

**STATEMENT BY H. E. MR. BHARRAT JAGDEO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA,
AT THE TWENTY-THIRD ANNUAL MINISTERIAL MEETING OF THE GROUP OF 77**

New York, 24 September 1999

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome you all to this our 23rd Annual Ministerial Meeting of the Group.

It is my understanding that we will have an interactive session in which our countries may together seek to anticipate future developments in the economic and social sphere and hopefully, to plan the ways in which we can address them. Such strategic thinking is necessary to achieving a common and effective approach to the issues of interest and concern to our Group. I therefore encourage you to focus your attention on those areas where we need to act together in pursuit of our common interests.

When I last spoke to the Group in April, I addressed some of the sweeping changes affecting the international community. The conclusion, which we drew then is still valid, that is, that the priorities of the South are being increasingly subsumed by the imperatives of the North. This has been largely the result of the self-serving presumption by the North that in the absence of super power rivalries for the post cold war era, North-South differences are no longer important to the building of a new international order.

The current ad hoc arrangements in North-South relations based as they are on a tenuous approach to consensus decision-making on global agreements and the very tentative policies for their implementation are clearly inadequate. This approach at best, caters only to the expediency of the North while ignoring the needs of the South. It seeks only to reinforce and perpetuate the status quo of the more privileged. Premised on the belief that the United Nations should not challenge the existing global structures and systems, it further argues that our changing world has made the development agenda, which has been pursued by the Organization over the past five decades, as irrelevant and indeed obsolete.

Clearly, the Group of 77 cannot subscribe to such concepts. For us the role of the United Nations in promoting international economic and social cooperation is paramount. Founded as it is on the principle of the sovereign equality of states, the United Nations is the only forum capable of restraining the use of hegemonic political and economic power, and of allowing all members of the international community, irrespective of their weight or power, to make themselves heard on critical issues. Moreover, in accordance with its Charter the United Nations is dedicated to the forging of a comprehensive global agenda, aimed at achieving the betterment of all humankind. The overarching goal of our Group must therefore continue to be the strengthening of the organization in order to protect and preserve multilateralism.

With this goal in mind we must seek to advance the implementation of international agreements reached at United Nations Conferences and Summits held during this decade. In the areas of Social Development, Sustainable Development, the Status of Women, and Population and Development among others, we have been able to review the progress made in fulfilling the commitments notably those held in Copenhagen, Rio, Beijing, and Cairo. Early next week, we will have the opportunity to examine the achievements of the Barbados Action Programme for the small island developing states. At this stage one can only say that while some progress has been made much more needs to be done to implement these various Summit Agreements to the satisfaction of our countries.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Having come thus far we need to look at the bigger picture of the global economy, and to see where we stand in terms of our development prospects. We will observe that while the momentum of development in some economies has been maintained, others are experiencing slow-downs or worse yet, almost chronic weakness. The World Bank, the IMF, the OECD, the UN and other forecasting institutions have all revised downwards global and regional growth predictions. The world economy is now expected to grow by an estimated 2 percent or according to baseline scenarios not at all. In its "Global Development Finance" report this year, the Bank claims that weak world trade growth, falling commodity prices, and a lack of external finance will condemn developing countries this year to their slowest rate of economic growth since 1982.

This bleak situation has been made even gloomier by the dramatic decline in the net flows of overseas aid to developing countries, which have fallen to their lowest level in real terms since 1981, with little sign of any recovery. The Bank has further indicated that without improvements in official assistance there would most likely be an additional 30 million poor people in developing countries each year. Already, it is said that of the world's 2.7 billion poor people, 2 billion live in 32 developing countries. It is remarkable that these reverses are occurring at a time when many of these countries are pursuing programmes that are more reflective of the policies of the international financial institutions.

The question, which inevitably arises, is *Can societies in the developing countries be enabled to cope with the far-reaching economic, technological, and environmental transformations taking place in the world today?*

An indicator that offers some hope is the decision to hold a high-level United Nations Conference on Financing for Development before the year 2000. I am pleased to note that the Ad Hoc Working Group that was set up to make recommendations on the scope and format of the event has successfully completed its task. We must now go on to define the agenda as well as the precise nature of the forum in which this important issue will be decided. I very much hope that our informal exchange of views today will indicate where our priorities lie in this area, as well as a strategy by which we may achieve them.

Pending the outcome of these deliberations, we must strive to secure the speedy implementation of the recent Cologne initiative within the HIPC framework, which was designed to provide broad and effective relief to this group of countries. However, more can be done and needs to be done if we are to halt the descent of the poor countries into the depths of despair. We must therefore continue to call for a modification of the stringent conditionalities which structural adjustment programmes impose on developing countries, causing severe hardship on our population, particularly the most vulnerable sectors. We must strive for improved conditions that would allow countries, particularly the LDCs and small economies generally to survive in an increasingly globalized world.

The Ninth Ministerial Meeting of the Group of 77 which was recently held in Marrakech, points to the need to fully prepare for the WTO Ministerial Meeting in and, ultimately for UNCTAD X in Bangkok early next year. If nothing, our discussions in Morocco revealed that closer coordination would be helpful since, even though our regional groups have worked assiduously for the upcoming negotiations, we must be sure that we have a common position and a collective strategy that would allow us to fully assert our claims to more equitable entitlements in the area of trade and development.

I strongly believe it to be in our general interest to continue pushing for the completion of the "unfinished business" of the Tokyo and Uruguay Rounds in order to help stabilize developing countries' incomes from their commodity exports. The restraints, which persist in those areas of interest to developing countries, must be removed. Similarly, the great disparity in market strength, which exists between the developed and

developing countries, must be addressed. We must persevere in our efforts to redefine the concept of reciprocity in accordance with the principles accepted in the GATT to provide for greater equity. Equally important is the full and effective interaction of our countries into the WTO, with special consideration given to protecting the interests of small and structurally weak economies, in particular the LDCs which are generally dependent on a single crop e.g. bananas and sugar for their export earnings.

Beyond Seattle and Bangkok, lies Havana where Heads of Government of the Group of 77 and China will meet in early April next year for the first time in the history of the group. Four broad themes have been identified for consideration viz. Globalization, North-South Relations, South-South Relations, and Knowledge and Technology. The outcome of our exchanges will be reflected in two main documents to be issued, one a visionary political declaration to be prepared by the host country, and the other, which will be a final Communiqué containing concrete proposals for joint action by members of the G-77. Together, these documents will constitute a platform on which our membership can build the future. Ideally, they should also clearly indicate concrete initiatives by which we may further cooperation among ourselves.

Of course, no agenda, however ambitious and well defined, can be successfully advanced without sufficient political will on the part of all members. If truth be told, the South Summit is yet to attract the full attention of the international community, distracted as countries are by the myriad of meetings and problems now on the multilateral radar screen. It is absolutely imperative that a full-scale campaign be undertaken to sensitize both the South and the North to the importance of this unique event. Guyana's Chairmanship will spare no effort to publicize and prepare for the Summit since we firmly believe that this is a historical opportunity for strengthening the South, which we cannot afford to let slip. Indeed, as we have said, a successful South Summit can impact significantly on the Millennium Assembly and potentialize the prospects of the latter.

Let me therefore, in conclusion, appeal to this Ministerial meeting, to use the few hours available to it to focus on some of the issues to which I have briefly adverted.

As the calendar now stands, this is the only high level meeting before the Summit itself. I would therefore hope that out of this exchange of views would come a clear sense of purpose and direction that would guarantee a successful outcome of the South Summit.

I thank you.