

***ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY MRS JANET JAGAN TO VENEZUELAN  
LEGISLATORS CARACAS, VENEZUELA***

Our two South American nations have a common history of struggle against colonialism, oppression and inequality. We also share a great burden of sacrifices to create political, social and economic systems which could ensure peace, progress and prosperity for our peoples.

As I was laying a wreath at the tomb of the Great Liberator this morning, I recalled his famous words in his letter from Jamaica in which he wrote: "Despite the convictions of history, South Americans have made efforts to obtain liberal, even perfect institutions, doubtless out of that instinct to aspire to the greatest possible happiness which, common to all men, is bound to follow in civil societies founded on the principles of justice, liberty and equality."

These inspiring words I learnt while studying Latin American history as a student at University. It is then that I understood for the first time the great import of Simon Bolivar on the struggles and developments of the Region in which he lived and which he influenced so profoundly. His concepts of freedom, independence and justice have had pervasive effect throughout this hemisphere.

His ideas and ideals deeply motivated the Father of Guyana's Independence, the late President Cheddi Jagan. The struggle of the Venezuelan people for freedom at different stages of your history have been a great inspiration to our late President and to the Guyanese people. It has given us the determination to persist and persevere because we know that the spirit of Simon Bolivar and the goodwill of the Venezuelan people will always be with the Guyanese people in our struggles for democracy and social justice.

It is thus a great honour and distinction for me personally and for the people of Guyana to be in your Legislative Palace, to address you, Venezuela's legislators, who have successfully created the mechanisms to consolidate and perpetuate Venezuela's sturdy democracy which we are sure will endure and will foster equality, liberty and justice.

My visit here is that of a friendly neighbour, who shares common ideals with you, seeking even closer ties with your great nation. The relations between our two countries have been evolving in a positive manner and we view this as a progressive trend which can be further strengthened. It is this optimism I bring to you on behalf of the Guyanese People.

Our two peoples have surmounted past challenges of slavery, colonialism and autocracy separately. But today's challenges are more complex, more global and defy individual approaches. We must, therefore, join forces and jointly seek solutions to the eradication of poverty, the redistribution of wealth, sustainable development, the debt burden, social and infrastructural development, economic diversification, the narcotics trade and the consequences of globalisation.

We believe that the establishment of a New Global Human Order can usher in a new era of just and equitable relations among all nations. And more immediately, a Regional Integration Fund will help cushion the effects of the Free Trade Area of the Americas on the smaller and more vulnerable economies of our hemisphere. My late husband and predecessor campaigned relentlessly to eradicate poverty in Guyana and the rest of the world with his call for a New Global Human Order and a Regional Integration Fund. We continue to aim for the implementation of these measures for we are convinced, as was he, that so long as the growth of weak economies is not improved, stability and peace will be threatened.

We subscribe to the processes and principles established by the Summit of the Americas and acknowledge the importance of free trade and free markets as measures to increase co-operation to develop our economies. However, for such policies to succeed and for our peoples to accept them, they must impact positively on the daily lives of our people by bringing them food, housing, health care, drinking water and education for their children. Otherwise these policies, will only be seen as more measures to increase the gap between the rich and the poor.

We are working with our sister countries in the Americas and the Caribbean through the Organisation of American States, the Rio Group, the Association of Caribbean States, the Treaty of Amazonian Co-operation, the Latin American Economic System and all other regional groups to pursue our common aims. It is a source of satisfaction to us that Guyana and Venezuela are together pursuing our shared ideals within these multilateral institutions.

We have seen around the world that the transition to democracy is not easy and there could be dangers along the way. Guyana was not spared this misfortune. However, our patience and tolerance, and the commitment of our peoples and our region to democratic principles, succeeded in ensuring the maintenance of peace and the integrity of the electoral system. We acknowledge the support of Venezuela along with CARICOM and other countries in the hemisphere in our resolve to protect our democracy after so much sacrifice in the past.

It is especially gratifying to be in Caracas, where the Treaty of Amazonian Co-operation is currently headquartered, at just about the time when they have marked their 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. For us, this symbolises our joint commitment to protect and preserve the Amazon rainforest for the benefit of our future generations. Our commitment to ecological preservation is unimpeachable. Sustainable development is a central and recurrent feature of our national development strategy. Our national efforts, which include strict laws, are being applied and fortified to avoid environmental degradation. The Iwokrama Rainforest Project, through which we have donated 360,000 hectares of pristine rainforest for research and study for the benefit of the rest of the world, is an inspiration to all environmentally conscious people everywhere.

In relation to issues surrounding the settlement of the controversy between our two countries, my government reaffirms our commitment to the Geneva Agreement and to the McIntyre Process which has greatly contributed to laying the basis for good relations which now exist between our two countries. We are committed to the examination of all initiatives which contain the possibility of a solution that would be satisfactory to the peoples of our countries while laying the basis for continued good relations thereafter.

We see the possibility of utilising new and existing mechanisms to strengthen functional co-operation with Venezuela based upon our mutual imperatives. We feel the necessity for further collaboration on environmental issues and fisheries. We wish to see more trade and Investment. We pledge to extend co-operation to eradicate the scourge of the narcotics trade. We need to implement more frontier co-operation. We will develop more programmes in the area of security and we intend to increase cultural contacts and exchanges.

Your Excellency, in these matters, we are ready and willing to further enhance our relations for the mutual benefit of our peoples. We have been encouraged by the hospitality of the Government and people of Venezuela. The same hospitality which has been shown to our delegation has been shown to the tens of thousands of our nationals who have made Venezuela their home. With the knowledge that it is this spirit which will continue to guide our relations, we view our future bilateral and multilateral agenda with growing optimism, we face the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the changes of the new millennium.

Your Excellency, the dreams and aspirations of the peoples of our continent have survived the ravages of the past and are being reasserted today with increasing urgency. We believe that most of our peoples' dreams, particularly the dreams of life without poverty, can be fulfilled with determined effort and with co-operation and goodwill between our countries. We look forward to Venezuela and Guyana together moving forward for the fulfilment of our peoples' dreams.

Thank you very much.

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