

Cooperative Republic of Guyana



Address

of

His Excellency Brigadier David Granger
President *of the* Cooperative Republic of Guyana
to the 72nd Session *of the*
General Assembly of the United Nations

2017.09.20

Salutations

Mr President,

Mr Secretary-General,

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The Cooperative Republic of Guyana extends its congratulations to His Excellency Miroslav Lajčák on his election to the Presidency of the General Assembly. We are confident, Mr. President, that under your guidance, progress will be made in advancing the international agenda and in realising the theme of this year's session of the Assembly – *“Focusing on people: striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet.”*

Guyana expresses its appreciation for the sterling performance of your predecessor, Ambassador Peter Thompson of Fiji for his stewardship of the Assembly over the past year.

I take this opportunity, also, to congratulate the distinguished Secretary-General, Mr António Guterres, on his election last year. I wish him a successful tenure.

People, peace and the planet

Mr President,

Nothing is more important, in this General Debate, than that all delegates should respect the relevant theme – *Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet.*

People

First, the theme enjoins us to focus on people – people of all countries and in all circumstances. The theme is about the human condition – of people in states that are large and small; rich and poor; strong and weak. The theme is about humanity's condition everywhere on earth.

The world faces several, serious, humanitarian crises. Children, in too many parts of the world, still die from preventable diseases or go to bed hungry. Women, in some places, are denied equal opportunities to enjoy a 'good life'. The gap between the world's rich and its poor remains unacceptably wide. Conflicts, within states, have spawned international refugee crises which have resulted in millions being displaced from their homelands.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent our collective desire and determination to eradicate hunger and poverty from our planet while promoting equal opportunities in education, employment and social justice for both men and women. The adoption of the SDGs has catalysed our aspirations for a better world into concrete and forward-looking actions and objectives.

The respective 'Goals' seek to promote respect for the inherent dignity of people and their rights as human beings. The advancement of these 'Goals', however, is being obstructed by the incidence of human rights violations and the involuntary migration of people from their homelands and by terrorism and warfare.

The challenge to the UN is to resolve to reinforce respect for the rights of citizens within the governance structures of our member states.

Planet

Second, a sustainable planet is humanity's ultimate patrimony. Nothing is more vital to people's survival. We have been indifferent too long to the need to protect the planet and now its sustainability is threatened on many fronts.

Climate change is not a fiction or the invention of a few extremists. The small island states of the Caribbean and parts of North America have felt the devastating fury of a series of hurricanes – Harvey, Irma, José, Katia, Lee and Maria – to whose frequency and ferocity mankind has contributed through the reckless exploitation of earth's resources.

Hurricane Irma was a deadly, destructive portent of the extreme vulnerability and fragility of the small island developing and low-lying coastal states of the Caribbean. Guyana is playing its part, within the limits of its resources, to provide relief to affected populations in sister Caribbean states.

Guyana signed and celebrated the *Paris Agreement* on climate change last year in this Assembly. We renew our commitment to its goals this year. This is demonstrated most positively in Guyana's pioneering role in global environmental stewardship.

Guyana, in 1989 – three years before the Rio Conference of 1992 – had the foresight to enter into an environmental covenant with the international community by dedicating 360,000 hectares of its rainforest:

“...to develop, demonstrate and make available to Guyana and the international community, systems, methods and techniques for the sustainable utilization of the multiple resources of the tropical forests and the conservation of biological diversity...”

Guyana, twenty years after that international initiative, entered an agreement with the Kingdom of Norway:

“...to work together to provide the world with a relevant, replicable model of how Reducing Emissions and Forest Degradation, plus conservation and sustainable forest management (REDD+) can align the development objectives of forest countries with the need to combat climate change.”

Guyana is part of the 'Guiana Shield', one of the world's last remaining blocks of pristine rainforest. The 'Shield' is the source of 15 per cent of the world's freshwater reserves. The 'Shield's' biodiversity provides ecosystem services such as food, freshwater and medicinal products. It provides environmental services such as the regulation of the water cycle, water quality and pollination. The 'Shield's' forests capture and store carbon, thereby mitigating the greenhouse effect. The 'Shield' is essential to life on the planet.

Guyana calls on the United Nations to help protect and preserve the 'Guiana Shield' as a global resource for the survival and sustainability of our planet.

Peace

Third, 'striving for peace' has been the principal purpose and preoccupation of this organization throughout its existence. A good life for the world's peoples and the sustainable use of the planet's resources are predicated on peace with justice, including justice within and between states. The world is weary of war.

'Striving for peace' must be humanity's ceaseless quest. The United Nations is the paramount global instrument of peace. It has a vital role to play in ensuring respect for international law through the International Court of Justice and the Security Council.

'Striving for peace' must aim at resolving long-standing inter-state conflicts. Guyana, in this regard, supports the call for the reform of the Security Council to give even greater voice to developing countries.

We iterate our support for a two-state solution to the Palestine-Israeli conflict. We affirm the right of the Palestinian people to a homeland and to a dignified existence.

We demand the withdrawal of the injurious economic embargo against the Caribbean island of Cuba. The embargo frustrates that state's right to development.

'Striving for peace' and the right to development have been Guyana's deepest concern since Independence in 1966.

I addressed this Honourable Assembly last September, explaining the danger we have been facing on our borders as a consequence of the territorial claims of our western neighbour – the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. I laid before the world's nations the peril Guyana was enduring on its borders at the hands of Venezuela.

Venezuela's claim to Guyana's territory, however, has not diminished or been diverted. Guyana remains imperilled. Disturbing developments within Venezuela have attracted the world's attention and roused the concerns of many of us over the privations of its people.

The Caribbean people wish for the Caribbean to be a Zone of Peace. The Venezuelan claim to Guyana's territorial integrity, however, would be a threat to that zone. Venezuela is more than four times the size of Guyana. Venezuela, however, claims two-thirds of Guyana's territory including our maritime space.

We depend on our territorial and maritime resources for development and for the release of our people from poverty.

The Venezuelan claim persists after fifty-one years of Independence. An eminent international Arbitral Tribunal provided 'a full, perfect and final settlement' 118 years ago in 1899. Venezuela denounced that Arbitral Award in 1962 at the Decolonisation Committee of this Assembly as British Guiana strove for its Independence.

Guyana warns the world, through this Assembly, that peace will be at stake in our region if justice does not become ascendant, not only within Venezuela, but also in respect to its border controversy with Guyana.

Four UN Secretaries-General have been seized of the Venezuelan claims. The choice has become one between just and peaceful settlement in accordance with international law, and a Venezuelan posture of attrition that is increasingly more blustering and militaristic. In this matter, protraction is the enemy of resolution and the ally of sustained conflict.

Fortunately, as they indicated publicly, former Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and current Secretary General António Guterres have decided that, under the 1966 Geneva Agreement, if by the end of the year 2017 significant progress has not been made toward

arriving at a full agreement for the settlement of the controversy, the International Court of Justice will be the next means of peaceful settlement, unless Guyana and Venezuela jointly request otherwise.

Guyana has been working assiduously with the Secretary General's Personal Representative. Guyana looks to the international community to ensure that Venezuela is not allowed to thwart the processes of judicial settlement which are the clear and agreed path to peace and justice.

Nations, United

The people of the world yearn “to fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment” – an attainable objective of the Sustainable Development Goals endorsed by the United Nations.

Peace for the world’s peoples is the mandate of the United Nations. Peace can be achieved by addressing the world’s humanitarian crises, promoting justice within and between nations and resolving long-standing conflicts between states.

Planet earth can provide a ‘good life’ for all. The planet can be protected from the ravages of climate change and the reckless damage to its ecology and biodiversity.

United, the nations gathered here can fulfil the promise of the UN Charter and the theme of the General Assembly to focus on people, to strive for peace and to protect the planet.

I thank you.