

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2015) OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

1ST Sitting

Wednesday, 10TH June, 2015

Assembly convened at 2.00 p.m.

PROCLAMATION SUMMONING SESSION

The Clerk read the President's Proclamation summoning the session.

GUYANA

Proclamation No. 5 of 2015

Seal No. 170 of 2015

PROCLAMATION

By the President of the

Co-operative Republic of Guyana

David A. Granger

PRESIDENT

WHEREAS by Proclamation dated 24th day of February, 2015, issued under Article 70 (2) of the Constitution, the Tenth Parliament of Guyana was dissolved on the 28th day of February, 2015;

AND WHEREAS, it is provided by Article 69 (1) of the Constitution that each session of Parliament shall be held at the place within Guyana and shall begin at the time, that the President shall appoint by Proclamation:

NOW, THEREFORE, in pursuance of Article 69(1) of the Constitution, I do hereby appoint the Parliament Chamber, Public Buildings, Brickdam, Georgetown, Guyana, as the place

where a session of the Eleventh Parliament shall be held, and 2 o'clock in the afternoon on the Tenth day of June, Two Thousand and Fifteen as the time when such session shall begin.

GIVEN under my hand and the Seal of
the Cooperative Republic of
Guyana, at the Office of the
President, Georgetown, Guyana,
this Third day of June, Two
Thousand and Fifteen, in the
Forty-Sixth year of the Republic.

By the President's Command

Mr. Joseph Harmon

Minister of State

ROLL CALL

The Clerk: As required, I now call, in the order declared by the Guyana Elections Commission, the names of those persons who have, to date, become Members of the National Assembly of the Parliament of Guyana following the elections on 11th May, 2015. Will Members kindly answer as your names are called?

Roll call taken as follows:

Declared elected on 20th day of May 2015.

A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change

Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine

Mr. Basil Williams

Ms. Amna Ally

Mr. Joseph Fredrick Harmon

Mr. Carl Barrington Greenidge

Mr. Winston Da Costa Jordan

Mr. Ronald Azam Bulkan
Dr. George Aubrey Norton
Ms. Annette Natasha Ferguson
Ms. Nicolette Odella Henry
Mrs. Simona Judie Charles Broomes
Mr. Moses Verasammy Nagamootoo
Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan
Mr. David Anthony Patterson
Mr. Noel Leroy Holder
Mr. Raphael Gregory Conwright Trotman
Mr. Hans Dominic Gaskin
Mrs. Valarie Kaloo Garrido-Lowe
Mr. Audwin Andrew Rutherford
Mr. Michael Carrington
Mrs. Catherine Andrea Hughes
Dr. Karen Roslyn Vanessa Cummings
Mrs. Volda Ann Lawrence (not seated)
Mr. Jaipaul Sharma
Mr. Charrandas Persaud
Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams
Mr. Richard Version Allen
Mr. Hemraj Bernard Rajkumar
Mr. John Aloysius Adams

Ms. Jennifer Janet Wade

Mrs. Rajcoomarie Bancroft

Mr. Jermaine Adrian Figueira

Mrs. Valerie Rosanne Patterson

Members who by virtue of appointment as Ministers of the Government have become Members of Parliament:

Mr. Winston Gordon Felix (not seated)

Mr. Keith Scott

Mr. Sydney Allicock

The President has appointed Ms. Amna Ally as the Government's Chief Whip.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have not received a list from the Chief Elections Officer with respect to the declaration of the names of Members of the People's Progressive Party/Civic.

ELECTION OF SPEAKER

The Clerk: My first duty this afternoon is, in accordance with article 56 (1) of the Constitution and Standing Order number 2, of the Standing Orders of the National Assembly, to elect a person to be the Speaker of the National Assembly, and I accordingly invite nominations.

Ms. Ally: Clerk of the National Assembly, I rise to nominate Mr. Barton Scotland to be the Speaker of the National Assembly.

Mrs. Hughes: I rise to second that nomination.

The Clerk: Are there any further nominations?

Hon. Members, Dr. Barton Umax Adolphus Scotland has been nominated by Ms. Amna Ally and seconded by Mrs. Catherine Hughes. There being no further nomination I declare Dr. Barton Umax Adolphus Scotland duly elected to be Speaker of the National Assembly. The oath will now be administered to Dr. Scotland.

The Clerk administered the Oath of Office to the Speaker.

Would the proposer and seconder kindly escort the Speaker to the Chair.

The Speaker escorted and assumed the Chair.

ELECTION OF DEPUTY SPEAKER

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Members. My first task is to preside over the election of the Deputy Speaker.

I have been advised, Hon. Members, that the Deputy Speaker is chosen from the Opposition Members. In the circumstance of the absence of the absence of the Opposition Members the election of the Deputy Speaker will not take place at this sitting.

Election of Deputy Speaker deferred.

OATHS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the oath will now be administered to Members of the House by the Clerk of the National Assembly. In order to save time it is my intention to move away from the normal practice of having the Clerk of the National Assembly move from one Hon. Member to another to administer the oath. I propose, and with your consent, the Clerk will name the Hon. Member, as the name is called the Hon. Member will stand, will hold the religious book he or she prefers in his or her right hand, repeat the oath, which is on the oath form, which he has placed on the desk of every Member, and after the oath has been repeated by the Hon. Member he or she will resume his seat or her seat and sign the form. While that is being done the name of the other Member will be called and the procedure will continue until all Members have taken the oath and have signed the form.

Hon. Members, the Clerk will now proceed with the administering of the oath.

The Oath of Office was administered to and subscribed by the following Members:

Mr. Moses Verasammy Nagamootoo, M.P., Prime Minister with Responsibility for Information and First Vice-President

Mr. Carl Barrington Greenidge, M.P., Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P., Vice-President and Minister of Public Security

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Sydney Allcock, M.S. M.P., Vice-President and Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs

Mr. Basil Williams, M.S, M.P., Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs

Ms. Amna Ally, M.P, Minister of Social Cohesion within the Ministry of the Presidency

Mr. Joseph Harmon, M.S.M, M.P., Minister of State in the Ministry of the Presidency

Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine, M.P., Minister of Education

Mr. Ronald Bulkan, M.P., Minister of Communities

Dr. George Norton, M.P., Minister of Public Health

Mr. Winston Jordon, M.P., Minister of Finance

Mr. Raphael Trotman, M.P., Minister of Governance within the Ministry of the Presidency

Mrs. Volda Lawrence, M.P., Minister of Social Protection

Mr. David Patterson, M.P., Minister of Public Infrastructure

Mrs. Catherine Hughes, M.P., Minister of Tourism

Mr. Winston Felix, D.S.M., M.P., Minister of Citizenship within the Ministry of the Presidency

Mr. Hans Dominic Gaskin, M.P., Minister of Business

Mr. Noel Holder, M.P., Minister of Agriculture

Mr. Keith Scott, M.P., Minister within the Ministry of Communities

Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P., Minister within the Ministry of Communities

Ms. Annette Ferguson, M.P., Minister within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure

Mrs. Valerie Garrido-Lowe, M.P., Minister within the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs

Mr. Jaipaul Sharma, M.P., Minister within the Ministry of Finance

Dr. Karen Cummings, M.P., Minister within the Ministry of Public Health

Mrs. Simona Broomes, M.P., Minister within the Ministry of Social Protection

Ms. Nicolette Henry, M.P., Minister within the Ministry of Education

Ms. Jennifer Wade, M.P

Mrs. Rajcoomarie Bancroft, M.P

Mr. John Adams, M.P

Mr. Richard Allen, M.P

Mr. Michael Carrington, M.P

Mr. Jermaine Figueira, M.P

Ms Valarie Patterson, M.P

Mr. Charrandas Persaud, M.P

Mr. Hemraj Rajkumar, M.P

Mr. Audwin Rutherford, M.P

2.30 p.m.

PRAYER

The Clerk read the following prayer:

“Almighty God, we, who are here gathered together, do most humbly beseech Thee to guide us in all our consultations, so that we may together build a land where knowledge is free, where the mind is without fear and the head is held high, and where words come from the depth of truth.

Grant us, O God, Thine aid and guidance, so that we may deal justly with the several causes that come before us, laying aside all private interests, prejudices and personal preferences, so that the result of our counsels may be to the glory of Thy Blessed Name, the maintenance of true religion, the preservation of justice, the safety, honour and happiness of the President and the peace and prosperity of Guyana.

Grant us, O God, the vision so to lead, that all the people of this fair land may enter into that state of brotherhood and unity, where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever widening thought and action.”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I claim the opportunity to express to you, in fulsome terms, my thanks and deep appreciation for your kindness in electing me Speaker of this honourable House. By electing me Speaker of this National Assembly, you have presented me with an opportunity to join with you in fulfilling the legislative programme which will engage us here. I invite you to let us work together to that end and may our efforts be crowned with success. I thank you honourable Members.

Prime Minister with Responsibility for Information and First Vice-President [Mr. Nagamootoo]: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great honour and a rare privilege to congratulate you most heartily on your elevation to the seat of Speaker of this National Assembly. I have followed your career, Your Honour, over many years. Also, today, in a very novel way our paths have crossed again, with you being the Speaker of the National Assembly and I being the Leader of Government’s business in this august Assembly. It was first a crossing at the University of Guyana, where I read International Law under your tutorship.

I am very confident, as Leader of the House, that we will rely on your guidance, your great sense of impartiality and your scholarship to take this House through what at times have been very troubled waters. We are here, as Members of this honourable House, to assist you as much as we possibly could. On behalf of the Government of Guyana and all Members of the Government benches, I reiterate congratulations to you today on your elevation. It was well deserved. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Member.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to for the record inform you of the names of persons who were appointed by the President to be Ministers of the Government:

- Mr. Moses V. Nagamootoo – Prime Minister with Responsibility for Information and First Vice-President
- Mr. Carl B. Greenidge – Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan – Vice-President and Minister of Public Security

- Mr. Sydney Allicock – Vice-President and Minister of Indigenous People’s Affairs
- Mr. Basil Williams – Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs
- Ms. Amna Ally – Minister of Social Cohesion
- Dr. Rupert Roopnarine – Minister of Education
- Mr. Ronald A. Bulkan – Minister of Communities
- Dr. George A. Norton – Minister of Public Health
- Mr. Winston A. Jordan – Minister of Finance
- Mr. Raphael G.C. Trotman – Minister of Governance
- Mrs. Volda A. Lawrence – Minister of Social Protection
- Mr. David A. Patterson - Minister of Public Infrastructure
- Lt. Col (Ret’d) Joseph J.F. Harmon – Minister of State
- Mrs. Catherine A. Hughes – Minister of Tourism
- Mr. Winston G. Felix – Minister of Citizenship
- Mr. Hans D. Gaskin – Minister of Business
- Mr. Noel L. Holder – Minister of Agriculture
- Mr. Keith Scott – Minister within the Ministry of Communities
- Mrs. Dawn Hastings-Williams – Minister within the Ministry of Communities
- Ms. Annette N. Ferguson - Minister within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure
- Mrs. Valerie Garrido-Lowe – Minister within the Ministry of Indigenous People’s Affairs
- Mr. Jaipaul Sharma – Minister within the Ministry of Finance
- Dr. Karen R.V. Cummings – Minister within the Ministry of Public Health
- Mrs. Simona Judy Charles-Broomes – Minister within the Ministry of Social Protection
- Ms. Nicolette O. Henry – Minister within the Ministry of Education

Hon. Members that concludes the list of Ministers appointed by His Excellency, the President.

2.45 p.m.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTERS, INCLUDING POLICY STATEMENTS

Mr. Speaker: I am informed that the Hon. Greenidge, Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs would like to make a statement. You have the floor Hon. Minister.

VENEZUELA'S NON-RIGHTS TO GUYANA'S MARITIME SPACE

Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs [Mr. Greenidge]: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, may I take this opportunity, if I may, to extend to you heartiest congratulations on your preferment. I look forward to working with you, as I am sure do my Colleagues, in a fruitful Session and term which we have the opportunity of sharing in this Parliament.

On 26th May, 2015, the President of Venezuela issued Decree No. 1.787, declaring an area Venezuela now regards as its maritime space. The issue of a Decree is well within President Maduro's constitutional right. What is not his right is to utilise the sovereign territory of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana to generate maritime territory to meet Venezuela's illegal ambitions. That is precisely what the Decree purports to do in relations to Guyana's Essequibo. In addition, it mandate and authorises the Venezuelan Navy to secure the area and to clearly prevent any other State from exploiting, without Venezuela's consent, the resources of the area, an area that now includes a significant portion of Guyana's maritime space.

This Decree, in its baseless and shameless attempt at usurping Guyana's territory, is also intended to deny Guyana her legitimate right to continue the pursuit of existing development initiatives. It is also intended to impact negatively on other pending and future development initiatives in that portion of Guyana's legitimate maritime space that falls within the area circumscribed by the Decree.

Contrary to the Venezuelan Government's public statements, the Decree cannot be considered an act of sovereignty, for it applies to territory that does not belong to Venezuela. It flies in the face of all norms and principles of international law and negates the very commitments assented to by Venezuela at numerous international and regional fora regarding the peaceful settlement of disputes. Guyana therefore condemns this Decree in the strongest possible terms.

In a recent public release and in a statement communicated to me by the Venezuelan Ambassador Resident here, the Venezuelan Government is claiming that it has done nothing wrong in issuing the Decree. It asserts that over the years it has been kindly disposed towards Guyana and indeed, virtually accuses the Government of Guyana of over reacting. Let it be clear, however, that our response was to what, from our perspective, can only be described as an act of territorial aggrandisement.

What really is Venezuela's intention in taking this illegal step? Mr. Speaker, please permit me to dilate momentarily on an aspect of our relations with Venezuela, which has been a consistent underlying theme and puts in clear perspective what Guyana has had to face over the past almost 50 years. I will pass over the continuing illegal occupation of Guyana's half of the island of Ankoko and the several unlawful incursions over those early years in thinly veiled attempts at claiming sovereignty over parts of the Essequibo region. I will make only passing reference to the many attempts at hindering development of this region, including Venezuela's intervention seeking to prevent the implementation of an hydroelectric project in the Upper Mazaruni area and the pressure Venezuela has exerted at various times to discourage foreign investments in the region. Of these acts of military, paramilitary and economic aggression, all have been well documented.

Instead, I shall fast forward to more recent times. Hon. Members will recall that in 2013 a Venezuelan naval vessel seized a seismic vessel conducting surveys in Guyana's maritime space on behalf of the Anadarko Petroleum Corporation, a Company that had been granted exploration rights. The action created the climate of uncertainty amongst potential investors in Guyana's maritime space. Exxon-Mobil is amongst the companies that continue to work on its concession area, in spite of this use of force by Venezuela against the Teknik Perdana vessel. In fact, no reasonable observer could have possibly anticipated that Venezuela could ever regard the position where the Deep Water Champion is located as even remotely falling within areas claimed by Venezuela. Clearly, as was revealed at the end of February, we all underestimated Venezuela's appetite for territory. Decree No. 1.787 has confirmed this appetite.

Efforts at getting Venezuela to do the logical and reasonable thing, namely, sitting down to discuss the issue of maritime delimitation have to date proved futile. In this context it may be recalled that on 30th September, 2011 my predecessor and her Venezuelan counterpart:

“...recognised that the delimitation of the maritime boundaries between their two States remains an outstanding issue and agreed that such delimitation will require negotiations...”.

Needless to say, such negotiations never took place despite Guyana's best efforts to convene a meeting for this purpose.

In passing, it is instructive to note that the incident with Anadarko Petroleum Corporation, just referred to, occurred a few months after President Maduro of Venezuela visited Guyana. In a joint declaration with President Ramator they expressed their satisfaction with the result of their dialogue and welcomed its promise for the enhancement of relations between the two countries. On that same day, a group of Venezuelans, accompanied by armed military personnel, landed at Eteringbang. A few weeks later there was a similar occurrence by opposition Venezuelan legislators who indicated that their presence was part of an act of sovereignty.

Just last year, as part of its development programme and in pursuit of initiatives already agreed to within the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), Guyana and Brazil began a programme that involved, *inter alia*, the examination of hydropower development in parts of the Essequibo region. The Government of Venezuela, also a member of UNASUR, formally objected to this development and requested both the Brazilian Government and the Brazilian firm undertaking the feasibility studies to desist from carrying out any action in what the Venezuelan Government described as being “Unquestionably Venezuelan territory”. A similar sentiment was communicated to Guyana. Venezuela insisted that its consent was required before any significant action could take place on Guyana’s territory. These approaches and that insistence have been roundly and rightly rejected.

The Arbitral Award of 1899 definitively established the boundary between Guyana and Venezuela. It is clear that Venezuela, by the aforesaid actions, is no longer contending that the Arbitral Award of 1899 is null and void. The inescapable conclusion and one which portends great danger to regional and international peace and security is that, the Venezuelan Government has now elevated the contention of nullity and invalidity to an assertion of fact. The Decree implies that international norms and good practices are not applicable to Venezuela and, consequently, that the Decree with respect to the Essequibo region, as well as the maritime space the region provides, is *ipso facto* Venezuelan territory. It is difficult for a dispassionate observer to determine what has propelled the Government of Venezuela to take this so patently illegal action – an action that flies in the face of all the norms and conventions that govern relations between States. Guyana has always sought the principled route in response to Venezuela’s persistent and continuing acts of aggression and will continue to do so.

We have been in contact with several members of the international community and have made special approaches to other Member States of the Caribbean and Commonwealth from whom we have consistently received support in the past of our just cause. Other steps are being taken to ensure that Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity are not compromised in any way and, that our sovereign right to develop this great country, free from threats and acts of economic aggression, remains untrammelled.

For 49 years we have lived in the shadow of Venezuela's illegal claim and attempts to despoil our country. The sword of Damocles, for the most part unseen, nevertheless hangs over our heads. Unless removed, it will be the legacy that will be inherited by our children. It is time to end this cycle. A definitive solution that will put to rest Venezuela's contention of nullity has to be found.

Venezuela has, by its recent Decree, virtually given notice that it intends to continue increasing the pressure on Guyana and to weaken our resistance to its illegal claim. We will not waiver in our resistance.

Apart from the diplomatic and related measures of resistance to which I have just alluded, there is also a legal instrument assented to by Guyana, the United Kingdom and Venezuela, which provides for the examination of Venezuela's contention that the Arbitral Award of 1899 is null and void. It also provides mechanisms for the eventual settlement of that baseless contention. The Geneva Agreement of 1966 remains the best hope for keeping the issue between Guyana and Venezuela from going totally out of control. The mandate of the Secretary General of the United Nations under this Agreement is quite clear. In fact, it is very specific. According to Article IV (2):

“... the Secretary General of the United Nations shall choose another of the means stipulated in Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations, and so on until the controversy has been resolved or until all the means of peaceful settlement there contemplated have been exhausted.”

3.00 p.m.

For more than 25 years, the Good Offices Process, as one of the chosen means of peaceful settlement to which I had just made referenced, has been in operation. Unhappily, it has signally failed to resolve the issue. The Decree of 26th May, 2015 has served to widen even further the gap between Venezuela and Guyana.

Notwithstanding the fact that an International Boundary Settlement already exists in the form of the Arbitral Award of 1899, a juridical settlement in respect of Venezuela's contention that this Award is null and void appears to be the best, if not only way now open to us. To that eventuality, we must now direct our full attention. Guyana of course stands ready to continue discussions with Venezuela, with respect to our bilateral relations, while we pursue a peaceful settlement within the framework of the Geneva Agreement, where the UN Secretary General has a defined role. I thank you very much Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for his statement. Hon. Members this completes the first part of the proceeding for today. We will now await the arrival of His Excellency the President. When the President arrives he would expect the Guard of Honour in the compound and thereafter he will be escorted upstairs. Members of the Assembly and invitees and guests, who would wish to witness the arrival of His Excellency for this purpose. I ask only that you return to the Chamber and claim your seats before the President arrives in the Chamber.

Sitting suspended at 3.02 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 3.22 p.m.

The Hon. Speaker accompanied His Excellency, the President to the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker: Your Excellency and Hon. Members, I bid your Excellency welcome to this the first Sitting of this the first Session of the Eleventh Parliament of Guyana. We acknowledge too the presence of many guests and bid you welcome. Your Excellency, it is the desire of the Hon. Members to hear from you and we hope that you will be please to address us. May I, therefore invite your Excellency to address us.

Address by His Excellency, the President, Brigadier David Granger

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Speaker of the National Assembly, Hon. First Vice- President and the Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Judiciary, Vice Presidents, Ministers, Members of the National Assembly, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Clerk of the National Assembly, Special invited guests, Members of the Media, Ladies and gentlemen and Fellow Guyanese, I congratulate the Members of this Eleventh Parliament who were elected to represent the citizens of this country at the General and Regional Elections held a month ago on the 11th May, 2015. Over 408,000 Guyanese exercised their democratic right to elect a government of their choice.

Those of us who were elected have work to do. We have a responsibility to represent the people. We have an obligation to speak for them. We have a duty to serve their interest. They have put their trust in us. That is why we are here.

I congratulate Dr. Barton Scotland on his election as the 8th Speaker of this Hon. House. He is a public servant of professional eminence, academic experience and unquestionable allegiance to our country. He will add lustre to the highest legislative forum in our land as the Speaker of this Assembly.

The elections campaign is over. The ballots have been cast. The tally has been taken. The results have been declared. A new Administration has been installed.

Let us put the hostility of the hustings behind us. Let us eschew the rancour of the campaign and the rhetoric of rivalry. Let us look to the future with hope, determined to do only what is best for the Guyanese people now and for generations to come. Let us reinforce the foundation of our Nation by working together for the common good. We are now the National Assembly not a political rally.

We shall, in pursuit of the common good, build bridges across chasms. We therefore renew our invitation to the People's Progressive Party to join A Partnership for National Unity and the Alliance for Change in this honourable House to serve the people. Thousands of Guyanese, a month ago, believed that they elected us to craft a collaborative approach to confront the challenges facing our country.

This is the time for collaboration, not confrontation. This is the place - the halls of the National Assembly – where we will conduct the great debate on Guyana's future.

This is the time for all Guyanese, from the hinterland to the coastland; from the Aruka to Achewib – to come together.

The National Assembly has not met before today for eleven months, since July, 2014. This is a consequence of a combination of the recess, prorogation and dissolution. No democracy should tolerate such a perversity.

When we last met, I was sitting right here in this hall as Leader of the Opposition. I seem to have lost my seat. I stand before you today, not merely as leader of a party or even of a partnership or of a coalition, but as Leader of the entire nation. I am Leader of an

Administration that is committed to doing the greatest good for the greatest number of Guyanese.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Clerk and staff of the National Assembly for their support and service during my brief tenure as a Member of Parliament (MP) and Leader of the Opposition. Also allow me to congratulate the Clerk on his award of the Golden Arrow of Achievement for his service to this Assembly.

I would also like to thank my Colleagues who served in the 10th Parliament and also those who have not returned to serve again in the Eleventh Parliament. I would like to thank the thousands of ordinary Guyanese - the paddy farmers from the Pomeroon-Supenaam region; the nurses from the Upper Demerara- Berbice region; the indigenous villagers from the Cuyuni- Mazaruni region; the residents of the East Berbice – Corentyne region; the Citizens of Georgetown; the women; the non- governmental organisations – all of whom, from time to time, would gather outside the precincts of the Assembly to seek an audience to air their grievances to our MPs. They came because they expected us to represent them and we did.

I thank you all for making democracy work. May God bless you.

Guyanese today, celebrate the opening of their Eleventh Parliament since the achievement of Independence 49 years ago on 26th May, 1966. This Parliament will have the honour of leading this country into its 50th Anniversary of Independence next year. This Parliament will have the duty of charting the destiny of this great nation for the next five years until 2020.

3.34 p.m.

Social Cohesion

Your Government recognises today that our fore-parents came from four continents. We, their heirs and successors, resolve to work together to pursue the ideal of making Guyana one nation. We must, in so doing, combine our efforts, concentrate our energy and endeavour to defeat the real enemies of our people – crime, disease, ignorance and poverty.

Your Government acknowledges the democratically-expressed will of the people of this great country as expressed in the results of the General and Regional Elections. We are guided by a one-nation policy that will bring enormous benefits to Guyana. We envisage the elimination of one-party domination of the government; the enhancement of local, municipal and

parliamentary democracy; the elimination of ethnic insecurity; the expansion of economic enterprise; the enrichment of cultural life; and the deepening of national consciousness.

Your Government has an obligation, over the next five years, until 2020, during the legal life of the Eleventh Parliament, to fulfil the aspirations of our founding fathers. We now, therefore, reaffirm our determination to continue the task of working towards achieving national unity and towards making Guyana one nation.

Your Government seeks, first and foremost, to eliminate extreme poverty. Our Poverty Reduction Plan will adopt a one-nation approach, reducing inequalities, removing obstacles to education, opening opportunities to the disadvantaged and uniting the coastland with the hinterland. We shall introduce social policies that will harness and develop the creative energies of our people and that will support the holistic development of our women and youth.

Your Government is aware that too many very young and very old persons are still classified as ‘extremely poor’ with an expenditure level that is far below what is required to purchase a minimum, daily, low-cost diet. Poverty can be reduced and, perhaps, eventually eradicated with good governance and the sensible public policies that we shall introduce.

The fight against poverty cannot be won through charitable handouts alone; neither will trickle-down economics be the panacea for pauperisation and privation. Providing jobs for our people, particularly our young people, will be one of our priorities. Today, in our country, there is a crisis of youth unemployment. Many of our young people are leaving school and university but are unable to find jobs. Without jobs, they will never be able to escape from the cycle of poverty.

We shall continue to introduce measures to establish young people’s economic independence and to improve their livelihoods by promoting micro-enterprise development. Our policy will be geared to finding ways to increase wealth to give people a good life. Everyone, both rich and poor, stands to benefit if poverty is eradicated. It is not our intention to deprive the rich in order to help the poor. We shall involve all classes in the fight against poverty.

We will wage war against poverty under a social compact characterised by an inclusionary process. Such an approach would boost national confidence and allow for the mobilisation of the material and human resources needed for the tasks at hand. We met the leaders of our private sector who will organise a forum that will bring together business, the trade unions,

the political parties and civil society. At this forum, we will work to develop a social contract that will guide the economy for the next five years until 2020.

We feel that a vibrant labour movement is essential for social security, for a fairer society, for effective governance and for national development. We aim at resolving social conflict, reducing poverty, improving productivity, strengthening democracy and enhancing the people's quality of life.

We shall implement measures to instate inclusionary democracy and social cohesion in every municipality, every neighbourhood, every region and right here in the National Assembly. We shall together resume our work, both through the legislative process in this Assembly and in the country at large, to engage the major sections of society – including other political parties – to realise our common quest for consensus on a national programme to move the country forward. We shall continue to work to harness the talents of a broader constituency, to foster the conditions for social cohesion, to deepen the democratic process and to develop the economy.

Your Government will revise relevant labour legislation to support all legally constituted and functioning trade unions to enable them to better represent the needs of workers. We shall, towards this end, give effect to the Motion passed in the Tenth Parliament to restore the annual subvention to the Critchlow Labour College.

Your Government will introduce measures to promote social cohesion and protect vulnerable groups. We shall work towards healing the rifts between social groups in this country. We shall re-establish cordial relations with civil society, religious organisations and trade unions. We have the responsibility to restore the integrity and viability of working people's and non-governmental organisations which have been gravely undermined.

Guyana cannot become one nation if gross disparities persist between the hinterland and the coastland, between the educated few and a semi-literate mass and between the very rich and the very poor. We shall foster the growth of a united nation in which cooperation prevails over confrontation.

Your Government will undertake to ensure equitable access of all Guyanese – whether they live on the coastland or in the hinterland or whether they are poor or rich – to good health care. The primary health care system is failing women, children and the aged. The system

was meant to promote equity and social justice. It should be seen as an initiative to make health services more accessible to the people.

We shall empower our womenfolk to enable them to look forward to working for living wages and to cope with the cost of living. We shall fashion a more friendly society in which old folk can enjoy adequate pensions and social protection. We will build a country in which women and girl children can expect to live in safety and to being protected from abuse and violent crime.

Economic Growth

Your Government envisages a prosperous Guyana. We shall craft a long-term, national, economic strategy that will ensure economic stability and social security, that will raise the productive potential of the economy and that will improve the quality of life for all.

We shall introduce amendments to appropriate laws to reform taxation, including the value-added tax, to give income tax concessions to wage earners and to offer fiscal incentives on an equitable basis to investors.

Your Government will place the important diamond and gold-mining industry on a sound and stable basis. This industry has been the country's largest foreign currency earner for several years. There should be no doubt that the national economy could be significantly enhanced and the livelihood of hinterland residents and miners enriched if the industry is placed on a surer economic footing. We shall, therefore, establish a Sovereign Wealth Fund, derived from revenues from our forests, mines, waters, lands and other natural resources, to benefit generations to come.

Your Government will introduce measures which aim at achieving full employment and providing more people with job security. Steps will be taken to create jobs, increase production and generate wealth.

We shall intensify education in the sciences, technology, engineering, mining, agro-processing and the arts in order to expand employment and promote economic growth. We shall propose policies that provide opportunities for local entrepreneurs and investors and our huge diaspora to develop our abundant natural resources. We shall introduce other job-creation measures that include promoting small and medium-sized enterprises. We will also work towards ensuring greater access to finance and capital to start new businesses.

Your Government will ensure that as a general rule, people, whoever they are, who are paid only the national minimum wage will not be required to pay income tax. We shall ensure, also, that there will be no increase in income tax rates, value-added tax or national insurance contributions for this financial year. There will be, however, moderate increases in salaries paid to public servants and pensions paid to seniors.

Your Government will support its economic thrust by implementing reforms in the public education system. We aim at producing citizens of quality who will be happy to remain here at home to build our great country. We shall expand opportunities to improve communication and human learning and to drive our economy forward at a faster rate. We shall improve information, communication and education infrastructure in hinterland and coastal areas. We shall implement measures that will extend access to the information superhighway to support the education of our young people.

We shall introduce measures to curb the rate at which so many primary school children are failing to qualify to enter secondary school or are dropping out of our primary and secondary schools every year. We aim at ensuring that our young people attain higher educational standards and can look forward to finding satisfactory jobs when they leave school. We want to ensure that their time and talent are not wasted in the penal system but are spent, instead, in gainful and satisfactory employment.

Your Government aims at providing accessible and affordable housing in sanitary and safe communities, with the necessities for wholesome and dignified living, for citizens in need. We shall ensure that all state-sponsored housing developments are provided with recreational, educational and sports facilities in addition to basic infrastructure and services such as electricity, telephones, roads, solid waste disposal and pure water supply.

Well-governed Guyana

Your Government is committed to a well-governed Guyana. We reassert and reaffirm the integrity and autonomy of the National Assembly. We shall ensure that this Assembly is granted administrative autonomy, institutional autonomy, political autonomy and financial autonomy. We have seen, from the benches of the Opposition, how a subservient National Assembly could become a bane rather than a boon to democracy.

Our governance policy reflects the Commonwealth (Latimer House) Principles on the Three Branches of Government endorsed by the Commonwealth Heads of Government. Among

those principles are that Parliament should be serviced by a professional staff - independent of the regular public service. We intend to ensure that the Eleventh Parliament is equipped with its own Budget Office and its own Parliamentary Counsel based right here in the Parliament.

3.49 p.m.

Your Government will also bring forward legislation to secure strong and lasting constitutional reforms and to guarantee good governance. We shall introduce:

- The Constitution (Amendment) Bill to amend the Constitution of Guyana to add certain entities, such as the Service Commissions and the Guyana Elections Commission, that ought to enjoy financial autonomy as constitutional agencies;
- The Office of the Clerk of the National Assembly Bill to establish an independent Office of the Clerk of the National Assembly that would allow greater independence in the appointment of all staff of the Parliament Office.
- The Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Bill to ensure that certain entities enjoy financial independence to free them from executive interference with their budgetary allocations;
- We shall introduce – now hear this - Former Presidents (Benefits and Other Facilities) Bill to cap benefits, including tax-free concessions and to specify certain conditions under which the benefits are to be enjoyed;
- Constitutional Offices Commission Bill to periodically review salaries, pensions and other conditions for persons appointed to constitutional offices, including Members of the National Assembly;
- The Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Amendment) Bill to curb money laundering and the contraband trade;
- The Telecommunications Bill to provide a new regime for a liberalised and competitive telecommunications sector;
- The Public Utilities Commission (Amendment) Bill to allow equal treatment to all investors in this sector and to ensure better service quality to consumers;

- The Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill to allow greater independence to the National Broadcasting Authority and to ensure standards of fairness, balance and accuracy on matters of public interests; and
- The Local Government (Amendment) Bill to allow the setting of the date for local government elections which were last held in 1994.

And there will be more, Mr. Speaker.

Your Government will adhere to an empowerment policy that regularly renews local democracy by ensuring that local government elections are held as is stipulated in our Constitution. We shall fortify grassroots democracy by ensuring that local residents are allowed to play a greater role in managing their own towns and villages.

We shall introduce legislation to upgrade the four hinterland regional administrative centres – Bartica, Mahdia, Mabaruma and Lethem – to township status with their own Mayors and Town Councils.

Green Guyana

Your Government envisages a green Guyana. We shall exploit Guyana's favourable geographical location and abundant assets in order to develop a green economy, one that generates human happiness in ways that are consistent with the economic exploitation of its natural resources. We see a green economy as one that sustains economic prosperity, environmental security and social well-being. It will allow the current generation to satisfy its needs without jeopardising the opportunity of future generations to satisfy theirs.

We shall confront the challenges of solid waste management, of climate change, of coastal zone conservation, of flooding, of public health and of damage to the rivers and forests by poorly-regulated mining and logging practices. We shall introduce a strategy to protect the population from hazards, to preserve the environment from further degradation and to sustain economic development.

Your Government will introduce an energy policy that utilises our wind, water and solar power to provide cheap, renewable electricity to more Guyanese in our urban, rural, riverine and hinterland communities.

We shall support the responsible exploitation of the hinterland's mineral and other natural resources. We shall ensure, however, that the livelihood of the residents of those areas is sustained and that the environment is protected by the rigorous enforcement of environmental legislation.

Your Government will introduce a comprehensive plan to invest in, improve or increase public infrastructure assets. Guyana's economic development has been impeded and its international competitiveness has been impaired because of the lack of major investment in public infrastructure. Collapsing stellingings, congested city streets, aging ferries, deteriorating hinterland airstrips, broken bridges, impassable roadways and weakened kokers and sea defences must become a thing of the past. They have all become major obstacles to everyday commuting, communication and commerce.

Your Government will introduce a national infrastructure plan for the maintenance and extension of aerodromes, highways, roadways, stellingings and bridges. Frequent fatal aviation, riverine and road accidents and delays and damage to vehicles on difficult roadways increase the risk and the cost of travel.

We can keep Guyana green while giving Guyanese safer and more comfortable lives.

Secure Guyana

Your Government will do everything within its power to secure our borders.

We aim at playing a leading role in regional affairs, using our presence on the South American Continent and our membership of the Caribbean Community, the Organization of American States and the Union of South American Nations to re-engage our neighbours and resolve the major regional security and economic challenges which confront us.

We shall strengthen our friendly relations with our neighbours – the Federative Republic of Brazil, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Republic of Suriname. We believe that our four neighbouring Republics, together, have much to contribute to the security of our national borders, to the stability of this Continent, to the success of the Union of South American Nations and to the happiness of our peoples.

We will seek effective international collaboration to sustain economic growth and to preserve international peace.

Your Government will continue to work towards adherence to agreements that respect our territorial integrity on all three frontiers – Venezuela, Brazil and Suriname. We insist on the full implementation of agreements that guarantee our sovereignty.

We shall also deepen our economic relations with the Caribbean Community. We shall work tirelessly with every single state of the Community to ensure complete compliance with the *Treaty of Chaguaramas* and the fulfilment of the needs of the Caribbean peoples.

Your Government will introduce measures to reform the defence and security sectors to ensure that our Defence and Police Forces protect our citizens and our territory, allowing Guyanese to feel safe as they go about their daily lives, allowing investors to feel secure as they explore our maritime zone.

Your Government will refashion the Guyana Police Force into a more professional and better equipped law enforcement agency. We shall pay policemen and policewomen better so that they may not be led into temptation.

We shall suppress serious crimes and stanch the spate of armed robberies. We shall reduce everyday crimes, including banditry, murder, piracy, fatalities on the roads and interpersonal violence. These are the crimes that scare away investors, drive away the educated élite, strangling the economy, the manufacturing sector and the local enterprise, undermine growth and impede social development.

We are a great country and we are good people.

The opening of the Eleventh Parliament, today, signifies not a victory but an opportunity for a new start for this great country and its good people. The state of the nation requires visionary leadership. We have assembled a Cabinet of men and women who can provide that leadership. They have the expertise; they have the experience and they have the enthusiasm to repair the damage which they found, damage which has been wrought over the past two decades.

The Cabinet, made up of Members of A Partnership for National Unity and the Alliance For Change came together as an executive team committed to working with the legislative branch over the coming quinquennium.

I pray, therefore, for the unity of the Guyanese people. I pray for this National Assembly, that it will debate, deliberate and determine the matters that come before it without cowardice or malice. I pray that its decisions will result in a good life for all Guyanese.

May God bless this Eleventh Parliament. May God bless Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Your Excellency, on behalf of the Hon. Members of our National Assembly, I express thanks to you for presenting to us information on the very important tasks for which this Eleventh Parliament has been convened and which tasks it will be the honour of this House to discharge.

I thank Your Excellency.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, I will now ask that you move the motion.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, I ask that this House be adjourned until the 25th June, 2015.

Mr. Speaker: The Assembly now stands adjourned to the 25th June, 2015.

Assembly adjourned accordingly at 4.03 p.m.