

New Global Human Order aims to reduce poverty

by Janet Jagan

Guyana's poverty level is, according to statistics, below 35%. This is a considerable drop from the 76% of the country's poverty level when the PPP/C took office in 1992.

The figure is also lower than the 41% level for Latin America and the Caribbean reported a few days ago in an article by Guyana's Ambassador to Venezuela, Dr Odeen Ishmael.

In his article, Dr Ishmael reported that the December 2005 report of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) stated that the number of poor people in the Latin America and the Caribbean region declined by 13 million since 2003. But even though the numbers have dropped, more than 41% of the region's population continues to live in poverty, with 88 million (or nearly 17%) existing in conditions of extreme pov-

erty."

Dr Ishmael wrote further: "These figures are grave reminders that while percentage points on poverty have fallen, the real numbers of poor people continue to be very high. ECLAC stated that the region met 51% of the first Millennium goal of halving the 1990 extreme poverty levels by the year 2015. However, since 15 of the 25 years have already elapsed, the region, according to the UN agency, is slipping away from the target."

It doesn't make us feel any better to know that poverty is prevalent all over the world. Africa is probably hit the hardest. But even in wealthy USA, poverty is a problem. The rest of the world was astonished to see stark poverty, especially in the minority Black population, when Hurricane Katrina

struck several American southern states last year.

But poverty in the USA has been growing, with some 1.3 million sliding into poverty in 2003 as the ranks of the poor rose 4% to 35.9 million, with children and Blacks worse off than most. According to the US Census Bureau, the percentage of the US population living in poverty rose for the third straight year to 12.5% — the highest since 1998. And in rich America, the richest one percent of the population holds 40% of the nation's wealth. Compare this figure with Britain where one percent of the population holds 18% of the nation's wealth (Time Magazine, November 17, 2003).

According to a "Review: Crop Circles" in National History (October 2003) "People go hungry because they lack money to buy food,

or they lack the land, water, credit and other resources they need to produce food on their own... each year malnutrition in developing countries contributes to deaths of more than five million pre-school-age children.... Yet global food production is rife with paradox. Enough food is available today to provide every human being on earth with more than 2,350 calories needed daily for a healthy and active life..."

Hunger in the midst of plenty is surely one of the great paradoxes in this world and one that should be vigorously corrected.

Cheddi Jagan, in an appeal for a New Global Human Order, in a letter sent to World Leaders on May 1, 1994, urged means of combating "the incidence of increasing poverty across the globe." He said: "Poverty

atrophy the vigour 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."

In this letter, Dr Jagan made 16 proposals to bring about a New Global Human Order to eliminate poverty and thus strengthen democracy. These included an adjustment of the IMF at several levels, to channel global surpluses and provide liquidity and credits, which poor countries need.

A key proposal was to reduce military expenditures which had reached a peak of US\$838 billion in 1987. A UNDP Report had pro-

posed that all countries should agree to reduce military expenditures in the 1980's by at least 3% a year. This would have released by the year 2000 a "peace dividend" of US\$1.5 trillion, which could direct more resources to a social agenda and to assist poor countries through debt relief.

At least, Dr Jagan's attention to debt relief, well ahead of the times, has proven to be one means of helping the developing countries. However, the massive expenditure on war continues in Afghanistan and Iraq in almost incalculable billions of dollars. Such funds would be better used to reduce world poverty as the UNDP had originally proposed.

A thorough study of Cheddi Jagan's proposals with additional proposals on developments since his demise eight years ago, would add positive inputs to the ongoing challenge of reducing poverty.