructure, research and development initiatives designed to yield productivity gains among the poor, and to improve the competitiveness of under-developed economies;
3. the time span for the realization of a Free Trade Area of the Americas to be the same as in the Asia-Pacific Economic Community (APC) - the year 2010 for the more developed countries and 2020 for the less developed countries;
4. a new and enhanced Lome Convention for the Third World;

5. a refashioned Alliance for Progress for Latin America and the Caribbean;
6. a democratic, lean and clean government; and
7. the earmarking of 20% of budgets by developing countries, and aid donors providing an equivalent 20% under the UNDP 20/20 Social Compact, for priority human development concerns.

Why should 40% of farm households in Guyana have five acres and less - with 58% of them being below the poverty line - in the context of a small population in a relatively large country with an abundance of water resources and arable land mainly in the state sector? Each farmer should and can have at least 100 acres, if not more, but the land must be drained and irrigated and protected from rising sea levels. Our farmers have demonstrated, during the past four years of my government, their capacity to increase agricultural production, but being so poor, they cannot be expected, under cost-recovery programs, to meet the huge expenditures on drainage and irrigation and sea and river defences. Guyana needs debt relief, grants and soft loans, not only to become food self-sufficient but also to feed the food-deficient Latin American and Caribbean regions and the world.

This Summit affords us the opportunity to accelerate the process of addressing the situation of the poor and the powerless. As we leave Rome, we should be buoyed in the confidence that we have really charted the course towards greater food security. As I had cause to state at the G-7 Sectoral Meeting on Agriculture in Guyana early this year, if the rich and poor countries do not act together to overcome the problems of poverty, and the attendant maladies of hunger and environmental degradation, there will be no secure peace.

If, therefore, there is cause to meet again in another twenty years, it should be to celebrate the achievements of this Summit and the full implementation of its Plan of Action.

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