

ADDRESS BY H.E. MR. BHARRAT JAGDEO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA, AT THE FIFTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

New York, September 24, 1999

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

I am pleased to have this opportunity - the first since my assumption of the Presidency of Guyana - to share with this Assembly some issues of interest and concern to the Group of 77 which Guyana now has the honour to chair.

Mr. President, a mere three months remain before mankind enters a new millennium filled with great hopes. Whether those hopes are realized will depend largely on the decisions we take, as an organization of united peoples, on how we collectively face the future. This 54th General Assembly therefore represents a crucial turning point where we can follow, either the high road to enlightened multilateralism, or the low road leading to narrow self-interest.

I am confident that the Assembly will not fail to take the right direction. As the Foreign Minister of Namibia, you have given long and distinguished service to your country which after a bitter struggle against apartheid rule, stands as an independent and proud member of the family of nations.

On behalf of the Group of 77, I salute Namibia and offer to you personally our warmest congratulations and good wishes for a successful Assembly.

To your predecessor, His Excellency Dr. Didier Operti of Uruguay, we offer our sincere appreciation for the guidance provided to the Assembly over the past year. A warm welcome is also extended to the three new members of the United Nations - the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

And to our distinguished Secretary General, I wish to convey our gratitude for his sustained stewardship of the Secretariat and more particularly for his report on the organisation's work

Mr. President, the challenges we must address this year are formidable. Our world continues to be plagued by a multiplicity of conflicts, both old and new, inter-state and intra-state, that not only imperil global peace and security but also sap our economic and social vitality. Whether in Afghanistan, Kosovo, the Middle East, the Great Lakes Region of Africa - to name just a few of these conflict zones, a heavy toll is being exacted on human life and development. Equally disturbing is the apparent inability of the world community to contain this increase in tensions and conflicts.

The World Organisation is continuously challenged by the outbreak of internecine strife in one country after another. Without a clear strategy, the United Nations can do no more than muddle through these crises in the hope that the warring factions will eventually see the virtues of peace. In these distressing circumstances, it is not only the parties to the conflict that are losers but also the international community. As a result of the increasing claims for peace-making and peace-keeping operations, developing countries are deprived of much needed development resources and are politically weakened. Gradually, the United Nations must move further into the area of peace-building to obviate recidivism and to reconstruct shattered societies. By helping to strengthen democracy, government institutions and the rule of law as well as rebuilding the foundations for long term development, the Organisation can help post conflict states to rebuild themselves.

The time may have come to revisit the United Nations Agenda for Peace as well as its Agenda for Development to see where deficiencies lie and what could be done to remedy them.

The time has also come to strengthen the Security Council, the organ which is primarily responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, that it may become more democratic, representative and credible. Of course, the United Nations cannot do what the parties to conflict are not prepared to do. Without a true commitment to peace by all involved there can be scant prospect for any lasting settlement. As we have seen from recent developments in the Middle East, the parties involved must show a strong will to resolve the conflict through peaceful means. Only then can the United Nations, using the instruments provided by its Charter, serve to facilitate negotiations for a satisfactory outcome.

Accompanying these threats to international security and stability are strong economic and social forces which impact negatively on many countries. While globalisation and trade liberalisation have benefited strong economies, it has also exposed weaker states to marginalisation from the world economy. By opening the flood gates of trade and finance, globalisation has invariably wrought havoc on small and weak economies which can do precious little to withstand its impact. Economic and social misery have followed in its wake exposing the particular vulnerabilities of small developing countries, many of whom are dependent on a single agricultural crop - like bananas or sugar - for the livelihood of their peoples.

At the regional meetings which have been held thus far in preparation for UNCTAID X caution has been sounded against the worst excesses of trade liberalization. Having benefited from the Tokyo and Uruguay Rounds, the industrialized countries are anxious to hold further negotiations - the Mother of all Rounds for free trade in the next millennium. Theoretically, developing countries can also gain from increased liberalization. However, since they are for the most part too weak to take advantage of the new opportunities, they run the risk of greater marginalization and indeed, elimination from the market place.

Fear of this eventuality is not based on uninformed speculation, but on the harsh reality of experience. Past negotiating rounds have yielded significant concessions to developed economies while offering relatively little to developing countries in terms of opening markets for their own products. At bottom, the problem is one of an imbalance in negotiating strength of its contracting parties, resulting in more favourable outcomes for the strongest. Yet, the developing countries are being urged to enter into a new round of negotiations - the millennium round - the result of which is likely to be no different from the past unless its agenda is balanced by issues of concern to the developing countries.

To be able to enter the global market place, developing countries should be assisted in the strengthening of their productive capacity and in widening their access to export markets. They need to be assured of stabilization in the international financial and monetary system in order to avoid the hazards of currency fluctuations. Equally important, given the vast disparity which exists in the economic capacities of countries, special and differential treatment should be granted to developing countries in accordance with the principles outlined in Part IV of the GATT Agreement and the GATT Legislative clause of 1971. Special consideration will have to be given to Africa, the least developed countries, and structurally weak economies, in particular the Small Islands Developing States, which are seriously disadvantaged in the area of trade. The SIDS Review Conference which will be held here in just a matter of days and the L.D.C. Summit scheduled for the year 2001 should serve to generate new initiatives to help these vulnerable states.

However, Mr. President, to benefit from the international trading system developing countries must receive significant debt relief and necessary ODA to boost the overall productive capability. Consequently, in the face of rampant globalization, it is imperative that the international community should come together to create a modern development vision and strategy aimed at bridging the dangerous division which now separates the prosperous from the poor nations. This new approach should be based on an international consensus on

development and on the rights and obligations of the partners.

As the preparations undertaken this year for the review of the Summits held in Beijing, Cairo and Copenhagen have shown, there is an increasing number of people, the majority of whom are women and children, living under adverse conditions caused by poverty. Despite great strides in the fields of health and education in the developed world, many developing countries continue to be plagued by unequal and inadequate access to education and health care, high infant and maternal mortality as well as lack of access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation. Indeed, low levels of health have inhibited the achievement of socially and economically productive lives not to mention the devastating social and economic impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic as well as malaria on a number of developing countries, particularly in Africa.

The Cologne Initiative to expand the scope and provisions of relief for the heavily indebted poor countries was a welcome step forward. Unfortunately, however, it does not go far enough to alleviate the debt burden which the developing countries still bear. Nothing short of the cancellation of some of these countries' debt will be sufficient to improve their circumstances to the point where they can be active participants in the world economy. The situation of many low income countries, has been made even more acute by the rapid decline of ODA in the wake of globalisation's spread and over reliance on the market to promote development.

The financing of development, Mr. President, must therefore be placed on a more sound and predictable basis. The Group of 77 therefore, attaches the greatest importance to the holding of a high level Conference by the year 2001 to address this pressing issue. We believe that if member states can address all aspects of the problem - particularly those identified in the Secretary General's Report on the Financing for Development, we may yet find solutions that are acceptable and effective. Crucial to the successful outcome of the Conference, however, is a general acceptance of a more enlightened approach to international development cooperation based on a genuine concept of interdependence and partnership.

Indeed, there is an acute need for a new global agenda with the objective of putting a human face to the marketplace. Policies aimed merely at creating unsustainable social safety nets are hardly lasting solutions. The root causes of the structural and endemic problems of the developing countries which ultimately lead to global instability must be addressed.

For their part, the developing countries which constitute the Group of 77 are committed to the search for ways and means by which we can accelerate the development process. Even before the Conference on the Financing for Development, we shall meet in Havana, Cuba next year for the first ever South Summit. The Summit is a long cherished idea whose time has finally come. It will allow the South a special opportunity to examine the impact which globalisation continues to have on developing countries as well as the policies and strategies needed to harness the process and to make it more amenable to control. In this context, North-South relations must be reviewed to see how they may be enhanced and put on a new basis for mutual trust and advantage. Understandably, the central focus of the South Summit must be the strengthening of the unity and solidarity of the Group of 77 and the identification of concrete initiatives to promote practical cooperation among members.

We have also agreed to devote our attention to the promulgation of Knowledge and Technology in order, hopefully, to achieve a quantum leap towards our development. This, after all, is an area in which the South can boast of remarkable advances and of many "centres of excellence" that can be utilised for the dissemination of skills and technology among the countries of the Group of 77. The North can, of course, do much to facilitate these exchanges by providing requisite financing and supplying appropriate technology and knowledge that would make the developing countries more self reliant and at the same time more competitive in the world economy.

Coming as it does in the early months of the New Millennium, the South Summit will certainly provide an indication of the direction for the future. In Havana, we hope to have in attendance our developed partners who significantly are usually present at all of our important deliberations as observers. Also expected to participate in the event are other key players in the development process such as our non-governmental organisations and representatives of the private sector. Together, through an interactive dialogue, we hope to forge a programme of action which will serve as a catalyst for the development of our countries and our peoples. Indeed, if given the chance, the South Summit, I daresay, will prove to be an inspiration for the Millennium Assembly and for a new compact on human development for the twenty-first century.

Speaking for Guyana, I wish to reaffirm our Government's intention to continue working for the creation of a New Global Human Order aimed at the eradication of poverty and the establishment of a just and more humane system of international relations. Conceived by our late President Cheddi Jagan whose entire life was dedicated to empowering the poor and the weak, not only in his native Guyana, but throughout the world, the outlines of this New Order have been presented at major international fora, including the World Summit on Social Development which was held in 1995 in Copenhagen, Denmark. All fourteen Heads of Government of CARICOM, along with other world leaders and eminent personalities, have declared their full support of the proposal and their commitment to its widest promulgation. We will, therefore, seek at this Assembly, to advance it for further consideration.

Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Although, much is being made of dawning of the Millennium, it is obviously too much to expect that it will bring solutions to all of the world's problems. It can provide, however, an auspicious opportunity for the international community to reflect upon the past achievements, its present challenges and future aspirations. With a firm sense of purpose and resolve, let us use this occasion to create a brave new world in which all our peoples may hope to live in peace - free from fear, poverty and want.

I thank you, Mr. President.