

The UN Must Support Our Efforts To Achieve Better Governance And To Guarantee The Enjoyment Of All Human Rights By Our Citizens

Address by President Janet Jagan to the 53rd UN General Assembly on September 22, 1998.

In just fifteen months, our world will enter a new millennium, leaving behind it a chequered past to face the challenges of a yet uncharted future. It is not too early to contemplate this historic conjuncture and to give some thought to how best we may deal with the uncertainties that lie ahead.

This fifty-third General Assembly offers, we believe, a timely opportunity for such reflection. Your leadership, Mr President, will be essential to the success of our exploration. We are assured that your diplomatic experience and skills demonstrated in the service of your native Uruguay will contribute greatly to the success of our deliberations.

To your predecessor, His Excellency Mr Guennadi Oudovenko of the Ukraine, we offer our sincere appreciation and thanks for the admirable guidance which he provided the Assembly over the past year.

Our gratitude is extended to the Secretary General, Mr Kofi Annan for the inspired direction which he has given to our Organisation. From the report that he has been good enough to present us on the activities of the last twelve months, we are able to see clearly those areas where our stated goals have been reached and equally important, those which require our further attention and effort.

Certainly among the developments that are most heartening is the spread of democracy within recent times. It is a happy coincidence that this year we celebrate the fiftieth Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights which embodies the principles of democracy. The democratic system has emerged as a popular form of government for many member-states of the United Nations. Guyana has rejoined

this growing majority. Unfortunately, this had to come after hard struggles and our people experienced three decades of lost opportunities under an undemocratic regime. Only last December, for the second time



President Janet Jagan

this decade, elections were held under international scrutiny, leading to the re-election of my government to office.

However, despite the fact that the outcome was adjudged by international observers to be free and fair, the minority Opposition refuses to abide by the result. Consequently, the will of the electorate has been questioned. Unfortunately, this negation of elections conducted in a free and fair manner, is not only limited to Guyana and increasingly requires our attention. Naturally, my government cannot tolerate this state of affairs. Nor should the United Nations which by its Charter is called upon to protect the gains of new and restored democracies.

It is vital that the international community and the United Nations rally in support of our efforts to achieve better governance and to guarantee the enjoyment of all human rights by our citizens. We need to go beyond the holding of periodic elections to ensuring the observance of the rule of law and building the institutions upon which democracy must rest.

Regrettably, many of our democracies are severely limited in terms of their own resources, to be able to satisfy these pressing needs. As a result, hard-won gains are under constant threat of erosion. We firmly believe that it is in the interest of the

international community as a whole to assist in the strengthening of the democratic system as a bulwark against encroachment by oppressive regimes. Only through such cooperation can the democratic ideal take root and flourish throughout the world. On our part we will staunchly defend the gains of our people and we are resolved not to allow ourselves to slide, once again, into the darkness of dictatorship.

Needless to say, the spread of democracy *within* states must be matched by democracy

addressed.

In this scheme of things, we attach great importance to reaching general agreement on how the Security Council may be transformed into an organ that enjoys the confidence and support of all states. Clearly, the body which was created in the aftermath of World War II is no longer appropriate to the circumstances of today's world. Sorely needed now is a more representative and transparent Council that can adequately address new threats to inter-



During the visit, the President handed over relief support to the leaders of Papua New Guinea to help in post-disaster reconstruction. Here, the President and Guyana's UN Ambassador Rudy Insanally meet with PNG officials at the UN.

among states. The United Nations was founded in 1945 on the premise of the sovereign equality of all states. This principle is the rock upon which international cooperation among peoples has been built. In their operation therefore, all organs and agencies within the international system, must be cognisant of the views and wishes of all states. Developing countries especially need to be adequately represented on these bodies to ensure that their concerns are

national peace and security. Accordingly, we encourage the Working Group that was created to reform the Council to persist in its search for a suitably reformed Council.

Our task is made especially urgent by the realisation that, despite our perseverance, the achievement of international peace and security remains a frustrating will o' the wisp. As soon as we put out the fires of conflict in one trouble-spot, several oth-

ers emerge to test our endurance. There are today more peace-keeping operations than the international community appears able or willing to sustain. Some have been reasonably successful while others appear to promise eventual settlement. Most, however, seem to be never ending with little to show for the considerable investment of time and money. In fact, the present conflicts threaten to bring global disorder which would have lasting and negative effects on future developments.

One can only conclude from these varying results that peacekeeping is insufficient in itself, to the resolution of some conflicts. Increasingly, we will have to turn to preventive diplomacy, peace-making and peace-building to fully address and treat the root causes of tension. This approach is valid not only for inter-state, but also for intra-state conflicts which have multiplied in the post Cold War era.

We have been forcibly reminded that, notwithstanding the abatement in East/West tensions, the dangers of a nuclear catastrophe are still very real and present. It is impossible to guarantee in an unstable world such as ours that nuclear weapons will not be used, either intentionally or inadvertently. Only a complete prohibition of such weapons, binding upon all states, can reduce the risk of a nuclear disaster. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty as well as the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, while admittedly useful as restraints, are too limited to provide the assurance needed. My government therefore urges the international community to move swiftly to a total elimination of these weapons coupled with an undertaking to discontinue their production. At the same time, we must redouble our efforts to curb the flow of conventional weapons which serves to fuel conflagrations in trouble-spots throughout the world.

Above all, we must intensify our search for a collective system of security upon which all states can rely for their protection. The outline of such a system is to be found in the Charter; we need only to build upon it to ensure its practicability. Understandably perhaps, states that are militarily power-

ful may be reluctant to place their security under a broad UN security umbrella. Yet experience has shown that the new genre of conflicts with which we have to deal requires concerted multilateral responses. As far as possible therefore, we should strive to strengthen international machinery for conflict resolution and peace enforcement on bases that will command the confidence and respect of all states, both big and small.

Mr President, peace, as has been so aptly said, is not the mere absence of war. True peace can only come if it is built on a foundation of sound economic and social development. The foremost obstacle to peace is poverty which, when it can be borne no longer, explodes with a vengeance. It is imperative, therefore, that the problem of poverty be squarely addressed by the United Nations with a view to halving its incidence by the year 2015. Reaching this target will require concerted action by both developed and developing countries. The developed nations have a vested interest in the economic prosperity of developing countries since they represent important markets for their exports. The assured provision of ODA, sufficient investment flows, technological transfer, and trade opportunities remain essential to the development of small economies such as my own. A renewal of the dialogue between the industrialised and developing nations is also urgently needed in order to lay a firm and reliable basis for future international co-operation.

Notwithstanding the onerous debt obligations and a physical infrastructure which we are tackling as a priority, Guyana has come a far way in overcoming poverty and maximising its full growth potential. As such we continue to rely heavily on external assistance for our economic development. We are therefore particularly concerned by the rapid diminution of resources available for financing by both bilateral donors and multilateral agencies. While private investment flows have a role to play in the development process, they are still far too selective to be of benefit to weak economies.

As we move into the next century, we have to

recognise the reality that developing countries are extremely vulnerable. The present course of globalisation and liberalization has led to marginalisation of the poorer countries. Guyana is a case in point. We have returned to the democratic fold and have achieved fairly high growth rates despite structural adjustment programmes. But after a few years we are now faced with a steep drop of prices of our main export commodities, drying up of developmental aid, adverse global weather conditions, etc. At the end of the day, our people face tremendous hardships.

We are being told that growing investment is needed. We open our economies to work with the private sector for development and we see investment being directed away from the poorer countries, making them incapable of modernising their economies. There is need for a global consensus to assist developing countries to complete their transition so that they can be equal players in the globalisation process.

The alternative is to continue to ignore the danger signals which are becoming more and more evident. And as usual the rich countries will be able to solve their problems, but will do so at the expense of the poorer countries. The gap between the poor and rich will become greater and conflicts will continue. The narcotics trade, mass migration, international crime, poverty and other ills will put severe strains on new and restored democracies.

Mr President, as we have become painfully aware, threats to our environment also impinge on our peace and security. Global warming and climate change have increased the vulnerability of small states like Guyana to a wave of natural disasters. The El Nino weather phenomenon recently inflicted on our country a period of intense drought, taking a heavy toll on our economy.

In our continuing efforts to develop our country and meet the needs of our people, especially those living in poverty, my country remains dedicated to the preservation of the environment and the sus-

tainable development of our resources. We are concerned therefore that when we seek to exploit our forest and other resources for the benefit of our people, we face criticisms by those who accuse us of disregard for the environment. These reproaches are entirely ill-informed if not mischievous. A land of abundant and pristine forests, Guyana runs no risk of deforestation. We have in fact put in place firm legislative and administrative arrangements to ensure the conservation of our natural resources. Moreover, under the Iwokrama Rainforest Project, we have set aside almost a million acres of these forests for research by the international community into the preservation of bio-diversity and the sustainable use of forests.

Mr President, the four pillars which I have listed - democracy, economic and social development, human rights and the elimination of poverty -- are indispensable to the construction of peace. Events in the post Cold War period have not only confirmed this fact but have also shown that the building of peace and development must be the work of the international community. Persuaded of the need for enhanced multilateralism, my government is committed to the realisation of the late President Cheddi Jagan's vision of a New Global Human Order. The thrust of his proposal seeks to reduce the ever-widening and dangerous gap which exists between countries in the North and those in the South.

Recalling the Marshall Plan which served to rebuild Europe from the ashes of World War II, Dr Jagan argued for a similar enterprise to eradicate poverty, promote good governance and bring development to all peoples. Only through such enlightened co-operation can the world enjoy the blessings of peace. I wish therefore to renew his plea and to call for early agreement on the establishment of a more just and equitable system of international relations. With the necessary determination and effort, we can make the twenty-first century a golden age for all humanity.

I thank you, Mr President.