

# Maximum Vigilance Necessary To Preserve Democratic Gains

*Address of President Janet Jagan to the Amazonian Parliament in April, 1998*

The increasing cooperation of countries in the Amazon Region within recent years fully accords with the aspirations of the peoples of our countries. This cooperation is exemplified in many ways and in many areas of policy and has been generated by the support given by the executive power to political and parliamentary dialogue in our region. We have seen that Amazonian cooperation not only assists in resolving common problems facing our countries but also in developing common positions on issues which affect us. There is no doubt that the numerous problems which afflict our region can be resolved if we intensify the development of common and unified approaches to our own problems and those facing the developing world.

Countries of the Amazon Region have undergone fundamental political and economic changes in the recent past. These changes have been brought about by a variety of factors operating in our countries and in the world at large and the basic reason for them is the age-long quest of mankind for a better life. The poor and disadvantaged in our countries have played a major role in determining the direction of these changes. Their voices continue to influence the direction of change and their continuing empowerment will provide the necessary stimulant for further progress in our dialogue.

The most important of these changes in the democratic transformations which have swept our countries. Formal democracy was won by countries which did not enjoy it before. The intensification and further entrenchment of democratic practices developed in those countries which had been enjoying democratic rule.

The wave of democratic transformations were

the result of the growing refusal of our peoples to accept conditions of poverty, exploitation, inequality and injustice which had long helped to generate conditions of instability, war and poverty in many parts of the world. Our efforts at co-operation had been



*President Janet Jagan*

a product of our peoples' aspirations for better lives. We are therefore enjoined to address matters of vital concern to their welfare.

Technological advances have raised consciousness and generated urgency in relation to solving problems common to all our countries and most of the world such as poverty, disease, crime, growth with our development, the environment, the debt crisis, the effects of globalisation and many others. These issues are no longer confined to dedicated activists determinedly trying to capture the attention of governments, parliaments and politicians. The information revolution has come to the rescue of the disadvantaged by placing these concerns at the top of the political agenda for the international community. At the same time these scientific developments have dramatically increased the possibility of resolving the fundamental problem of poverty which we believe is at the root of most other problems.

A major advance has been the interest which Governments of developed countries and international agencies have been demonstrating in relation to issues affecting our countries. We have achieved tremendous success in advancing those causes which have so adversely affected our peoples and countries for so long. Out of all of these experiences and developments,



arising out of our long struggles against colonialism and domination, one of the earliest lessons which has been forced upon us is that of cooperation and solidarity in as many areas as possible. While we need to protect our individual interests, we have to always remain focused on the common problems of the Amazon Region in order to develop strength in unity in defending our interests.

The Executives in our Region and beyond have given support to parliaments and politicians in the discussions and debates which have been taking place in relation to the great issues which need to be resolved if

conditions which are adequate enough to protect their economies.

The extension of free trade and especially the Free Trade Area of the Americas, which will involve our countries, will require a high degree of unity, co-operation and co-ordination between our countries, Governments and Parliaments and all politicians in dialogue to arrive at equitable policies to advance which are fair and balanced and which will protect our countries and, at the same time, ensure maximum advantages for us all.

I am sure that the lessons which we have already absorbed from internal dialogue and Amazonian Co-



*President Janet Jagan with Bolivian President Hugo Banzer before addressing the Amazonian Parliament.*

our countries are to move forward. One of the main products of the efforts of dialogue in our countries has been the Treaty of Amazonian Co-operation.

The impetus towards globalisation has raised new and sometimes unfamiliar problems. Issues of trade and investment, particularly for less developed countries, can have devastating impact on their economies unless the appropriate conditions are satisfied. Yet these countries do not, individually, and sometimes in unity, have the economic and political power to negotiate

operation will serve as a guide and inspiration for us to achieve the best for our peoples.

The crushing burden of the debt crisis has been one of the major factors restricting economic growth in our countries. Many of our countries face the situation where the sums which we export in debt servicing are larger than the investments which are made in our economies.

We also face the problem of capital export where more is taken out of our countries than new



investments which are attracted.

Falling or depressed commodity prices on the international market and the reducing support for those protective measures which have hitherto enabled our countries, so far, to survive the growing liberalisation of trade, are another major obstacle to the sustained growth of our economies.

These are all issues which our executives, parliaments and politicians are addressing in one form or another in our individual countries. The dialogues which have taken place have brought many of these issues, including the debt crisis, to the attention of the international community. The result is that Governments of developed countries and multilateral agencies are adopting flexible approaches to the burdens which some of our countries are facing. However, much more needs to be accomplished in all of these areas, including further debt relief and protection of our economies in the course of globalisation.

Our region has been the host to international agreements relating to the environment and sustainable development which have been the result of prolonged and profound dialogue in the international community. It is appropriate that our region should have been the host to these treaties which have transformed the manner of our approach and our commitments to the environment and to sustainable development.

Guyana, like other countries in our region, has enormous forestry and mining resources, the exploitation of which are necessary to ensure that our people are able to climb out of poverty. Guyana had adopted policies and enacted laws for the protection of our environment and the sustainable development of our resources which are in conformity with our international obligations. The administrative agencies to monitor and implement these laws and policies have been strengthened with bilateral and multilateral assistance which are continuing.

At the same time Guyana has taken steps to demarcate the boundaries of lands belonging to the indigenous peoples of our country which was promised to them since the time of our independence from Great Britain 32 years ago, but which has not been fulfilled

by successive Governments. We have undertaken to the indigenous peoples of our country that as soon as the demarcation is completed, we will address the question of additional lands which they have occupied for farming with a view to legalising their occupation.

Guyana's commitment to the environment has been demonstrated by the donation of 900,000 hectares of rainforest in the Iwokrama Region of Guyana to the international community for the purpose of research in sustainable development. It is hoped and expected that the results of this research, which would be ongoing, will add to the world's store of knowledge in sustainable use of forest resources.

The continuing support of governments to political and parliamentary dialogue depends on the maintenance of democracy in our region. In some of our countries, especially where democratic renewal has been recent, democratic systems and structures are still fragile. It is vital that as part of our co-operative effort that our countries through our parliaments and other institutions maintain dialogue with a view to strengthening our institutions. Strong institutions, rooted in a democratic culture and based on a shared commitment by all social partners, generated by trust and confidence, are essential for democracy, stability and economic growth.

In those countries where democracy is still fragile, it is necessary to ensure maximum vigilance as well as tolerance so that our democratic gains so far are not destroyed. Our experience in Guyana demonstrates that democracy must be given high priority, nurturing it to ensure its sustenance and growth and the development of our Region.

The political and parliamentary dialogue in our Region supported by our governments, have already brought benefits. We of the Amazon Region must ensure that we exploit to the fullest extent the trend towards international co-operation and seize the opportunity to globalise issues affecting our vital interests. In this way our region can begin to play a much larger and more deserving role in protecting the interests of our peoples while at the same time advancing the cause of international co-operation.