

Cooperative Republic of Guyana



Address

of

His Excellency David Granger

President *of the* Cooperative Republic of Guyana

to the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly

September 20, 2016

Guyana: a 'green' state: threatened

Kindly check against delivery

Mr. President,

The Cooperative Republic of Guyana congratulates you on your election as President of the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly. The election of a representative of Fiji, a small island developing state, to preside over the General Assembly at this session is especially gratifying. The choice of theme for our general debate: "The Sustainable Development Goals – a universal push to transform our world" – is most appropriate.

We thank His Excellency Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, the outgoing President of the historic 70th Session, for his guidance of the Assembly over the past year.

Guyana commends Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his stellar stewardship of the United Nations during his decennium. The international community owes him an enormous debt of gratitude for his earnest efforts and indefatigable exertions to alleviate human distress, promote peace and sustain development around the world.

The Secretary-General's courageous campaign to combat the adverse effects of climate change and his commitment to sustainable development have been transformative. His labours bore fruit in the adoption of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* in September 2015 and the signing of the *Paris Agreement* on climate change in April 2016.

The *Agenda* and the *Agreement*, most memorably, made a massive impact on the manner in which the world manages the environment.

The *Agenda* and the *Agreement* are evidence of environmental commonsense. They are the most excellent examples of the sort of collective action most likely to ensure a sustainable future and a safe planet. They are harbingers of hope for everyone, everywhere and forever.

The Secretary-General's leadership has led the UN, irreversibly, further along a 'green path'. We thank him heartily.

Mr. President,

Guyana is part of this global 'green' movement. Its natural assets, commitment to sustainable development, contribution to countering the adverse effects of climate change and collaboration with the international community in seeking solutions to global threats have distinguished it as an emergent 'green state.'

It is a state that will ensure a secure future for its people in the pursuit of a 'green' economy. It is one that is proud of its place as a reliable and cooperative partner in international efforts to protect the earth's environment.

Guyana recognises the interlocking objectives of the *Agenda* and the *Agreement*. It realises that the establishment of a 'green state' is consistent with building climate resilience while mitigating the effects of climate change. Guyana promises to continue to:

- work towards the *Agenda's* goals, particularly, by contributing to limiting increases in global temperatures; and,
- work towards a 'green path' of development that is in accord with the *Agreement's* nationally-determined commitments.

Guyana, serendipitously, stands at the centre of the Guiana Shield – one of the world's last remaining spheres of virgin tropical rainforest. The Guiana Shield spans an area of 2.7 million km², larger than Greenland, and is shared by six South America countries – Brazil, Colombia, Guyana, La Guyane, Suriname and Venezuela.

Guyana, as a part of that Shield, is a net carbon sink. A green canopy of rainforest envelops more than 85 per cent of its land mass – the second highest percentage forest cover on earth.

Guyana is pursuing a 'green path' so as to understand better how to protect its precious biodiversity and manage its complex ecosystems, sustainably.

Mr. President,

Guyana made a covenant with the world to be an exemplar of 'green' growth in 1989, three years before the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. We made a gift with the prospect of sustainable development and to a project to protect its environment through our generous grant of 371,000 hectares of our pristine forests to be used as an international model for:

.. research, training and the development of technologies which will promote the conservation and the sustainable and equitable use of tropical rain forests in a manner that will lead to lasting ecological, economic and social benefits to the people of Guyana and the world in general...

The Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development (IICRCD) – located in the centre of our country and at the heart of the Guiana Shield – survives and thrives as a testament of Guyana's commitment to sustainable development and environmental conservation.

Guyana is an important partner in the global environmental movement. It entered into an agreement with the Kingdom of Norway: "to provide the world with a relevant, replicable model of how REDD+ [the mechanism for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation] can align the development objectives of forest countries with the need to combat climate change." It entered agreements, also, with the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Federal Republic of Germany, the State of Japan and other states and international organisations.

Guyana reaffirms its commitment to Goal No. 15 of the *Agenda* under which UN member states pledged to "*protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.*"

Guyana is improving the management of its ecosystems and natural resources in order to conserve its forests and their rich biodiversity. It will fulfill its obligation contained in the 'Intended Nationally Determined Commitments' under the *Paris Agreement*.

Guyana will deepen its research by establishing an International Institute of Biodiversity at the Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development. The Institute will allow scientists and students from the Caribbean and around the world to come to our country to increase their knowledge of vital ecosystems and to share in the study of the Guiana Shield's amazing biodiversity.

Mr. President,

The *Agenda's* Goal No. 13 urges us to "take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact." This goal envisages and encourages international cooperation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to abate the adverse impacts of climate change.

The *Agreement* obligates member states to taking action to "limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels" [and to] "foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development in a manner that does not threaten food production."

Guyana is developing a comprehensive *Emissions Reduction Programme* (ERP) as part of its responsibility to contribute to global solutions to the threat of climate change. We will set aside an additional two million hectares of our territory for conservation purposes.

Guyana will pursue a low carbon growth trajectory to enhance its contribution to the campaign against climate change through the preservation of its forests, within the ambit of the REDD+ mechanism. It will contribute, up to 48.7 million metric tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, to the global mitigation effort through a programme of avoided emissions.

The *Agreement* on climate change and the *Agenda* both emphasise the importance of financial flows towards supporting the efforts of states pursuing a 'green path' to development, in meeting its adaptation and mitigation obligations and in implementing 'Intended Nationally Determined Commitments'.

Mr. President,

I am constrained to state, however, that all our efforts – nationally, regionally and globally – for the advancement of development in an environment of peace and stability are being challenged by the territorial ambitions of our neighbour, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Guyana celebrated the 50th anniversary of its Independence this year. Venezuela, regrettably, acknowledged this anniversary by reasserting its repudiation of a border treaty it had solemnly signed over 1117 years ago and ratified and respected for 60 of those years.

I addressed this Assembly last year and warned of the danger Venezuela posed to the peace and security of our region not by its internal instability but by its external assault on Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

I placed hope in the fact that the process for final resolution of Venezuela's unworthy territorial claims rested now in the hands of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Venezuela, for a full year since I spoke, has stalled by every means as it intensified its aggression against Guyana and thwarted all of the Secretary-General's efforts to pursue 'a way forward' – at least in terms of a process that promises final resolution to the controversy.

Guyana stands ready to have the International Court of Justice determine the matter with finality. We will work resolutely with the Secretary-General in his final months in office to free Guyana, and his successor, from this surreal burden.

Venezuela agreed, in the *Geneva Agreement* of 1966, that the United Nations' Secretary-General shall determine the means of settlement of this matter, including by judicial settlement. Yet, it defies his every effort to fulfill that commitment.

The United Nations cannot be a dispassionate party to a threat to peace anywhere and a challenge to the law of nations. Venezuela's territorial claim is such a challenge. It strikes at the heart of the United Nations, its trusteeship of the law of nations and the Charter which the Secretary-General upholds.

Guyana, a small state, must look to the United Nations for protection against threats to its security, for intervention for peace and for respect for international law.

Mr. President,

My plea for international understanding of our plight has nothing to do with Venezuela's internal situation. The ordinary people of Venezuela are our sisters and brothers. Their agonies touch our hearts and we wish them early relief from their ordeal.

Venezuela's claims, however, are a threat to our existence as an independent nation. They are a scandalous revival of the conquistadorial disease that once plagued its own history. They are a crime against our humanity, clothed in the verbiage of national honour.

Mr. President,

I wish, also, to iterate Guyana's continued support, within the context of the preservation of sovereignty and its inextricable link with sustainable development, for the complete removal of the commercial, economic, and financial blockade imposed by the United States against another Caribbean country – the Republic of Cuba. We cannot commit to policies to transform our economies to provide development for our peoples and not demonstrate the political will to change systems that are in direct contradiction to these policies.

Mr. President,

Guyana is on the path to becoming a 'green' state. Its efforts and those of other small states, however, can be derailed unless there is collective commitment by the greater part of the international community to collaborate with those states which are determined to pursue a low-carbon, low-emission path to sustainable development and to constraining the rise in global temperature.

The road from Stockholm in 1972, to Paris in 2015, has been long and difficult. The words of the *Declaration* of the UN Conference on the Human Environment, however, remain as relevant in 2016 as they were in 1972:

"A point has been reached in history when we must shape our actions throughout the world with a more prudent care for their environmental consequences. Through ignorance or indifference we can do massive and irreversible harm to the earthly environment on which our life and well being depend. Conversely, through fuller knowledge and wiser action, we can achieve for ourselves and our posterity a better life in an environment more in keeping with human needs and hopes ...To defend and improve the human environment for present and future generations has become an imperative goal for mankind."

The General Assembly, at this 71st Session, has the opportunity and the obligation to commit to measures: *"To defend and improve the human environment for present and future generations..."* thereby making the road forward into the future an easier one for posterity. Venezuela's aggression should not be allowed to threaten our children's future.

I thank you