



**Co-operative Republic of Guyana
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation**

254 South Road & Shiv Chanderpaul Drive, Georgetown, Guyana

50th REGULAR SESSION OF THE OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
GENERAL STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE HUGH TODD
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION OF
THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA
WASHINGTON DC, OCTOBER 20-12, 2020

Theme: “Facing the Challenges of COVID-19 in the Hemisphere: A Collaborative Approach to Address Vulnerabilities and Build Resilience in Times of Crisis, Based on the Four Pillars of the OAS”

Mr. Chairman,

Esteemed Colleague Ministers of Foreign Affairs

Heads of Delegation

Mr. Secretary-General

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Mr. Chairman,

I wish to extend congratulations upon your election to preside over these virtual proceedings and am confident that your leadership will result in a successful outcome for us all.

I commend Assistant Secretary-General Nestor Mendez and his team for the excellent technical arrangements made to ensure the success of this unprecedented virtual General Assembly.

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I am pleased to meet, albeit virtually, my colleague Foreign Ministers and other Heads of Delegation, some for the first time since being appointed Foreign Minister, and I look forward to many more fruitful engagements in the future.

Mr. Chairman,

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a most negative impact on the development of our countries, overturning the gains made towards attaining the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, while disrupting economic growth and increasing poverty and inequality. Any further delay in bringing this pandemic under control and alleviating the extreme economic distress our countries are experiencing will result in a deepened crisis, involving an increased debt burden, also a worsening unemployment situation, continued challenges to the provision of education to our children and young people, as well as a weakening of our ability to deliver adequate healthcare, among other things.

It is therefore imperative that an organisation like the OAS helps to find lasting solutions to existing hurdles that have impeded and continue to impede our progress towards a progressive and sustainable development trajectory, even as we endeavor to ensure that all four pillars of the OAS remain on equal footing.

Mr. Chairman,

Guyana, like many other countries of the hemisphere, is committed to upholding the principles of democracy and the rule of law. It is, in this regard, that I extend, on behalf of the Government and people of Guyana, to Secretary-General Luis Almagro and officials of

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the General Secretariat, in particular the Department of Electoral Cooperation and

Observation, as well as the member states of the Organisation, sincere gratitude for the support provided during our recent electoral crisis, which culminated in the will of the Guyanese people being respected and democracy and the rule of law triumphing, after five tense long months. We especially wish to express our appreciation for the role played by the Chief of the Electoral Observation Mission, former Prime Minister of Jamaica, the Most Honourable Bruce Golding and the members of the Mission, for their unwavering dedication throughout the protracted process.

Mr. Chairman,

It should come as no surprise to anyone that Guyana is very concerned about the increasing challenges to democracy in the hemisphere and around the world, many of these exacerbated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a consequence of the pandemic, more than 67 countries and territories have had elections postponed and more than 80 countries have declared a state of emergency, with a consequent deterioration in the quality of democracy and respect for human rights in most of those countries. On the other hand, during this period, 11 countries have become democracies. I therefore posit that, with collective vigilance and mutual support, and with the right amount of political will and citizen participation, democracy can prevail. We must therefore monitor ourselves daily for any regression from upholding the principles of democracy and human rights and we must be

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careful, moreover, not to allow the fragilities and vulnerabilities of our countries, particularly of small developing countries, be completely undermined by this pandemic.

Mr. Chairman,

Guyana, like so many other countries, has refocused its priorities to deal with the health crisis affecting our people and the dire economic impact on our people's livelihoods. None of us is in a position to conduct business as usual. If the popular phrase, "We're all in this together" is to have any real meaning, then we must all come together, large and small, industrialized or developing economies, to pursue a collective solution to one of the greatest existential threats of the 21st century.

Guyana sees the OAS as strategically positioned in Washington, DC, right next to the world's leading International Financial Institutions and the Inter-American Development Bank, and we therefore urge the OAS not just to carry on with its relatively small development programmes and valuable scholarship opportunities, but also to do its utmost to address the problem that we face as small developing countries.

In this respect, my Delegation fully supports the Framework Strategy Document: "From Vulnerability to Resilience" and its accompanying action plan, a collaborative effort between the Secretary-General and the CARICOM Caucus of Ambassadors, as a road map that would see the Secretary-General playing the role of key interlocutor and advocate, on our countries' behalf with the IFIs in Washington, DC and other development partners. I thank the Secretary-General, most sincerely, for agreeing to campaign our interests during this period

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of grave uncertainty and I urge member states, especially those with greater resources and those who sit on the high councils of the developed world, to recognise our needs and support more humane and realistic plans, not only to help us recover from the onslaught of the pandemic but also to build resilience and sustainability in the face of other grievous challenges and exogenous shocks, such as Climate Changes, Environmental Degradation and Natural Disasters.

Mr. Chairman,

Climate change continues to be one of the greatest existential threats to Guyana and other countries within this hemisphere. I am therefore pleased to note that the resolution, spearheaded by the Delegation of Barbados and co-sponsored by all 14 CARICOM countries at the OAS and nine other member states, “Advancing the Hemispheric Response to Climate Change in the context of COVID-19 Pandemic”, will be adopted at the end of our deliberations.

Mr. Chairman,

Our hemisphere is also faced with challenges, in the context of the multidimensional nature of security, given that transnational organized crime, corruption, narco-trafficking, cyber-attacks, terrorism and violent crime continue to impair our capacity to ensure that our societies are free from these scourges. My Delegation is mindful of the fundamental differences which may exist in our acceptance of the inter-related nature of these challenges but, nevertheless, calls on the entire membership of the OAS to acknowledge that a

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collaborative and cohesive approach in meeting these challenges would provide the greatest benefits for all.

Mr. Chairman,

Guyana has had the distinct honour and privilege of chairing, simultaneously, the Permanent Council from January 1 to March 31 and the Inter-American Council for Integral Development from January 1 to June 30. We not only oversaw the process to elect the Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General but also had to contend with the challenges presented by the first months of the coronavirus pandemic. I would like to thank all member states for their tremendous support during our twin chairmanships and Ambassador Riyad Insanally for his effective and excellent leadership in steering these bodies successfully, at a particularly challenging time for us all.

Guyana intends to continue to play its part, as a responsible member of the hemispheric community, in helping to advance a coherent hemispheric agenda, based on the four pillars of the OAS. Even in the midst of a current crisis, Guyana anticipates exponential growth, in the next few years, as a result of the benefits that are expected to be derived from our new oil and gas sector, the proceeds of which will be used responsibly for the benefit of all Guyanese. In this respect, I take this opportunity to assure our regional partners that Guyana will play its role to support Energy Security in the Caribbean and contribute to the further development of the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas (ECPA).

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I also wish to give the assurance that Guyana's election, by acclamation, to serve as Vice Chair of the Inter-Americas Committee against Terrorism (CICTE), at its 20th Regular Session held on September 25, last, will provide another opportunity for us to contribute towards ensuring that the Hemisphere's security agenda is further strengthened.

Mr. Chairman,

While we remain hopeful that we will overcome this pandemic, though we know not when, there is also need for efforts towards reducing global and societal inequalities, which have become more pronounced with the advent of this virus. As we look forward with hope towards the dawning of the brighter future, efforts should be geared towards anticipating and preventing future outbreaks while providing quality healthcare, housing, potable water, and access to education for all.

Mr. Chairman,

The OAS remains the principal forum for political dialogue in this hemisphere. This rules-based institute must pursue consensus-building, especially on the pressing issues that continue to confront us, bearing in mind the principles enshrined in our Charter. We must set aside the notion that there are separate rules and another set for others, and recognise that whatever the prevailing circumstances, now and in the future, this body must be ever mindful that the Charter must be applied equally across the board.

In this respect Guyana continues to value multilateralism and the role played by the OAS. We remain committed to ensuring that the four pillars of the OAS- democracy and good

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governance; the promotion and protection of human rights; the pursuit of integral, sustainable and equitable development; the multidimensional security needs of countries - are addressed and bear equal treatment, if we are to confront the challenges of the present and future.

I thank you.