



**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE PARLIAMENT OF  
THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC  
OF GUYANA**

# **OFFICIAL REPORT**

*PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2020-2023) OF THE TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE DOME OF THE ARTHUR CHUNG CONFERENCE CENTRE, LILIENDAAL, GREATER GEORGETOWN*

---

68<sup>TH</sup> Sitting

Monday, 6<sup>TH</sup> November, 2023

---

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE  
HANSARD DIVISION**

*The Assembly convened at 10.05 a.m.*

*Prayers*

*[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]*

**MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)**

**Speaker (1)**

\*Hon. Manzoor Nadir, M.P.,  
*Speaker of the National Assembly,  
Parliament Office,  
Public Buildings,  
Brickdam,  
Georgetown.*

**MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)**

**(i) MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY/CIVIC (PPP/C) (38)**

**Prime Minister (1)**

+ Hon. Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark Anthony Phillips, M.S.S., M.P.,  
*Prime Minister,  
Prime Minister's Office,  
Colgrain House,  
205 Camp Street,  
Georgetown.*

**Vice-President (1)**

+ Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P.,  
*Vice-President,  
Office of the President,  
New Garden Street,  
Georgetown.*

**Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)**

+ Hon. Mohabir Anil Nandlall, M.P.,  
*Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs,  
Ministry of Legal Affairs,  
Carmichael Street,  
Georgetown.*

+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Speaker**

## **Senior Ministers (16)**

+ Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.,  
(Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni),  
*Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance,*  
*Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.*  
*Government Chief Whip,*  
*Office of the Presidency,*  
*New Garden Street,*  
*Georgetown.*

+ Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P.,  
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),  
*Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation,*  
*Ministry of Foreign Affairs,*  
*Lot 254 South Road,*  
*Georgetown.*

+\*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,  
*Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance*  
*Ministry of Finance,*  
*Main & Urquhart Streets,*  
*Georgetown.*

+ Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P.,  
*Minister of Public Works,*  
*Ministry of Public Works,*  
*Wight's Lane,*  
*Kingston,*  
*Georgetown.*

+ Hon. Dr. Frank C. S. Anthony, M.P.,  
*Minister of Health,*  
*Ministry of Health,*  
*Brickdam,*  
*Georgetown.*

+ Hon. Priya D. Manickchand, M.P.,  
(Region No. 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),  
*Minister of Education,*  
*Ministry of Education,*  
*Lot 26 Brickdam,*  
*Georgetown.*

+ \*Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P.,  
*Minister of Home Affairs,*  
*Ministry of Home Affairs,*  
*Brickdam,*  
*Georgetown.*

+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P.,  
*Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),*  
*Minister of Agriculture,*  
*Ministry of Agriculture,*  
*Regent and Vlissengen Road,*  
*Bourda, Georgetown.*

+ Hon. Pauline R.A. Campbell-Sukhai, M.P.,  
*Minister of Amerindian Affairs,*  
*Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,*  
*Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,*  
*South Cummingsburg,*  
*Georgetown.*

+ Hon. Joseph L.F. Hamilton, M.P.,  
*Minister of Labour,*  
*Ministry of Labour,*  
*Brickdam,*  
*Georgetown.*

+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,  
*Minister of Natural Resources,*  
*Ministry of Natural Resources,*  
*Lot 96 Duke Street,*  
*Kingston,*  
*Georgetown.*

+\*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P.,  
*Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,*  
*Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,*  
*Lot 229 South Road,*  
*Bourda, Georgetown.*

+ Hon. Collin D. Croal, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 1 – BarimaWaini),*  
*Minister of Housing and Water,*  
*Ministry of Housing and Water,*  
*Brickdam,*  
*Georgetown.*

+ Hon. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P.,  
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),*  
*Minister of Human Services and Social Security,*  
*Ministry of Human Services and Social Security,*  
*Lot 357 East and Lamaha Streets*  
*Georgetown.*

+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Charles S. Ramson, M.P.,  
*Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports,*  
*Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports,*  
*Main Street,*  
*Georgetown.*

+ Hon. Sonia Savitri Parag, M.P.,  
*Minister of the Public Service,*  
*Ministry of the Public Service,*  
*164 Waterloo Street,*  
*North Cummingsburg,*  
*Georgetown.*

**Junior Ministers (4)**

Hon. Susan M. Rodrigues, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),*  
*Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water,*  
*Ministry of Housing and Water,*  
*Lot 41 Brickdam & United Place,*  
*Stabroek,*  
*Georgetown.*

Hon. Deodat Indar, M.P.,  
*Minister within the Ministry of Public Works,*  
*Ministry of Public Works,*  
*Wight's Lane,*  
*Kingston,*  
*Georgetown.*

Hon. Anand Persaud, M.P.,  
*Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,*  
*Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,*  
*Fort Street,*  
*Kingston,*  
*Georgetown.*

Hon. Warren Kwame E. McCoy, M.P.,  
*Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister,*  
*Office of the Prime Minister,*  
*c/o Colgrain House,*  
*205 Camp Street,*  
*Georgetown.*

+ **Cabinet Member**

**Other Members (15)**

Hon. Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj, M.P.,  
*Lot 71 BB Eccles,  
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Alister S. Charlie, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),  
148 Lethem,  
Central Rupununi,  
c/o Freedom House,  
41 Robb Street,  
Georgetown.*

Hon. Dr. Vishwa D.B. Mahadeo, M.P.,  
*Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),  
Lot 4 Public Road,  
No. 66 Village,  
Corentyne,  
Berbice.*

Hon. Mr. Sanjeev J. Datadin, M.P.,  
*Lot 60 Section 'K',  
John Street,  
Campbellville,  
Georgetown.*

Hon. Mr. Seepaul Narine, M.P.,  
*Lot 321 BB Seventh Street,  
Eccles,  
East Bank Demerara.*

Mrs. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, M.P.,  
*Mainstay Lake/Whyaka Village,  
Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,  
c/o Freedom House,  
41 Robb Street,  
Georgetown.*

Hon. Dr. Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.P.,  
*Lot 340 East Street,  
South Cummingsburg,  
c/o Freedom House,  
41 Robb Street,  
Georgetown.*

Hon. Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.,  
*55 AA Victoria Avenue,  
Eccles,  
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Faizal M. Jaffarally, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),  
Lot 16-30 New Street,  
New Amsterdam.  
c/o Freedom House,  
Robb Street,  
Georgetown.*

*[Virtual Participation]*

Hon. Dr. Tandika S. Smith, M.P.,  
(Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),  
Lot 290 Area 'J',  
Tuschen, North,  
East Bank Essequibo.

Hon. Mr. Lee G.H. Williams, M.P.,  
Paruima Upper Mazaruni,  
c/o Freedom House,  
Robb Street,  
Georgetown.

\* Hon. Ms. Sarah Browne, M.P.,  
Parliamentary Secretary,  
Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,  
Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,  
South Cummingsburg,  
Georgetown.

*[Absent – on leave]*

\* Hon. Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,  
Parliamentary Secretary,  
Ministry of Agriculture,  
Regent and Vlissengen Road,  
Bourda, Georgetown.

*[Absent – on leave]*

Hon. Ms. Bhagmattie Veerasammy, M.P.,  
Lot 32 Crown Dam,  
Industry,  
East Coast Demerara.

Hon. Ms. Nandranie Coonjah, M.P.,  
(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),  
Lot 69 Suddie New Housing Scheme,  
Essequibo Coast.  
c/o Freedom House,  
Lot 41 Robb Street,  
Georgetown.

**MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)**

**(i) A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) (31)**

Hon. Mr. Aubrey Norton, M.P.,  
*Leader of the Opposition*

Hon. Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.,  
*Lot 10 Delph Street,  
Campbelville,  
Georgetown.*

Hon. Mr. Roysdale A. Forde, S.C., M.P.,  
*Lot 410 Caneview Avenue,  
South Ruimveldt,  
Georgetown.*

Hon. Mr. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),  
Lot 55 Henrietta,  
Essequibo Coast.*

*[Virtual Participation]*

Hon. Ms. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),  
Lot 13 A, New Providence,  
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P.,  
*Lot 48 Atlantic Ville,  
Georgetown.*

Hon. Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P.,  
*Lot 590 Good Hope,  
East Coast Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Volda Lawrence, M.P.,  
*Lot 7 Freeman Street,  
Castello Housing Scheme,  
La-Penitence,  
Georgetown.*

*[Virtual Participation]*

Hon. Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P.,  
*Lot 933 Block 1,  
Eccles,  
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Christopher A. Jones, M.P.,  
*Opposition Chief Whip,  
Lot 609 Conciliation Street,  
Tucville,  
Georgetown.*

Hon. Mr. Vinceroy H. Jordan, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),  
Lot 214 Lovely Lass Village,  
West Coast Berbice.*

*C/o Christopher Jones*

Hon. Ms. Amanza O.R. Walton-Desir, M.P.,  
*Lot 1285 EE Eccles Sugarcane Field,  
East Bank Demerara.*



Hon. Ms. Coretta A. McDonald, A.A., M.P.,  
*Lot 202 N, Fourth Street,  
Alexander Village,  
Georgetown.*

Hon. Mr. Deonarine Ramsaroop, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),  
Lot 40 Block 3  
Craig Milne,  
Cove & John,  
East Coast Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Vincent P. Henry, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),  
Shulidnab Village,  
South Central,  
Rupununi.*

*(Culvert City Lethem)*

Hon. Dr. Karen R.V. Cummings, M.P.,  
*Lot 2 Belfield Housing Scheme,  
East Coast Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Tabitha J. Sarabo-Halley, M.P.,  
*Lot 3382 Caneview Avenue,  
South Ruimveldt Park,  
Georgetown.*

Hon. Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P.,  
*Lot 1110 Plot 'B',  
Herstelling,  
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P.,  
*Lot 842 Eccles,  
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P.,  
*Lot 1282 Block EE,  
Eccles,  
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. David A. Patterson, M.P.,  
*Lot 151 Durbana Square,  
Lamaha Gardens,  
Georgetown.*

Hon. Mr. Ronald Cox, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 1 – Barima Waini),  
Mabaruma Compound.*

Hon. Mr. Jermaine A. Figueira, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),  
Lot 136 2<sup>nd</sup> Street,  
Silvertown,  
Wismar, Linden.*

*[Virtual Participation]*

Hon. Mr. Ganesh A. Mahipaul, M.P.,  
*Lot 14 Plantain Walk,  
West Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Haimraj B. Rajkumar, M.P.,  
*Lot 18 Public Road,  
Johanna Cecilia,  
(Region # 2 Essequibo Coast).*

Hon. Ms. Nima N. Flue-Bess, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),  
Lot 88 Nelson Street,  
Mocha Village,  
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P.,  
*Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),  
Lot 80 Babu John Road, Haswell,  
Port Mourant, Corentyne Berbice.*

Hon. Ms. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),  
Lot 17 Block 1, Section F,  
Plantation Belfield,  
East Coast Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Beverley Alert, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)  
Lot 169-170 Stanleytown,  
West Bank Demerara.  
c/o Lot 13 A, New Providence,  
East Bank Demerara.*

*[Virtual Participation]*

Hon. Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 8 –Potaro/Siparuni)  
Church Street Mahdia.  
Lot 4 Public Road,  
Stewartville,  
West Coast Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Devin L. Sears, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),  
Lot 90, Section C,  
Wismar, Linden.*

**(ii) A New and United Guyana, Liberty and Justice Party and The New Movement (ANUG, LJP & TNM) (1)**

Hon. Dr. Asha Kisooson, M.P.,  
*Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly,  
Lot 855, 3<sup>rd</sup> Field,  
Cummings Lodge,  
Greater Georgetown.*

## **Officers (2)**

Mr. Sherlock E. Isaacs, A.A.,  
*Clerk of the National Assembly,*  
*Parliament Office,*  
*Public Buildings,*  
*Brickdam,*  
*Georgetown.*

Ms. Hermina Gilgeours,  
*Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly,*  
*Parliament Office,*  
*Public Buildings,*  
*Brickdam,*  
*Georgetown.*

## **Hansard Division Officers (16)**

Ms. Allison Connelly,  
*Chief Editor*

Ms. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,  
*Senior Editor*

Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,  
*Senior Editor*

Ms. Carol Bess,  
*Editor*

Ms. Shevona Telford,  
*Editor (a.g.)*

Ms. Tesia Ellis,  
*Editor (a.g.)*

Ms. Indranie Persaud,  
*Reporter*

Ms. Roseina Singh,  
*Reporter*

Ms. Somna Karen-Muridall,  
*Reporter*

Ms. Lushonn Bess,  
*Reporter*

Ms. Eyoka Gibson,  
*Reporter*

Ms. Celisa DeFlorimonte,  
*Reporter (a.g.)*

Mr. Tafari David,  
*Reporter (a.g.)*

Mr. Parmanand Singh,  
*Pre –Press Technician*

Mr. Saeed Umrao,  
*Audio Technician*

Mr. Daison Horsham,  
*Audio Technician*

---

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

*Contents*

---

68<sup>TH</sup> Sitting

Monday, 6<sup>TH</sup> November, 2023

---

Public Business – Motion ..... 10355-10451  
Support for Govt & People of Guyana - Reaffirming Recog. – 1899 Arbitral Award & 1966 Geneva Agreement  
.....10357-10450  
Adjournment - ..... 10452

## ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, today is a very important and significant day for our country with this Extraordinary Sitting of the National Assembly of the Twelfth Parliament of our Republic. At the beginning, on your behalf and my own, I want to acknowledge the presence of former Speakers Mr. Scotland and Mr. Ramkarran, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, our leaders of our Disciplined Forces, and senior officials of Government this morning. There is a significant interest in what is happening. Online, there are thousands of viewers currently tuning in to the live streaming of this particular session. I want to express my appreciation to the Government and the Opposition for working to ensure that we have this session here today. Thank you, very much. [*Applause*]

## PUBLIC BUSINESS

### MOTION

#### **SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF THE COOPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA AND REAFFIRMING RECOGNITION OF THE 1899 ARBITRAL AWARD AND THE 1966 GENEVA AGREEMENT**

WHEREAS the Arbitral Award of an Arbitral Tribunal constituted under the Treaty of Arbitration signed in Washington on 2 February 1897, determined the boundary-line between the Colony of British Guiana and the United States of Venezuela in 1899;

AND WHEREAS by the 1897 Treaty, the United Kingdom and Venezuela agreed that the results of the Arbitration would be a full, perfect and final settlement of the questions referred to the Arbitrators, and in 1905 signed the Agreement with regard to the Map of the Boundary which outlined the boundary and accepted the coordinates thereof;

AND WHEREAS, for over six decades, the boundary was internationally recognized, accepted and respected by Venezuela, Guyana and the international community as being the land boundary between the two States;

AND WHEREAS the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela arbitrarily and unilaterally sought, from 1962, to challenge and impugn the 1899 Arbitral Award, thus, giving rise to a controversy over the validity of the Award;

AND WHEREAS the Geneva Agreement of 1966 which was concluded among the Parties adumbrated the means of peacefully and legally resolving this controversy and in compliance with its terms, both the Cooperative Republic of

Guyana and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela agreed and referred the choice of the means of settlement of the controversy to the United Nations Secretary-General;

AND WHEREAS the United Nations Secretary-General first selected a Good Offices Process in 1989 which was effected until 2016 with an enhanced mediation process in 2017, the entire period during which the Government of Venezuela was never able to prove its claim of nullity of the 1899 Arbitral Award, but instead embarked on a pattern of intimidation, threat, economic aggression and neo-colonialism against Guyana, using its superior military, economic and political power to try to weaken and force Guyana to agree to the nullification of the 1899 Arbitral Award;

AND WHEREAS, the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana has always relied on international law and justice, and the support of its international partners including the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States, the Caribbean Community; and its bilateral partners and friends to secure its sovereignty and territorial integrity and to be able to withstand the continued and systematic onslaught from the Government of Venezuela, relating to its illegal and unjust claim to more than two-thirds of Guyana's territory;

AND WHEREAS the Cooperative Republic of Guyana despite the aggression of Venezuela, has always abided by the strict terms of the Geneva Agreement, in furtherance of which and in need of respite, invited the United Nations Secretary-General to refer the matter of the Venezuelan claim of invalidity of the 1899 Arbitral Award to the International Court of Justice, of which both the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela are members;

AND WHEREAS the United Nations Secretary-General, having determined that no progress was made towards the resolution of the controversy after twenty-eight (28) years of bilateral dialogue between the Parties, did so in 2018 in accordance with the powers conferred upon him by Article IV(2) of the Geneva Agreement; and the matter remains extant before the International Court of Justice;

AND WHEREAS the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela raised two preliminary objections to the Court's adjudication of the matter; first challenging the existence of the Court's jurisdiction then secondly, challenging the exercise of that jurisdiction, both matters of which were dispensed with by the Court which in its judgement of December 18, 2020 affirmed its jurisdiction based on the provisions of the

Geneva Agreement and in its judgement of April 6, 2023 rejected the preliminary objection of Venezuela;

AND WHEREAS in another attempt to avoid the scrutiny of its illegal claim under international law and to nullify the binding legal process before the International Court of Justice, the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has demanded that the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana return to the now defunct bilateral dialogue on the issue of Venezuela's illegal claim; the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana refused to enter into such dialogue and reaffirmed its commitment to the process before the International Court of Justice;

AND WHEREAS the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on September 21, 2023 decided to hold a Referendum on December 3, 2023 where it will put to its populace, five questions relating to the controversy between the two States, including whether citizens “agree with the historic position of Venezuela not to recognize the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice to resolve the controversy over the territory of ‘Guayana Essequiba’” (Question Three); and in a most flagrant disregard for international law, Question Five speaks to the annexation of the territory awarded to Guyana (then British Guiana) by the 1899 Arbitral Award coupled with inter alia, granting Venezuelan citizenship and identification cards to Guyanese citizens in that region;

AND WHEREAS the Government and people of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana deem this purported Referendum to be contemptuous of the legal process prevailing before the International Court of Justice and repugnant to the accepted principles, tenets, norms and practices of international law;

BE IT RESOLVED that this National Assembly:

1. Affirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the State of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana;
2. Reaffirms its recognition and acceptance of the 1899 Arbitral Award as a “full, perfect and final” settlement of the boundary between Guyana and Venezuela and Article IV (2) of the 1966 Geneva Agreement as giving the mandate to the United Nations Secretary-General to select the means of resolving the controversy;

3. Denounces as provocative, unlawful, void, and of no international legal effect, the purported referendum in Venezuela that is scheduled for December 3, 2023;
4. Supports the Government in its pursuit to ensure a peaceful and lawful resolution of the controversy before the International Court of Justice and rejects the proposal to return to any form of dialogue with Venezuela on the controversy outside of the process before the Court;
5. Supports Government's formal approach for the urgent protection of the International Court of Justice, with the filing with the Court a Request for Provisional Measures for an Order preventing Venezuela from taking any action to seize, acquire or encroach upon, or assert or exercise sovereignty over, the Essequibo Region or any other part of Guyana's national territory, pending the Court's final determination of the validity of the Arbitral Award;
6. Calls for the deepening of engagements among all national stakeholders on issues relating to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, particularly within the context of the meetings of the bipartisan Ministerial Advisory Committee on the Guyana/Venezuela Controversy;
7. Encourages the citizens of Guyana to remain fully engaged on developments surrounding the controversy;
8. Expresses its appreciation to the partners and friends of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for their support and expressions of affirmation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Guyana.

*[Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation]*

The motion was circulated. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation to move this motion. Hon. Minister, Hugh Todd, you may proceed.

**Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation [Mr. Todd]:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this motion that is standing in the

hearts of Guyanese everywhere. For this motion itself, I commend this absorption to every Member of this House and beyond these walls to all who need an understanding of neighbourly deception, the ravages of greed, and grasping ambition. We have been the victims of such vice from Venezuela. A vice that ebbed and flowed over the years as electoral ambition and human weakness made Venezuelan political leadership devoid of its commitment to treaties and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. She, Venezuela, has attempted to mislead the world that it is desirous of dialogue and amicable resolution, but she had decades for dialogue. This has amounted to nothing. Latin America is a zone of peace. Venezuela not only threatens but asserts that it will end that zone.

Dr. Eric Williams, the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago who was one of the leaders of the Caribbean Integration Movement, in his speech titled *The Threat to the Caribbean Community* in 1975 addressed in quite some detail the issue of Venezuela's territorial ambition and penetration of the Caribbean over the last century. Dr. Williams posited that Venezuela had historically used two arguments to justify its vicious and unrelenting quest for territorial spoils in this part of the hemisphere. One, Spain's right of discovery fortified by the *Papal Bull* of 1492. Secondly, the captaincy the General of Venezuela established in 1777. I will encourage every Member of this House and Guyanese here and abroad to read this seminal piece on Dr. Eric Williams.

10.12 a.m.

These arguments were the basis for Venezuela's territorial claims in the Northern Caribbean to Bird Island. Venezuela's boundary dispute with Columbia includes the Mohave Archipelago in the Western Caribbean, in the East, its claim Essequibo and Trinidad's offshore islands. By the 1960s, Venezuela was able to take possession of Bird Island. Aves Island from Dominica, even though that island was 350 miles away from Venezuela and only 70 miles from Dominica, took possession of Los Mohave Archipelago from Columbia, took Patos island from Trinidad, and laid its claim to the Essequibo. The Essequibo region is the only territory that Venezuela has had her eyes set on that she has not been able to take possession of and she will not be able to take possession of our Essequibo.

The independence Constitution of Guyana provided that the territory of Guyana shall comprise all areas that, immediately before the 26<sup>th</sup> May 1966, formed the former Colony of British Guiana. This territory includes the

Essequibo since British Guiana's western boundary with Venezuela had been well established. The international law deems that agreed or established boundaries are sacrosanct, immutable, and permanent, and it is regrettable that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has continued for decades on a path that is in direct confrontation with this fundamental principle that has been steadfastly upheld by the International Court of Justice and I quote, once agreed a boundary stands:

“...for any other approach would vitiate the fundamental principle of the stability of boundaries.”

The boundary between Guyana and Venezuela was established by the Arbitral Award on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1899. The Arbitral Award was impanelled pursuing the Treaty of Washington on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 1897, consisting of permanent jurists from the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US) Supreme Court, and Russia. Unanimously agreed on the present-day land boundary between Guyana and Venezuela, consistent with the old age principle regarding the sanctity of boundaries. Article 13 of the Treaty of Washington obligated the parties to and:

“...consider the result of the proceeds of the Tribunal of Arbitration as a full, perfect, and final settlement of all the questions referred to the Arbitrators.”

The Treaty of Washington provided for Great Britain to nominate two members. On its part, the members of the judicial committee where Her Majesty Privy Council nominated the right Honourable Charles Baron Russel I, Lord Chief Justice of England, and Sir Richard Henn Collins, the Lord Justice of Appeal of England's High Court. On the part of Venezuela, it nominated the United States Chief Justice, Mr. Weston Fuller. The United States nominated Justice Josiah Brewer of the United States Supreme Court. The tribunal was presided over by Mr. Frederick DeMartens, a privy councillor, a permanent Member of the Council of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Russia and a Doctor of Law. He also taught at the universities of Cambridge, Eric, and Edinburgh.

Venezuela, therefore, participated fully in the arbitration process and, as a sovereign state, chose its arbitrator in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Washington. This tribunal unanimously agreed on the present-day land boundary between Guyana and Venezuela. Mr. Speaker, for 63 years, Venezuela accepted the Award of 1899 as a full, perfect and final settlement, including by the act of ratification of the award within its Congress. It is important

to point out Venezuela's Ambassador, Mr. **José** Andrade, the brother of the then Venezuelan President, commented on 7<sup>th</sup> October, 1899, a mere four days after the award was given, and I quote: *Greatly indeed did justice shine forth when, in spite of all, in the determining of the frontier the exclusive dominion of the Orinoco was granted to us, which is the principal aim which we set ourselves to obtain through arbitration.*

He goes on to state:

“I consider well spent the humble efforts which I devoted personally to this end during the last six years of my public life.”

I want the people of Guyana and the International Community and the world over to see the developments post-1899 and how it is being chronicled and recorded in history factually and truthfully, and we are here this morning as a nation united to show the world that we are here on the right side of history and the right side of international law. Moreover, two months after the Award, the American President at that time, Mr. William McKinley, spoke of Caracas's satisfaction in his State of the Union address to the American Congress on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1899, and this is what he said:

“The International Commission of Arbitration appointed under the Anglo-Venezuelan Treaty of 1897 rendered an award on October 3 last whereby the boundaries line between Venezuela and British Guiana is determined...;”

He goes on to state:

“...thus ending a controversy which had existed for the greater part of the century. The Award, as to which the arbitrators were unanimous, while not meeting the extreme contention of either party, gives to Great Britain a large share of the interior territory in dispute and to Venezuela the entire mouth of the Orinoco, including Barima Point and the Caribbean littoral for some distance to the eastwards. The decision appears to be equally satisfactory to both parties.”

This is what the United States President said in his address to the Congress, and you know of the State of the Union address given America's not only national policies but its foreign policies updating the people of America. This is what was established in December of 1899.

Mr. Speaker, if you allow me further, between 1900 and 1904, Venezuela also participated in the joint placement of the boundary markers with the British to identify the boundary as delimited by the award and signed the agreement regarding the map of the boundary in 1905 consistent with the rulings contained in the award. The history and the facts are overwhelming, but I have to continue because we have to give the people of Guyana a fulsome understanding of this longstanding controversy, which Guyana intends to see through to its logical conclusion in the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Allow me to show the people of Guyana and this House what and how Venezuela benefitted. When we talk about Orinoco, this is the map; I know it is small, but I know our modern-day technology can enhance this for us. Venezuela attained 751,640 square kilometres from that award. In square miles, that is 358,841 square miles, which is more than four times the size of Guyana; that is what it got in the award.

Guyana got 83,000 square miles or equivalent to 214,969 square kilometres. Mr. Speaker, the facts are here. Venezuela was content with what it wanted because it felt that if it got the Orinoco, it was satisfactory for it. It was a victory. It got all that it had bargained for. Therefore, in the contemporary political economy, it is unbelievable and inconceivable that Venezuela would want to try to fool the rest of the world into thinking that it has a legitimate right to Guyana's territory; this will not stand Mr. Speaker. We live in a world where laws and rules must be respected by every nation-state. However, by the proverbial magic wand, Venezuela sought and still seeks to unilaterally sweep away the reality of the award and our own conscious acts consistent with its rulings by seeking to impugn the credibility of the Members of the Tribunal, one of whom she, herself, had selected and all of whom were indeed eminent and respected jurists of their time. We are dealing in a time in 1899 when the best were selected, two from Great Britain and two jurists from the United States. One was selected by Venezuela, and one by the President of the United States. It was a solid team. Those four jurists selected a Russian Lawyer and Diplomat. It could not have gotten better than that in 1899.

10.27 a.m.

I recall that in 1899, we still had about six empires. We still only had about 65 nation-states. The only regional institution at that time was the Organization of American States (OAS). That Arbitral Tribunal was respected. It was credible and did its work in the best interest of ensuring that both British Guiana – at that time – and Venezuela got their fair share in the boundaries.



It is clear that Venezuela's only grounds for its declaration of nullity and invalidity of the 1899 Arbitral Award is a posthumous publication of a memorandum by – at that time – a young legal counsel of the law firm that represented the interest of Venezuela during the arbitration process. The memorandum, allegedly written by Attorney Mallet-Prevost in 1944, accused the members of the Tribunal, including its President, Mr. Frederic de Martens – a Russian international lawyer and diplomat – of conspiring to despoil Venezuela of territory in favour of the British. This is what we have to deal with, Mr. Speaker. A young Attorney at that time, who had obviously matured by 1944, presented a memorandum to the Government of Venezuela which alleged that there was some collusion among those seasoned and highly respected Judges. At this time, we are speaking about the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), and Russia. It was a good time for inter-state relations. It was a good time for international law and its development.

We, the people of Guyana, are very convinced that those Attorneys who sat on the Tribunal did their best to ensure that they upheld decency and kept their characters intact in the interest of both the then British Guiana and Venezuela. We are sure of the fact that the International Court of Justice will prevail, and the world will stand with Guyana and its people. Mr. Speaker, no evidence has ever been found to support this accusation of this young Attorney. He ensured that he could not be questioned about it; his instructions were that his memorandum must not be released until six months after his demise. Let us go back. Attorney General (AG), I am sure you are downing your head for this. Could you imagine that an Attorney at that time was putting two states against each other, and he was not willing when he was alive to justify his argument to say the world, where, when, and how these events occurred? He wanted it to be unsealed six months after his death. This is unfounded. This should not be accepted by any right-thinking member of this society or any society in the world over. It is noteworthy that at the same time, the law firm that represented Venezuela wrote in the *American Journal of International Law* in 1949. This is what it states in the Journal:

“The Award secured to Venezuela the mouth of the Orinoco and control of the Orinoco basin, these being the most important questions at issue.”

So, there is a contradiction here. You have the young Attorney who states in 1943 that there was some collusion among these esteemed jurists. Yet again, the same law firm that represented Venezuela states in the *American Journal of International Law* that all is well – all was well. It does not

take a specialist to understand what is going on, Mr. Speaker. It does not take an intellect to demystify what Venezuela has attempted to do over the several decades. We, as Guyanese, are very proud of our history and heritage. We are here today in this House to not only represent the people of Guyana; we want to set an example for the world over. We believe in the rule of international law and the maintenance of peace and stability. We want to ensure that there is sanctity of agreements and treaties.

In view of the fact that the acquisitions in the memorandum were unsubstantiated by Venezuela, it unilaterally and formally declared the Award of 1899 null and void as early as 1962. The British Government agreed to provide full access to its archives to Venezuela and British experts to lay rest the unsubstantiated acquisitions made. Importantly, no evidence was found by the experts. Yet, Venezuela persisted with its claim of nullity and invalidity of the Award. The British Government and the pre-independent Guiana agreed to permit an even closer examination of the acquisitions made by and upon which the unilateral contention of Venezuela is based. So, we were extremely patient and respectful with Venezuela. Venezuela has always been the tyrant; it has always been the state devoid of any respect for the sanctity of treaties and agreements. It is clear, in every section and every phase in our history that Venezuela has always been on the wrong side of international law. It was within that context that the Geneva Agreement of 17th February 1966 was negotiated. As stated in Article 1, the objective and purpose of the Geneva Agreement is to seek:

“... satisfactory solutions for the practical settlement of the controversy between Venezuela and the United Kingdom which has arisen as the result of the Venezuelan contention that the Arbitral Award of 1899 about the frontier between British Guiana and Venezuela is null and void.”

Venezuela incorrectly views the 1966 Geneva Agreement as replacing the 1899 Arbitral Award. Guyana has consistently requested successive Governments of Venezuela to do ‘three’ things. One, prove the basis of the contention that the Arbitral Award of 1899 is null and void. Two, identify any provision in the Geneva Agreement that states that Guyana is precluded from developing the Essequibo. Three, identify the article in that Agreement that states the Arbitral Award of 1899 is superseded by the Geneva Agreement. Venezuela has never been able to do so, and it will never be able to do so because it is on the wrong side of history. Instead, Venezuela expanded its claim of nullity of the 1899 Arbitral Award to claim the entire Essequibo region, the waters off

the coast of Essequibo and now even further afield. In furtherance of its baseless claim, successive Governments of Venezuela have resorted to acts of open military aggression, such as the continued illegal occupation of Guyana's territory on Ankoko Island and the forced removal and detention of a survey vessel back in October of 2013 in our exclusive economic zone. There have been threats to companies investing in Essequibo and Guyana's maritime spaces, the host Government, and outright subterfuge.

Under the hospices of the Geneva Agreement, a Mixed Commission was established for the purpose of seeking satisfactory solutions for the practical settlement of the controversy arising from Venezuela's contention of nullity. The Mixed Commission held numerous meetings during its four-year term between 1966 and 1970 but was unable to make any progress towards the settlement of the controversy. Following a 12-year moratorium between 1970 and 1982 and the seven-year period of consultations on a means of settlement between 1983 and 1990, the parties agreed to refer the matter to the United Nations Secretary-General to determine the means of settlement of the controversy. The Secretary-General chose the Good Offices Process. So, from 1990 to 2017, the parties engaged in a 27-year Good Offices Process, including one year of enhanced mediation. We are giving the people of Guyana an understanding of the burden that we have had to carry perpetually, given Venezuela's reluctance to respect the 1899 agreement and its path towards expansionism.

We know all too well what Venezuela wants. It wants to take our land away from us, which we rightfully own. Venezuela wants more access as it did with Dominica, Columbia, and Trinidad and Tobago. This is what it is about. It is pure greed; it has more than its fair share. It is four times the size of Guyana. Why would it want more? This is a zone of peace, Mr. Speaker. This is an era of peace and stability. Venezuela has to stop. Venezuela has to recognise that we need to move forward to get this region as one and a zone of peace. Venezuela is the only country in this region that is threatening that peace. That must not happen, not now, not never, or not ever. Once again, this process yielded no significant progress toward the resolution of a controversy. Venezuela has never been able to prove its claim of nullity of the 1899 Arbitral Award.

10.42 a.m.

During the entire period of the Good Offices Process, Venezuela has never been able to prove its claim to nullity of the 1899 Arbitral Award but, instead, embarked on

increasing menace through a pattern of intimidation, threats and economic aggression against Guyana, utilising its larger military in the bid to weaken and force Guyana to agree to the nullification of the 1899 Arbitral Award and cede the Essequibo to her. Never, Mr. Speaker – never.

In 2014, the Government of Guyana decided it was time to resolve Venezuela's controversy over the validity of the 1899 Arbitral Award. Indeed, the Government of Guyana recognised that Governments of Venezuela never acted in good faith and bilateral engagements were never going to achieve the desired results of resolving the controversy. It was then that Guyana wrote the United Nations (UN) Secretary General and requested that he choose another means of settlement consistent with its mandate under Article 4 (2) of the Geneva Agreement, specifically, a judicial process. The Secretary General was determined to give bilateral discussions one more try. He proposed a one-year – that was in 2017 – of enhanced mediation. He determined that after that year, if no significant progress was made towards arriving at a full agreement to the solution of the controversy, he would choose the International Court of Justice (ICJ) as the next means of the settlement. Due process, Mr. Speaker, in line with the international law and practice, His Excellency António Guterres, following on the efforts of his two predecessors, wrote the Governments of both Venezuela and Guyana on the 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2018. And I quote as follows, this is the Secretary-General Speaking:

“I have fulfilled the responsibility that has fallen on me within the framework set by my predecessor and, significant progress not having been made toward arriving at a full agreement for the solution of the controversy, I have chosen the International Court of Justice as the means that is now to be used for its solution.”

We are progressing nicely, Mr. Speaker. Therefore, Guyana instituted proceedings against Venezuela by application to the International Court of Justice on the 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2018. In its application, Guyana asked the court to resolve the controversy that arose as a result of Venezuela's contention, which was formally asserted for the first time in 1962, that the 1899 Arbitral Award regarding the boundary between the colony of British Guiana and the United States of Venezuela was null and void.

Guyana invoked the 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2018, decision of the United Nation Secretary-General António Guterres to select the court as a means of settlement for the controversy as a basis for the court's jurisdiction. The Secretary-General

acted pursuant to the authority conferred upon him by the agreement of the parties reflected in Article 4, paragraph 2 of the Geneva Agreement by an order dated 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2018. The court then decided that the question of its jurisdiction will be determined separately prior to the proceedings on the merits. On the 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2018, Guyana filed its Memorial on jurisdiction by a letter dated 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2019. Venezuela indicated that it had decided not to participate in the written procedure. This is Venezuela and its usual posture, trying to avoid being part and parcel of what we call Good Practice – following the rule of law and procedures. Nevertheless, Venezuela later submitted a detailed document entitled: *Memorandum of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on the Application filed before the International Court of Justice by the Cooperative of Guyana on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018*, together with a 155 pages annex containing various arguments regarding the controversy and the court's jurisdiction in respect of Guyana's application. On the 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2020, the court held a public hearing on the question of its jurisdiction. Here again, Venezuela did not participate. On 18<sup>th</sup> December, 2020, the court delivered its judgement holding that it had jurisdiction in respect of Guyana's application to the court and then fixed the deadline for the filing of Guyana's Memorial on the Merits as the 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2022 and the deadline for Venezuela's counter Memorial on the Merits as the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2023.

Mr. Speaker, on the 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2022, Venezuela filed preliminary objection to the admissibility of Guyana's claim – its usual posture again – urging the court to exercise its discretion to refuse to rule on them. The proceedings on the Merits were to be suspended until the determination by the court on the matter of Venezuela's Preliminary Objection. However, Guyana submitted its response to the Preliminary Objection on 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2022. The court heard oral hearings from both Guyana and Venezuela on Venezuela's objection over the period 17<sup>th</sup>- 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2022. On the 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2023, the court gave its judgement on Venezuela's objections which is final without appeal and binding on both parties and are as follows. The court:

“(1) Unanimously,

*Finds* that the preliminary objection raised by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is admissible;

(2) By fourteen votes to one,

*Rejects* the preliminary objection raised by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela...

(3) By fourteen votes to one,

*Finds* that it can adjudicate upon the merits of the claims of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, in so far as they fall within the scope of paragraph 138, subparagraph 1, of the Judgment of 18 December 2020.”

Mr. Speaker, what does this means? It means that in votes 2 and 3, the single vote against was that of the Judge *ad hoc* appointed by Venezuela. This is what we get from Venezuela, Mr. Speaker. The only vote against was a vote by a Judge *ad hoc* appointed by Venezuela. Fourteen judges voted in favour. Guyana has consistently demonstrated its ability to face the international law head on. We have tried and we have thrived, and we will continue to succeed, Mr. President, because the law is clear, and Guyana will continue to proceed in that direction because we believe in international law, peace and stability, not only of this region but the entire global environment. The court, by order, fixed the 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2024, as the time limit for the filing of the counter Memorial of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Guyana's case before the court is both legally and factually straightforward. It is founded upon two basic fundamental principles of international law and underpins the orderly relations of state, namely, *Pacta Sunt Servanda* or 'agreements must be kept' and the binding character in international tribunal awards. The application of those axiomatic precepts to the factual record can only lead to one conclusion and that conclusion is constant, that the 1899 Award is valid and binding and the boundary between the two countries follows the line that is described therein.

Venezuela's rejection of the 1899 Award undermines the basic norms of international law, respect for which is fundamental to maintaining international peace, stability and security. Venezuela's disregard for its international legal obligations is a threat to Guyana and to the peace and stability of the entire region by undermining the sanctity of long-standing voluntary executed arbitral awards and boundary agreements. Venezuela has acted over the years with utter contempt for international law. Article 26 of the Geneva Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969) provides that:

“Every treaty in force is binding upon the parties to it and must be performed by them in good faith.”

“In good faith”, Mr. Speaker. Venezuela has never honoured one agreement that it entered with respect to this issue with Guyana. I will give you six points, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, Venezuela breached the Treaty of Arbitration signed in Washington on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1897, which obligated the

parties to consider the results of the arbitration as full, perfect and final. Secondly, Venezuela has unilaterally and without any legal basis denounced the Arbitral Award published in Paris on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1899. Thirdly, Venezuela has disregarded the 1905 Agreement between the British and Venezuelan Boundary Commissioners on the map of the boundary on 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1905. Fourthly, Venezuela disregarded the 1931 Trilateral Diplomatic Agreement on the specific location of the trijunction meeting point of the boundaries of Guyana, Venezuela and Brazil. Fifthly, Venezuela unilaterally withdrew from the 1970 Protocol of Port of Spain.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Venezuela has repeatedly and consistently breached the 1966 Geneva Agreement when it expanded its claim to the Essequibo region, when it threatened Guyana Sovereignty and Territorial integrity, when it refused the decision of the United Nations Secretary-General exercised pursuant to Article 4 (2). The evidence is overwhelming. Venezuela has always been defiant. Venezuela has always been devoid of its commitment. Venezuela has always displayed, not only to its own citizens but the rest of the region and the world over, that she has never been committed to any legal process, but this must stop, Mr. Speaker. We will end it. The International Court of Justice will end Venezuela's tyrant and unlawful behaviour. Further, Article 93 of the United Nations charter provides that:

“All Members of the United Nations are ipso facto parties to the Statute of the International Court of Justice.”

10.57 a.m.

We are members, Mr. Speaker. Still Venezuela refuses to accept the jurisdiction of the court. Since the decision of the court, as rendered in April of this year, Venezuela has expressed its disapproval of the court's ruling and is now demanding that Guyana returns to the defunct bilateral dialogue on the issue of Venezuela's illegal claim to Guyana's territory. This is not going to happen. Venezuela accuses Guyana of reneging on its commitments under the Geneva Agreement, but the reverse is true. That Agreement obligates both parties to pursue the means of settlement chosen by the Secretary-General, and he has chosen the International Court of Justice. It is Guyana that is faithful to the Geneva Agreement and the decision of the Secretary-General. It is Venezuela that is defiant and noncompliant. Instead of complying with the international obligations, Venezuela has further embarked on what appears to be an

intensified campaign of intimidation and threats to force Guyana to concede to its wishes. To date, the planned consultative referendum of the Venezuelan Parliament is most concerning.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 2023, Venezuela's National Assembly passed a resolution calling for a referendum regarding Venezuela's unsubstantiated claim to Guyana's Essequibo. Both the Government of Guyana and the Secretary-General of the Organisation of American States (OAS) have condemned the passing of the resolution as illegal and improper since it violates the Geneva Agreement of 1966 and is inconsistent with the decision by the United Nations Secretary General to submit the question of validity of the 1899 Award to the International Court of Justice as a ruling. I also want to state in this House that the Opposition and the Government met recently, and we have published a joint statement, united as *One People, One Nation and One Destiny*, in pursuit of the logical conclusion of this unfounded claim that Venezuela has to our territory. Mr. Speaker, if you allow me, I will just read from the joint statement:

“President Ali and the Leader of the Opposition agreed that the protection of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state must be subserved by a vigorous and comprehensive public relations programme and a proactive and robust diplomatic effort aimed at blunting Venezuelan propaganda and misinformation as they relate to the territorial controversy generally, and the Geneva Agreement in particular. They...”

This means the Opposition and the Government.

“...reaffirmed the commitment to the current judicial process that is being conducted under the aegis of the International Court of Justice and are convinced that this would finally resolve the question raised by Venezuela over the validity of the 1899 Arbitral Award.”

I hope that every Guyanese has read this joint statement which provides the basis for which we continue to stand on as *One People*. We will continue to move ahead in that direction ensuring that we bring peace, stability and predictability to the people of Guyana and to ward off the unfounded claim by Venezuela, by using the right and proper process which is the proceedings that we are now involved in within the International Court of Justice.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to share with the people of Guyana, also, statements...I will share that in a moment. Let me just continue. I will be wrapping up shortly. In its usual mode of flouting its international obligations, on 23rd October, 2023, the Government of Venezuela, through its National Electoral Council, published a list of five questions that it plans to put before the Venezuelan people in this referendum. On 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2023, they are planning to hold a referendum, Mr. Speaker. There can be no doubt as to the purpose of these questions which is obvious from their nature, timing and manner in which they have been drafted. Venezuela is seeking to obtain responses that would support their decision to abandon the ICJ proceedings, and resort instead to unilateral measures to resolve the controversy with Guyana, which is, of course, contrary to international law by illegally purporting to annex and integrate into Venezuela all the territories awarded to Guyana in 1899.

Venezuela got four times the size of Guyana in 1899 during that Award. They got what they wanted. They got the Orinoco and Barima. They got it. They were satisfied, but their greed and their obsession with expansionism has not allowed successive governments of Venezuela to respect their boundaries, not only with Guyana, but also with Brazil. This is because there is a trijunction that we have all committed to and we have to maintain those borders, not only as a people and as a nation, but as a region. In addition to the decision to conduct this referendum, Venezuela has increased its military forces and equipment on its border with Guyana. While the former position of Venezuela is that the security forces are being mobilised on the border to curb illegal mining, there have been reports of Venezuela's military building a landing strip in a zone near the Essequibo region. No explanation about the airstrip has been provided to the Government of Guyana, but it is clear that it is the intention of that state to increase the rhetoric on the controversy and drive fear in the Guyanese population along the borders.

We will not be afraid. We stand on principles and we stand on the right side of the law. Why should we be fearful? It is the Venezuelans who are fearful. They are fearful. We are not fearful. We are committed to this process, and we want to see it through to its logical conclusion. That is why we are here united as a people. The Government of Guyana has approached the ICJ for provisional measures, specifically, to ensure that the referendum planned, and/or any other public referendum, should not address the question of encroaching upon the legal issues to be determined by a court in its judgement on the merits.

A lot of the rhetoric coming out of Caracas has made reference to the deepened relations between Georgetown and Washington. The Government of Guyana takes offence to such rhetoric as an attempt by Venezuela to diminish the right and capability of the Government and the people of Guyana to be able to define and determine their own national interests and pursue those for the benefit of the people of Guyana. The relationship between Guyana and Washington is stronger than ever. It will continue to grow because we believe in the values and principles and the respect for international law and norms. We are comfortable with our process, and we are comfortable with the support that we are getting from our traditional partners, not because they love us, but because they respect the rule of law. The Government of Guyana has settled that the case concerning the validity of the Award is before the court. This is where it will stay until the matter comes to a logical conclusion which is the assertion of the inalienable rights of the people of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana to the enjoyment of dignity and independence of a country bequeathed to them free from the threat of ancient historical claims and contemporary ambitions of recolonisation. We have gotten support from the Commonwealth. Let me just read quickly a paragraph from the statement provided by the Commonwealth's Secretary-General:

“The five questions approved by the National Electoral Council to be included in the referendum undermine Guyana's territorial integrity and sovereignty and their intent is contrary to international law. Question 5 proposes the creation of Venezuelan state of Guyana Essequibo and an accelerated plan for giving Venezuelan citizenship and identity cards to the Guyanese population. International law prohibits the seizure and annexation by one country of the territory of another. The language in these questions contributes to heightened tension and is a threat to peace and stability in a member state of our Commonwealth Family and indeed in the wider Caribbean region.”

If you allow me to go on Mr. Speaker, within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the CARICOM Secretariat also provided a statement which has been endorsed by the entire community. I will just read two paragraphs:

“CARICOM reaffirms that international law strictly prohibits the government of one State from unilaterally seizing, annexing or incorporating the territory of another state. An affirmative vote as

aforesaid opens the door to the possible violation of this fundamental tenet of international law.

CARICOM notes that the language of two questions approved to be posed in the Referendum seeks an affirmation and implementation of Venezuela's stance on the issue 'by all means, according to/with the Law'. It is open to reasonable persons to conclude that "by all means", includes means of force or war."

This is troubling what we are seeing in our region. History does not allow for what Venezuela is trying to embark on. We know that international law will prevail, and we will have a peaceful settlement of this controversy that Venezuela has with Guyana, and the people of Guyana will be able to move on with their lives in peace and tranquillity. Over the years, Guyana has always benefited from the support of the international community, not only because of the positive and strategic relations which we have with our partners, but because most members of the international community subscribe to the basic tenets of international law. I repeated that for emphasis. In this regard, we have had traditional support in reaffirming our sovereignty and territorial integrity from the Commonwealth of Nations, the Organisation of American States, the Caribbean Community and numerous friends and bilateral partners.

11.12 a.m.

In closing, please allow me to thank, His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, for his stewardship and leadership during this extremely sensitive period in Guyana's post-independence history. Let me also thank the Leader of the Opposition and the Hon. Members for ensuring that we have continuity in the support for Guyana's process. Let me also thank my Colleagues on this side of the House, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Let me also thank Sir Shridath Ramphal, the only surviving Member who actually journeyed to Geneva in 1966 to sign that agreement, along with Mr. Paul Reichler and the entire legal team. Allow me also to thank co-agent, Mr. Carl Greenidge; our co-agent, Ambassador Elisabeth Harper; and Ms. Donnette Streete, who is our Director of Frontiers, for her hard work and dedication to this process. Let me thank the entire Guyanese community, not only here in Guyana but abroad, for their support and their commitment to this process. Mr. Speaker, allow me to also thank you for giving me enough time to complete such an important task to ensure that Guyana is heard not only here but abroad

because we stand on the right side of history and on the right side of international law. I thank you. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, thank you very much for your most informative presentation. Hon. Members, on your behalf, I would also like to acknowledge Her excellency, the Chancellor, who is here with us and just about to leave. We also have former Prime Minister Hamilton Greene here with us; Ambassador to Venezuela, His excellency, Dr. Richard Van West-Charles. We have His Worship the Mayor, Mr. Alfred Mentore, and Regional Chairman for Region 4, Mr. Daniel Seeram. Also among our guests is the next generation, students from the President's College along with their teachers. On this very important day for our National Assembly, we will have the Hon. Member, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, next, then the Hon. Member, Dr. Asha Kissoon and then we will then take the break. Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, you have the floor.

**Mr. Ramjattan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I stand in this august Assembly, in this extraordinarily historic moment to give support – and full support – to the motion that is before this Assembly. I rather suspect that any motion of similar ilk will be given solid support by the Opposition not only because it is needed but because it is right and just. We now live here in a time with that existential threat of a... *[Interruption]* Could we be a little more... Am I being heard here? **[An Hon. Member:** Yes.] That is all right. I have my documents and papers in front of me and I do not want to transfer that. That space is a little too small for what I have to say.

Mr. Speaker, it is an existential threat. After speaking behind the Hon. Minister Todd, I must say that I am reassured and bolstered by his optimism that there may not be anything happening at the borders and that everything here may be what is called 'in Guyana's interest'. Though bolstered by that, I want to say that there is an element of what is called 'concern' at this stage. Venezuela's leaders... I do not want to create an anti-hysteria against the Venezuelan leaders, but I must make the point that they are behaving extraordinarily irrational. In international politics, when rationality *leaves the room*, we can have problems. Problems that can violate the peace of this zone and it can also create tremendous economic and political troubles for its eastern neighbour.

After that Award, then the demarcating of the boundaries in 1905, and the completion of all that which was supposed to be done, and done thoroughly, after the five wise men made their Arbitral Award, we had a period in which it was recognised for some 60 years that that border is what

delineates Guyana from Venezuela. But it was then British Guiana and Venezuela was obviously not going to *play the fool* with Britain. Come 1966, when independence was to be gained from the colonial master, we saw Venezuela upping the ante in relation to what it can now do to a small country on its eastern border. It started all the activities, and I will name a couple, which not only was a violation of our territorial integrity, but also was an undermining of our investment prospects in that almost three-fifths of Guyana. I will come to that. I must quote from one of our greatest statesmen, Sir Shridath Ramphal, in his book *Guyana in the World: The First of the First Fifty Years and The Predatory Challenge*. Being so masterful of the English language as he is, he indicated, at page 84 thereof, that this welcome of Guyana's freedom was not shared by our neighbour on the western front. As I noted in a passage of his, the singular aversion to Guyana's freedom was the very converse of all that their hero, Simon Bolivar, symbolised. Today, we have in Venezuela a grasping on to the greatness of Simon Bolivar. Before I come to Simon Bolivar, I want to say that this is how Sir Shridath Ramphal described those that had happened in 1966:

“It was on this flimsiest pretext of an old and disappointed man's posthumous memoirs set down some 45 years after the events – these shreds and patches embroidered with speculations, ambiguities and allusions to new but undisclosed evidence; these calumnies against five of the most eminent jurists in the world of their time – that Venezuela mounted its international campaign against Guyana as we approached independence. As the date drew nearer the agitation grew fiercer threatening in veiled and indirect ways the advance to Independence itself. Hence the British conversations in Geneva in 1966 – three months before Guyana's independence.”

When the leaders of Venezuela are going to quote and talk about Simon Bolivar, I wish to remind our countrymen and even the Venezuelans who will be, of course, peeking into our National Assembly here today, what Simon Bolivar, 1783-1830, said in 1819 after independence was gained from Spain. He had indicated around that time, after the fight for freedom, that the peoples of Latin America were so used to tyranny and ignorance and vice that they would not know what to do with freedom, that government had to be appropriate to the people and that legislators and fledgeling countries like Venezuela, at that time, would have to work to create conditions in which their fellow citizens could enjoy freedom. This is what he said specifically:

“If a people...”

I am quoting him here.

“...perverted by their training, succeed in achieving their liberty, they will soon lose it, for it would be of no avail to endeavor to explain to them that happiness consists in the practice of virtue; that the rule of law is more powerful than the rule of tyrants...”

I want to repeat that.

“...the rule of law is more powerful than the rule of tyrants, because, as the laws are more inflexible, every one should submit to their beneficent austerity; that proper morals, and not force, are the bases of law; and that to practice justice is to practice liberty.”

Therefore legislators, your work is so much the more arduous that we have to re-educate the men and women of Venezuela from being corrupted as a result of their training from, as he said, Spain. This profound advice from one of the greatest of Latin America's heroes must now be applied to, or at least compared and contrasted to what Venezuela seeks to do now. As a matter of fact, I feel that all the advice of Simon Bolivar is being *thrown out of the window*. That is why we have irrational leaders now, almost people who one would have to say had huge problems appreciating morals and justice and all of that now trying to do certain things for their political continuity, obviously.

11.27 a.m.

Rationality is important in international politics. If we do not recognise what might be the motivations of Maduro and his team, inclusive of Delcy Rodriguez Gomez, Hon. Executive Vice-President...Them making statements about referendum and all of that means, in my opinion, that there is now a deliberate attempt to transfer their irrationality onto their countrymen for purpose of ensuring that they can be distracted from all of the problems they have in Venezuela. Venezuela has a lot of problems, a humongous number. I have a book – *The New Map* – by Daniel Yergin. I was doing some readings in relation to what might be their motivation. Of course, he was talking about climate and the clash of nations and energy. It is not only for the present leaders of Venezuela to distract from their bad governance and whatever else, it is also to extend, in view of the fact that we have now found oil in Guyana, and to try to have a hand in that. I am glad that we signed the deal with ExxonMobil which had geopolitical advantages about it, although a

number of people said that it was the rottenest deal that we ever did. We are going to see the benefit of it as a result of ...

Mr. Speaker, it all started, as I said, in Venezuela, especially under Hugo Chavez with his mantra of socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and it became Maduro thereafter. What Venezuela is suffering from now is a tremendous economic and even a humanitarian disaster. We know that in the 1990s, Venezuela was hitting 3.3 million barrels per day. Today, it is about 600,000 barrels per day. We know that so many people have left the country – about six million. It is millions. Inflation has annualised to almost an unimaginable one million percent. These are notes I took from Daniel Yergin. One million percent is their inflation rate. Of course, in 2018, Maduro won a second term. I suppose they want, now, not to get that 300 billion barrels of reserve exploited so that they could give Venezuelans a better chance. They are now eyeing Guyana.

That kind of politics that is played in our region is going to be disastrous for this region. The provocation, as we are seeing, has now gone to a referendum, as I said, to transfer the irrationality onto the ordinary, simple, peace-loving citizenry of Venezuela. We cannot allow that. It is for that reason, too, that we are all here united. What is more unity is that I see in this Assembly, sitting here, the fact that we have the Diplomatic Corps. We have so many others with us, appreciating that, indeed, there must not be any confrontation on that western border. We have suffered greatly, since the 1960s, with the attitude and approach of Venezuela. When we gained Independence, Venezuela, under President Leoni, placed an advertisement in the *Times Newspaper* of London, on 15<sup>th</sup> June, 1968, to the effect that Essequibo belonged to Venezuela and that they would not recognise economic concessions that were to be granted by the Government of Guyana at that time. Again, the same President issued Decree 1152 of 9<sup>th</sup> July, 1968 purporting to annex a nine-mile wide belt of sea space along Guyana's entire Essequibo Coast. That was, as I said, July, 1968.

I remember, as a Member of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), in 2000, Beal Aerospace Corporation came here and another big reversal in investment happened when President Raphael Chavez issued a blunt rejection of the agreement between the Guyana Government and Beal Aerospace Corporation of the United States of America (USA) to establish a satellite launch facility in the Waini. I take these from the book, *Caribbean Geopolitics*, that was written by Brigadier (Ret'd) David Arthur Granger and a historian of repute. We also had President Raphael Caldera

Rodriguez in 1969, or I think it was 1970, block Guyana's attempt to allow petroleum exploration rights in the Essequibo by DIMATEX Limited, a German company. President Luis Herrera Campins, sometime in 1980, reinforced the blockade by obstructing the development of the Upper Mazaruni hydropower project. He said that the whole of Essequibo belonged to them. Of course, the Venezuelan Foreign Minister, Jose Zambrano, wrote a letter and gave the President of the World Bank an ultimatum to refrain from financing the Upper Mazaruni hydroelectric project.

Notwithstanding all of this, we also saw in 2013, 10<sup>th</sup> October, the frigate, Yekuana, of the Bolivarian Navy of Venezuela enter Guyana's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and under the threat of force, prevented the unarmed vessel, the RV Teknik Perdana, from conducting seismic surveys. I remember that on the same day we were supposed to inaugurate Brigadier General (Ret'd), David Arthur Granger, as the Ninth President and on our 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Independence, the President of Venezuela then made Decree No. 1787, stating that entire coastal plain on the Essequibo there, and even coming almost to Demerara, they owned everything – the Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and all the resources thereunder. It was a couple of days after the elections when President Granger was supposed to be sworn in and on the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Independence. Of course, we went ahead, knowing the geopolitical value of an agreement, now that they had found oil with ExxonMobil, and not only ExxonMobil, but it included a Chinese company, China National Off-shore Oil Corporation (CNOOC). Today, we understand, too, that Chevron Corporation has bought the shares over of the third company and we have two very large American companies there.

All of the time we have done the acts of eminent domain, meaning acts of our sovereignty over Essequibo. Venezuela was well aware of those acts. We, on 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1977, enacted the Maritime Boundaries Act. We also, on 10<sup>th</sup> November, 1993 endorsed Guyana's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Of course, later on, as is stated so meticulously in this book written by David Arthur Granger, that indeed the 60<sup>th</sup> Instrument of Ratification of 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1993 enabled the Convention to go into force a year later. Guyana also took steps towards the consolidation of sovereignty over its marine resources, with the introduction of the Petroleum Exploration and Production Act 1986, which became the law in June, 1986. Of course, licences were issued under the Act in 1999 to ExxonMobil.



We have also done all that which makes it very clear that Essequibo belongs to us by entering into fishing agreements – bilateral fishing agreements allowing foreign vessels to fish in Guyana’s waters – and so many other acts of eminent domain. I want to say that with all of these activities that we did to ensure that we can get the benefit of that largesse out there, we must appreciate that, indeed, it is our land and nobody else’s. Not a blade of grass. Though we may have the situation where they are going to do some sabre-rattling, we are not going to give up. Guyanese all across this country and in the diaspora – and we have a wide diaspora. I understand we have some people in Alaska and so on – are very clear and united on this issue. We must ensure that this bonanza that is Essequibo, which is ours, be exploited and we must not have confrontation from our western neighbour to any extent. We must see, also, the flourishing of Guyana because the space must be allowed without any intervention from any dominant big player called Venezuela.

11.42 a.m.

We are going to have a couple of speakers talking and I do not want to repeat a number of the points that I understand they will speak on, but I want to make the point that in this polarised world that we have there is going to be – and even Mr. Daniel Yergin talks about it in his book – even bigger rivalries all across the globe, especially because of oil, energy, climate change, migration and so on. This deepening rivalry must be seen as not creating problems for small countries like us which might very well now be pressured and forced to take sides with one of the big players. I want to enter the realm of talking about that for just a short moment. There is deepening rivalry between...especially as we know that is going on right now...the big countries of the world, Washington and Beijing – one can see it – would expect certain players to support them and certain players to support the others is what the others might want.

As you know, given this collision and incompatible perspectives we might have, we would have to combine, as a small country Guyana, with all of those players to ensure that we get maximum diplomatic support, if not more than diplomatic support, for the purposes of ensuring that Venezuela does not touch a blade a grass. Sometimes, these clashes at that higher end of the global order, create great quandaries for small countries like us. Of course, we, in Guyana, are connected very closely to the USA. We are also connected, even culturally, to China. We must not feel any pressure to align with one side, knowing very well that there might be sides taken in relation to certain issues. I do not want to see non-alignment being pressured out of existence.

So, I hope that our Government, with the support from the Opposition, will ensure that the diplomatic work that has been done meets that target of ensuring that we could get the support of everybody in the world on this matter. We are one step there or almost there because we have done the international rule of law method of carrying it to the International Court of Justice (ICJ); that is important. We must adhere to our treaties. We must all adhere to the international rule of law. We must adhere to territoriality, as prescribed 200 years ago or 100 years ago and so on. We must not make the Caribbean or this area a zone that will have conflict and confrontation.

I urge, especially the diplomats and the diplomatic corps members that I see here today, to give their wholehearted support to Guyana in this cause. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I commend this motion for full support by each and every Parliamentarian here. *[Applause]*.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Mr. Ramjattan. I know everyone has been extremely attentive. Our Deputy Speaker is making her maiden speech in the National Assembly. The custom is utter silence. Hon. Deputy Speaker, Dr. Asha Kisson, you have the floor.

**Deputy Speaker [Dr. Asha Kisson]:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Allow me to stand on all protocols already established. Mr. Speaker, I stand before you, today and before the people of Guyana, to, first of all, express gratitude to you, the Government of Guyana, the Opposition and my parliamentary joinder partners for this extraordinary sitting. This issue cannot go on. Today’s sitting is extremely important. It is a matter of urgency and must be treated as such continuously.

Today, I stand in full support of this motion for the Government and the people of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and reaffirm recognition of the 1899 Arbitral Award and the 1966 Geneva Agreement. An issue such as this requires us to stand united. I must say that I am very happy to see that the Government and the Opposition are working together on this. We, as the parliamentary joinder parties, also lend our voices and our support because, at the end of the day, we are all Guyanese. In the highest House of this country, we will stand as Guyanese to defend our Guyana and Essequibo. I openly and strongly reject the referendum put forward by the Republic of Venezuela on 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2023:

“...citizens “agree with the historic position of Venezuela not to recognize the jurisdiction of the

International Court of Justice to resolve the controversy... of ‘Guayana Essequiba’ ...”

I openly reject the proposed question five in this referendum which speaks of the annexation of the territory awarded by Guyana by the 1899 Arbitral Award granting Venezuelan citizenship and identification cards to Guyanese citizens in the regions. For the thousands of people at home, what Venezuela is saying to our nation is that it has no regard for what the International Court of Justice says. It has the intention of making our Guyanese citizens Venezuelans in order to take the territory from us. We condemn this referendum. We will not have it. While we all agree that this is contemptuous of the legal process prevailing before the International Court of Justice, allow me to express my open and honest displeasure at the disrespect shown by the Republic of Venezuela for Guyana and its territorial integrity. Our Guyana is a peaceful nation. It has been for more than 56 years and counting. What we have been seeing happening at the Venezuelan borders and ongoing in the country is very distasteful. Internationally, there has been a lot of unrest. There have been wars in Israel and Ukraine, just to mention a few. I stand here to say that Guyana must lead by example in showing the world that peace comes first, and we will not bow to Venezuela’s threats.

With the motion put forward, we stand in support of affirming the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the State of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. I reaffirm the recognition and acceptance of the 1899 Arbitral Award and the 1899 Geneva Agreement. I denounce as unlawful, void and of no international legal effect the referendum in Venezuela. I support the Government in its pursuit to ensure a peaceful and lawful resolution of the controversy before the ICJ. I support the Government’s formal approach for the urgent protection done through the International Court of Justice. I support calls for the deepening of engagements among all national stakeholders. I would like to express gratitude to our international partners. *A friend in need is a friend indeed*, and we are in need. There is no time for silence. We require our international partners to speak out, to speak up and to support Guyana as we stand on the side of the law. The Venezuelan Government needs to concentrate on giving its people a better life today and to leave Guyana alone. We see their people leaving Venezuela by the thousands, including coming to Guyana. To be honest, if I had leaders who had no regard for international law, I would probably be leaving my country also. We need to continue along the legal lines. We will not back down. We are focused on building our nation. Hundreds and thousands of

Guyanese are returning home. We will reaffirm to Venezuela that our territorial integrity will be protected.

Mr. Speaker, you will hear a lot today. People will say, ‘not a blade of grass’, but I stand before this House to say, not one drop of sweat, not one tear from any mother or child being displaced from Essequibo and not one Guyanese citizen will be given Venezuelan citizenship because Essequibo is our own and our territorial integrity must be protected. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, we will take the suspension now and return at 1.00. p.m. Thank you.

*Sitting suspended at 11.53 a.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 1.11 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Now, we give the floor to the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir.

**Ms. Walton-Desir:**

*[Ms. Walton-Desir vocalised the following verses from the Song of the Republic.]*

“...Corentyne’s lush sands,  
Her children pledge each faithful hour  
To guard Guyana’s lands.  
To foil the shock of rude invader  
Who’d violate her earth,  
To cherish and defend forever  
The State that gave them birth. ...”

It is a powerful song. A song that reminds us, every day, of our duty towards this nation, our duty as Guyanese to:

“...To foil the shock of rude invader  
Who’d violate her earth,  
To cherish and defend forever  
The State that gave them birth. ...”

I rise today to express my unequivocal support for this motion before this honourable House at this extraordinary sitting. We are in extraordinary times. We look the world over and we see that which was once sacrosanct is now temporal, that which we held as time-honoured principles are now discarded in the name of the expedient.

*1.14 p.m.*

Here, at home, we are all facing what we agree is an existential threat – a threat to our territorial integrity, a threat to our sovereignty, a threat to our very way of life. A nation

of over 28 million, with a large well-equipped army and a population indoctrinated in the belief, in the misguided, the mistaken and the unfounded belief that the Essequibo belongs to them...Venezuela is, for all intents and purposes, a formidable goliath. Our beloved Guyana, on the other hand, is a young state with a peace-loving population of less than a million people, a small defence force and we are a nation on the cusp of achieving our full potential. My colleague on the other side of the House laid out for us, in great detail, the historical developments that have led us to this time, and I thank him for it, and I will not, in the interest of time, regurgitate those developments. I will only observe here that the tensions between our nation and Venezuela have undoubtedly escalated to levels hitherto unseen. The Maduro Government's claim over three-quarters of our territory, including our Essequibo, has cast a long shadow over our sovereignty, as it has from the time that we became a sovereign nation.

Their actions have impeded our economic development and have done this for far too long. Now, we are faced with a referendum, a referendum that has serious implications for our territorial integrity and that poses the threat of irreparable harm to our nation. Guyanese, both at home and abroad, are uneasy and deeply concerned by what they see as a grave gathering danger. Tens of thousands of Venezuelans are here; we know this, and hundreds more arrive every day through our porous borders. It is not a matter of argument that these vast numbers pose a significant threat to the socioeconomic fabric of this nation, placing strain on our already inadequate health, education and security systems. Some have argued, and correctly so, that this uncontrolled migration represents a threat to our national security. I want to say that we in this House represent the people of Guyana and it will be irresponsible of us to come to this House and not address the concerns of the ordinary Guyanese man, woman and child.

Mr. Speaker, it is not inconceivable, and history has examples, that a collapse of our public sector system could occur just under the sheer weight of numbers and Guyanese are undoubtedly anxious. Everywhere we go in the town and in the villages, as Members of Parliament (MPs) on this side of the House – I cannot speak for the experience of my colleagues on the other side – we are asked, 'MP, what is it? What are we doing? How are we dealing with this?' Guyanese are anxious. The truth is and the reality of the Guyanese man and woman in the street is that they see these migrants as competing for jobs, for businesses, for land ownership, and even for personal relationships. Those are the concerns of the ordinary Guyanese man and woman. We

want to say...and we have been very clear. We speak to every Guyanese that we meet...that we understand their anxiety, but notwithstanding their anxiety, we as Guyanese and Guyana as a sovereign state have certain international obligations and we are required by those treaties to which we subscribe to treat those who are in our midst with the utmost level of dignity and regard for human rights. But it would be irresponsible of us not to acknowledge that the concern exists. We would be shirking our duties as Members of this National Assembly not to represent the interest of the people who elected us to be here. We want to make it clear that we must treat, as I said, migrants with the dignity and respect that one human being deserves from another. We must treat them as guests and not as threats. But I want to be very clear about something – even guests are expected to obey the rules of the house.

We want to be clear, on this side of the House, that peaceful, law-abiding migrants will be accorded the Guyanese hospitality and the full protection of our laws as we are required to do. We want to make that very clear. We are here and we have been reminding Guyanese because we will not operate as if we are ostriches with our proverbial heads in the sand. We see the anxiety of the Guyanese people. We see the videos on social media that are giving rise to more anxiety. But we want to say and we are at pains to remind Guyanese that even if they are provoked, they are not to take the law into their own hands. They must turn offenders over to the authorities immediately. In the existing circumstances, we want to be clear that Venezuelan migrants, bar those, of course, who are entitled to citizenship by virtue of their descent, must understand...and we have a duty to make it clear, that we will extend the courtesies that we are required to extend, whether it be temporary residency, healthcare, *et cetera*, and only that. We must make it clear that, once things get better, they should plan to return to their homeland. Our accommodation and hospitality are just that – accommodation and hospitality. It must not be regarded as a path to citizenship, unless one is entitled to it, or as permanent residency.

What I am speaking about here is embodied in the laws of so many countries. If we research, we will see that this is nothing new and novel, but this is what a nation does to protect its people. Our first duty is to the people of Guyana, it is to Guyanese, and we will not shirk in our duty. I want to be very clear because, again, we as representatives of the people do not sit in this National Assembly of our own free will and volition. We were elected to represent the interest of the Guyanese people and that is what I stand here, today, intent on doing. I hope that we have been very clear that we

will not encourage the mistreatment of any migrant. We will not encourage Guyanese to take the law into their own hands. I repeat that for emphasis because I know there are those who are interested in propaganda and in cheap political points. We are not here for that today. We are here to represent the interest of the people of Guyana.

It is important that we understand, as we have been calling for on this side of the House, that the time is now for a national conversation on migration. We called for it two years ago. We warned about these numbers two years ago. I stood right in this spot in the National Assembly, two years ago, and we said that unless we had serious conversations and unless we took serious action, we would have found ourselves in the position in which we have found ourselves today. We are living to see exactly what we warned about come to pass, much to the detriment and anxiety of Guyanese. It is all around us, when one looks at the legal frameworks that exist to protect Guyanese, to protect the citizens of a sovereign state and to make sure that the path for citizenship is crystal clear and that the path for residency is crystal clear. Now is the time for us to have those conversations. We are a small nation of 800,000 thereabout, if we are to believe the last set of statistics. We owe it to our people to have a very clear legal framework – a framework that does extend to *fiat* or rule by *fiat* but that is clearly deliberated in this House so that people who come to our nation will know exactly where they stand, how they stand and what is their path to citizenship, if any. I repeat: our first duty is to the people of Guyana, and we must be unapologetic in the prosecution of that duty. We are unapologetic about putting Guyana first.

So, like I said, we have a migration situation; we have a situation of thousands of persons pouring over our border. We have a situation where there are persons who are entitled, by virtue of their parentage, to be given Guyanese citizenship and we want to make it clear that we on this side of the House understand that. Like I said, a perusal of citizenship laws around the world set out a very clear path. So, I am wondering whether it is time that we propose legislative measures to make it clear, particularly in the context of a nation of 28 million people where the youngest child is taught, from the time that he or she could read, that Essequibo somehow belongs to them.

Mr. Speaker, these are extraordinary times, and we cannot behave as if it is business as usual because it is not business as usual. For us to consider whether we should have specific laws to deal with this issue, given the fact of this territorial claim and given the fact of this belief that Essequibo belongs

to them, we must consider whether we must not enshrine in our laws provisions that speak to persons, particularly migrants and particularly people who are coming in from the neighbouring western neighbour...that we would say whether there is merit in considering laws that make it clear that participation in inappropriate political activities that amount to insurrection, treason or promoting cessation or annexation will be met firmly by prosecution, deportation and possibly a ban on residency. Let us not forget that we had a Rupununi uprising. We must, unless we fail to learn from our history, be doomed to repeat those mistakes. There is too much at stake now for us not to learn from our history and to proceed blindly along. There will be dual citizens and dual citizens must choose their loyalty and they have a right to choose whichever loyalty they will exercise. If they choose to be Venezuelans, as they have a right to so do, then we must consider whether it will be important to proscribe their ability to act and participate in Guyanese civic and political activities.

Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear about this. This might not have been critical had we not been dealing with people who genuinely believe...because we interact with people, we interact with people in our community, and we get feedback. There is a genuine belief, as represented the other day by the map of Venezuela, which included the Essequibo, on that food cart in central Georgetown... We had to send the police to make sure that was done away with. That is the gravity of what we are dealing with, so forgive me if I am not prepared to engage in too many pleasantries about this. We have to be serious. There is a *Goliath at the gate*, and we have to, like David, *gather our stones*.

1.29 p.m.

We must immediately enhance screening procedures at our borders. We must set about to verify and record, in a transparent and credible manner, those Venezuelan nationals, as I said, who are legitimately entitled to citizenship by virtue of their parentage; those who are eligible as economic migrants; those who may, given the international legal framework, have the eligible refugee status; and even those who will be deported back to Venezuela because they pose a security threat. This is what the screening process at our border should be doing.

We must establish a robust and continuous education programme, one which matches the fervour and intensity that we see next door. As I speak, there are jingles out on social media, whole national songs from Venezuela, claiming the Essequibo as theirs – as we sit in this House

and debate this motion. So, we must establish a robust and continuous education programme which will engender patriotism and respect for our collective heritage. We must have a programme which will inform the youngest to the oldest about the seriousness of the territorial issue. They must know about Venezuela's scandalous and illegitimate claim to our Essequibo. The programme must be tailored to specific audiences. It must include our nine Indigenous tribes in their languages. The urgency of the situation demands that no effort be spared to light the fire of patriotism in the belly of every Guyanese man, woman, and child. The urgency is that great. We must have a programme that embodies the fundamental and inherent truth that we will repeatedly teach our children and our new adult citizens. Essequibo, as one of the three counties of Guyana, is, was, and always will be 100% Guyanese, from Pakaraima to Parika; from the sprawling savannahs to the rapids at Rockstone, Essequibo belongs to Guyana.

Now more than ever, we must be committed to full collaboration between the Government and all national stakeholders. I want to be clear that the time for petty partisan politics is over. The time for subordinating the national interest below the interest of party and political expediency is over. This moment demands that we rise above this. There are defining moments in a nation's history. These are moments that shape the course of our collective destiny. The pivotal junctures that we meet, particularly these pivotal junctures, are very often the crucibles in which the character and resilience of a nation are tested. These defining moments, however, are not solely challenges, they are opportunities. They are opportunities for us to learn, to grow and redefine ourselves. They are opportunities to make positive changes and progress as a nation. It is during these moments that we have a choice – we can either set a new course, one that aligns with our values and aspirations, or we could go down the same road that we have been going down. Mr. Speaker, I am reminded of the words of Mr. J. W. Chinapen that were set to song by the late Ms. Valerie Rodway. We now know it as the national song, *Arise, Guyana*. It reminds us of:

“When Freedom waved her banner bright  
On Ayanganna's verdant height,  
A Nation's glad triumphant song  
Reverb'rant rose full, loud and long;  
Guyana, fair Guyana,  
Be true to your higher destiny.”

Inherent in that is an admonition that there is a lower destiny that we must avoid, a lower destiny that we must shun. We

are true to a lower destiny when we settle for less, when we use the path of least resistance, and when we decide that we are entitled to far less as a nation. A nation embracing its lower destiny manifests itself in a myriad of ways, from failing to take care of the poor and needy to tolerating injustice and inequity, to fermenting hate and strife for political gain, to failing to invest in its human capital. As Guyanese, we must, now more than ever, forcefully reject any attempt – any attempt – to be led down such a path; we must commit ourselves to strive for excellence, embrace our potential, and collectively work towards a higher destiny for ourselves, for our community and for our nation.

Mr. Speaker, you may ask, why is this important? It is important because it is only as a united Guyana that we will stand a chance of defeating this Goliath. That is why we on this side of the House have been clear that there will be no *daylight* between us and the Government as it relates to the independence of Guyana, to our territorial integrity and to our sovereignty. We want to be pellucid. We will continue to be pellucid. The only way that we will be able to overcome this is to unite. It must be unity not just in word, but it must be unity in thought. It must be unity in deed. It must be a unity that says, I am my brother's keeper. It must be a unity that says, when one Guyanese suffers, the entire Guyana feels. It is a unity that will say, we must now put an end to discrimination, to strife, to discord. Unity, we speak of it, but we have to walk it out now as a nation. This is the moment that we have to demonstrate to the world that we are able, we are capable, and we are up to the challenge of uniting for the good of Guyana and for Guyanese.

It is true that how we meet this moment will determine our legacy and place in this world and history. Let us remember in this moment that unity, resilience, and adaptability are our greatest assets in confronting the challenges and seizing the opportunities that will come our way. As we face the defining moment of our time, let us be a nation that rises to the occasion. Let us be a nation that demonstrates strength of character, depth of will and depth of unity. We may not have might on our side, but we have right on our side. We have the rule of law on our side. We have the support of the international community on our side. Therefore, the urgency of the moment demands that we send a clear and ambiguous message that all of Guyana is united in the fundamental premise that the Essequibo, which is the heartland, is 100% Guyanese. It is ours; it is not up for debate. It is not up for debate. It is not up for Barbados-type negotiations. We are confident in the merits of our case, and we expect to prevail. We reaffirm the full, perfect and final settlement that was established and embodied in the 1899 Arbitral Award. We

reaffirm the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of this dear land of Guyana. We reaffirm the principles and tenets – which, in the interest of time, I will not delve into – of this motion to support the Government and people of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. We stand strong, Mr. Speaker. I want to end by saying this, Sir: We know we will win. We know we will win because as the famous Bob Marley said:

“...we are confident  
In the victory  
Of good over evil”

Therefore, even though we are hemmed in on every side, even though foes may encamp around us, we want to say – to the miner at Monkey Mountain who may be worried about his claim; we want to say to that homemaker in Hampton Court who may be worried about the future of her children; we want to say to the farmer at Fairfield whose land has been in his family for generations and he now wonders what are the implications of this and he is anxious; we say to the children at Chenapau; and we say to Guyanese across these 83,000 square miles – do not fear, do not fear. We are confident in the victory of good over evil. Standing together as one people in this one nation with one destiny, we shall prevail. We shall emerge stronger; we shall emerge better. Long live the people of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. Long live the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Now, it is time for the Minister of Amerindian Affairs, the Hon. Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai. We may have to get you to use another microphone in the meanwhile. Just give the Technician two moments and we will continue. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

1.44 p.m.

**Minister of Amerindian Affairs [Ms. Campbell-Sukhai]:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon, everyone. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the motion proposed by my colleague, the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, in reaffirming the Arbitral Award of 1899, which definitively settled the land boundaries between the then British Guiana and Venezuela, which land boundaries was recognised by Venezuela for some six decades until our country began its quest for independence. It was Venezuela’s sudden non-recognition of the award which ultimately led to the Geneva Agreement of 17<sup>th</sup> February, 1966, by which it was agreed that the resolution of the controversy of Venezuela’s contention that

the Arbitral Award was null and void would be pursued through a number of measures.

Venezuela has sought to prove its spurious claim, which is trumped up in a vain attempt to rewrite the boundaries of our country. Today, no doubt, we have stood our ground as a nation on the position that all of Guyana belongs to us, Guyanese. The Arbitral Award between the then colony of British Guiana and the United States of Venezuela, in 1899, and the Geneva Agreement of 1966 are two established definitive positions, agreed by both countries, to settle the issue. Venezuela has blatantly demonstrated complete disregard for international law, the principles of which every Government and past Governments of Guyana have had total respect for and have upheld. It is no secret that the youngest Guyanese and the oldest Guyanese have always claimed that we will not give up a ‘blade of grass’ and so, too, should be the position of the representation of the leaders in this august House, from all sides. Immediately, I am very pleased and very proud that our Guyanese leaders have taken a united stand, together, on this controversy, and have taken a single position that is in defence of our country and our people.

Mr. Speaker, past and current generations of our people have had to live with Venezuela’s claim to more than two thirds of our country hanging over their heads. And now, today, we are confronted with the greater threat to our territorial integrity by the most presumptuous act thus far; an act that will seek to give Venezuela, through a referendum, the right to annex Essequibo which they have coveted and continue to illegally pursue with growing aggression. Venezuela has now gone beyond provocation. On the Northwestern area of Guyana mainly Amerindians reside there, and they are living under intimidation and heightened tension, and will be impacted the most. In fact, all of Guyana will be impacted. This will continue if Venezuela is allowed to continue to fuel this controversy. In reality it is a big concern for peace and stability in the border communities. Further, movements of military personnel, and I suspect arsenal, by the Venezuelan military, on the shores of Guyana, represent a confirmation that the Government of Venezuela continues to misrepresent the 1966 Geneva Agreement, the same agreement by which the Secretary-General of the United Nations exercised his mandate to commit the resolution of the controversy to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for a final and binding agreement. Guyana has full confidence in the international judicial process and has urged Venezuela to present its arguments appropriately before the International Court of Justice. Guyana further rejects the proposal to return to any form of dialogue with Venezuela on the controversy, outside of the process which is before the court. Venezuela, on the

other hand, continues with brazen rhetoric and defying posture, and this posture by Venezuela needs to be strongly condemned.

Venezuela's most strident statements and pending referendum on 3<sup>rd</sup> December of this year reiterates that government's disregard for the judicial solution to the controversy. The international court has twice confirmed that it has jurisdiction to hear the case. Guyana continues to firmly believe that justice will once more prevail and that Guyana will emerge strong, for and on behalf of all the people. We are now a nation on guard more than ever. The threat that has been unleashed on our population should not be taken lightly. Our communities on the borders have been subjected to increasing intimidation by the evident build-up of Venezuelan personnel, military and other. If there was ever a time for unity in our country it is now, to face and collectively defend this brazen act to deny us, Guyanese, of our rights to live within our agreed borders and to develop the resources of our entire territory. By Resolution 3314 of 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1974, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the definition of aggression as being:

“...the use of armed force by a State against the sovereignty, territorial integrity, or political independence of another state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations.

In that resolution, the United Nations General Assembly adopted several acts that qualify as an act of aggression, and Venezuela is guilty. The first being:

“The invasion or attack by the armed forces of a State of the territory of another State, or any military occupation, however temporary, resulting from such invasion or attack, or any annexation by the use of force of the territory of another states or part thereof.”

Again, I reiterate that Venezuela is a guilty partner. As Venezuela prepares to execute its crusade of greed, the government of that country should be warned that this deliberate intention to annex a portion of Guyana's territory by the use of force will constitute an act of aggression that goes beyond the Charter of the United Nations. The ancestral beginnings of the people of this land demand respect from people who stake their claim on the papacy of centuries later. Amerindian heritage takes priority over any conquistador claims of subsequent years. Amerindian development and right to peace, security, livelihood and to keep apace with the transition of Guyana into a modern state needs to be

respected and secured. The Government of Guyana has prioritised Amerindian development, expending technical and financial support to buildout our villages and communities, unlike what obtains internationally in many other parts of the world where their first peoples are marginalised, or their issues and development are still on the back burner.

Guyana's children, youths and women continue to urge for an expansion of opportunities which, expectantly, will secure a future of economic independence for today and tomorrow. I can assure you that our government has responded to those urges. We will have to ensure the support, the development, the position where our children, our youths, our women and all of Guyana is now poised, that these must be secured and protected. At no time, we should allow a country to behave in such a bullish manner to destroy what we have worked so tirelessly for as a nation, and endured as a nation, to be erased. The 3<sup>rd</sup> December referendum, as I see it, seeks to legitimise the voices of the Venezuelan people, by its government, through a vote to annex Essequibo. This defiance, if allowed to happen will have consequences for all of Guyana and to our total territorial integrity and sovereignty. We, therefore, call on all peace-loving nations to stand with Guyana in upholding the rule of law and respect for the principles of international law in condemning Venezuela's intention to violate the territorial integrity of Guyana.

I applaud the Guyanese population in the country and in the diaspora for embracing the spirit of nationalism, and I also want to say with pride that I embrace the united stand of the National Assembly in its resolved to preserve and protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country. I also want to applaud His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, in ensuring that he offered the *olive branch* and was able to have a humble, yet significant, breakthrough with the Opposition on this position.

1.59 p.m.

I want to say that this is a position which, in many significant instances in our country, should be maintained. On this note, I support and endorse the motion of Support for the Government and People of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and Reaffirming Recognition of the 1899 Arbitral Award and the 1966 Geneva Agreement, and simply put, as all Guyanese know it, that Essequibo belongs to us. Salute to Guyana. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Henry:** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Guyana Action Party (GAP), a member of the Coalition, I stand to make my

contribution on the motion of Support for the Government and People of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and Reaffirming Recognition of the 1899 Arbitral Award and the 1966 Geneva Agreement. Before I delve into this motion, please allow me to express a warm welcome to all our distinguished visitors who are here with us today in the National Assembly. I encourage you to visit our hinterland so as to enjoy our hospitality and the unique experiences we have to offer. I guarantee that, should you visit once, you will always want to come back to visit.

The subject of our debate today is one that must be appropriately placed as being most important for our future survival as a nation in the short, medium and long term. Essequibo is our El Dorado; it is our home, and we are proud to live there. Mr. Speaker, please allow me to say that the Indigenous peoples of Guyana stand firmly with all Guyanese in saying to the world that Essequibo, our El Dorado county, is ours and will stay ours. The history of what is now known as the North and South America, did not begin with the arrival of Christopher Columbus who got lost on his way to the East Indies. Prior to Columbus, my ancestors, as a whole, settled and lived without country borders as we know it today. Because of the worsening socioeconomic situation in Venezuela, we have seen Guyanese who had migrated to Venezuela remigrating to Guyana with their families. We welcome them and wish them all the best. Also, there are migrants from many countries who are in transit to other pastures or have settled here legally. On humanitarian grounds, we welcome them; we welcome you.

Recently, I saw an Indigenous Venezuelan Warrau child, about four years, old sitting on a floor in front of a shop in Lethem begging for a meal. I saw someone purchasing a meal and giving it to the baby. I immediately called the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Office to report this matter and to seek their assistance. I must say that a team from the IOM and other agencies visited a few days later and support was given to those in need. Mr. Speaker, please allow me to say thanks to the IOM, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Food for the Poor and other local and international organisations for their timely and positive interventions to those in need, be it Venezuelans or whomsoever. This problem or the issue of migrants and refugees entering our country is one we have to face frontally. We must not, if I should use the Guyanese terminology, *dilly dally* on this issue. We therefore request that the Government seriously consider expanding to an all-

inclusive taskforce with adequate budget to manage the migrant/refugee situation urgently.

We note that the Government of Venezuela is embarking on a referendum to, among other issues, seek the annexation of Essequibo. We note that this move has no support or legal leverage in international law. This move by Venezuela could take us to centuries ago when the Spanish conquistadors and other invaders trampled over the territories of my ancestors and, in that process, destroyed several civilisations, all in the name of greed. In 1831, the counties of Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice came together under the British to be known as British Guiana. In those early days, steps were put in place to fix boundaries using the acceptable and agreed upon protocols available. In 1899, the Arbitral Award was the protocol agreed upon by the United Kingdom and the country now known as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, to settle the boundaries of the two countries. The boundaries were accepted by the two countries. In 1905, the mutually agreed upon boundary was made legally binding.

Some 60 years later, according to a historical anecdote, we were then told that a document left by a Mr. Prevost, a lawyer, purported that the powers that existed, in the days leading to the mutually agreed upon decision of the 1899 Arbitral Award, had made a bargain that somehow cheated Venezuela out of Essequibo. To date there has been no proof to substantiate that story as told by Mr. Prevost, and we stand by waiting to see this legally binding proof that we can accept, but there is none. Further, an agreed upon process based on international law was activated and pursued by Venezuela and Guyana, under the auspices of the good office of the United Nations. Today, the process has reached the International Court of Justice. Now we note that Venezuela is saying that they do not want the ICJ to rule on this matter. Further, a planned referendum, that is similar to a *loaded dice*, by Venezuela, is set for 3<sup>rd</sup> December to up its ante, and could lead to Venezuela, against international laws, moving to annex Essequibo. I repeat that we stand with all Guyanese and the Government of Guyana against this most serious threat to our sovereignty and territorial integrity. We are cognisant of the fact that Venezuela is heading towards an election, and we ask that the Essequibo factor be not used by anyone to work in their favour with the disruption of the zone of peace that we all currently enjoy.

We, in Essequibo and in Guyana, note that there has been for some time a massive exodus of Venezuelans to neighbouring countries, not only in Guyana. This we understand is because of the terrible socioeconomic conditions that the people of Venezuela are experiencing. We, the inhabitants of



Essequibo, the Guyanese Essequibians, given the choice, prefer to speak English and live free of any conquistadors enslaving us. We are not in a perfect country, but it would be most calamitous for us to allow ourselves to descend to a situation in which we can be subjugated or have to migrate to other countries in search for better socioeconomic conditions. Having a Venezuelan Identification Card (ID) will not make our lives better, and I leave it at that for now. With the previous statements, one cannot say, in all honesty, that we are happy with the state of affairs in Guyana. The same way we can shout in one voice and say that we are all in solidarity and we stand and say that Essequibo is ours, which we mean, the same way we must work towards correcting or solving the festering problems that we face in our beloved Guyana.

We call for the People's Progressive Party/Civic's Government, that is currently the Government of Guyana, to respect our symbols of nationhood, inclusive of our flag, the Golden Arrowhead, and our national motto, *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*. I heard the Hon. Hugh Todd mention it today, and I wanted to go across and shake his hand, but I did not do it. Next time. The 'One Guyana' slogan that is currently being promoted by the People's Progressive Party/Civic, using state funds, is being seen as a political slogan that caters for only one section of Guyana. It is said that *whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad*. Only someone in this state would wake up one morning and instruct the police in Guyana to identify their vehicles with the Spanish word *Policia*. What message are you sending to Guyanese in these times, be it actual or subliminal? What message?

We saw a *Facebook* video, which was somehow allowed to circulate, in which a senior executive of the Government is said to have met in secrecy with the Venezuelan migrants and sought to wrongfully promote A Partnership of National Unity (APNU), as practicing xenophobia against the Venezuelan migrants. It seemed that this individual would go to all ends, including putting Guyana in danger, to achieve his objective of continuing his *de facto* presidency for another term. We call on this individual to tell us whether this is true or false. If true, the least we expect as soon as possible, is an apology, not to us in the National Assembly, but to the people of Guyana. As we sit in the House to give our support to Guyana, our beautiful mother, we have to insist that we are given the reasons to feel that we are fairly included in all spheres of Guyana's life.

Since the PPP/C became the Government of 2020, we have seen the attempted and actual trampling of the rights of

Indigenous peoples. One example is the Single Window System Bill that sought to supersede the Amerindian Act and the land rights of Indigenous peoples. Luckily, the Coalition managed to get this Bill to go to a select committee where satisfactory changes were made, thanks to the Coalition and the Government of Guyana. However, recently a Petroleum Activities Bill was passed in the National Assembly that gave the Minister of Natural Resources the full authority to control the process and issue oil exploration licences in any part of Guyana. This is inclusive of Indigenous people's ancestral lands, whether titled or untitled, and land contiguous to it. We urge that this Bill be urgently repealed. This unjust threat by Venezuela must not see us going our separate ways but, on the contrary, allow us to come together as a wholesome nation. As such, things cannot continue as normal. No one will stay proud when hungry and in need. It is time to look after the needs of the people, time for liveable incomes for our workers, time for retooling the Guyana Defence Force, time for restarting our National Service and time for a fair and equitable distribution of our natural patrimony.

Already we have noted that some are promoting Guyana to be an antagonist in this controversy. This is totally untrue. Mr. Speaker, please allow me to repeat that Guyana's *modus operandi* with regard to this issue has always been to follow the course of acceptable international law. Please allow me to express many thanks to the countries and international organisations that already expressed solidarity with our position and have called for both parties to respect that the International Court of Justice is the final arbiter. Let me say it again, we are not causing this; we are not the antagonists here.

2.14 p.m.

As a proud Guyanese, I join with all patriotic Guyanese, including my colleagues in this noble House, in saying that we affirm the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, and that we are in full support of the Motion before us in its entirety. Let us remember the famous story of the three-legged stool told by a former Vice-President, Mr. Sydney Allicock, when he said that if there are three legs on a stool, one has to have all three legs. The three legs in this situation, I would dare say, is the Opposition, the Government and the people. All three of us are needed in this struggle that we are now facing. Long live our dear Cooperative Republic of Guyana with its 83,000 square miles. Nothing less; nothing less. Including our beloved Essequibo. Our El Dorado. Thank you very much. [Applause]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Now for the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

**Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]:** Thank you very much, Sir. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, our beloved Guyana finds itself facing menacing threats emanating from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Guyana has always aspired to and remains, unwaveringly committed to peace and peaceful resolution of disputes, as stated by President Mohamed Irfaan Ali at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Today, 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2023, is a historic occasion in the life of this parliament, the Parliament of Guyana. The Motion before us captures the long road we have traversed to defend Guyana's territorial integrity through peaceful means. One that has been repeated time and time again since our independence as a nation to this moment.

In fact, when one goes to the parliamentary records, the issue of British Guiana and Venezuela's debate started in Parliament on 28<sup>th</sup> February, 1964, prior to our independence. Then again, just before our independence, on 28<sup>th</sup> April, 1966. Yet again, on 17<sup>th</sup> July, 1968. These were all motions that were brought before the House. On 8<sup>th</sup> July, 1982, regarding Venezuela's claim to Guyana, and now today. This National Assembly has debated, and recognised this issue that is one that impedes our full development and our right to self-determination as a nation. This is the one issue we can agree on as Government and Opposition regardless of who is in Government and who is in Opposition. Regardless of the sharp differences of our views on many issues. This is the one issue that we have unconditional, unwavering support for the 1899 Arbitral Award and Guyana's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and our commitment to the process at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) which started in 2018.

My dear Friends, this is a golden opportunity for our nation to forge national unity on what are the main issues. We can quibble about many things. We can disagree about many things, but if Guyana does not exist, we have no homeland. We are seeing what is going on in the world by annexations that are taking place in other parts of the world. We do not want this to happen in this part of the world. We do not want that to happen to us, as Guyanese people, nor to any people who are within our borders. There is no other time other than now for all the parliamentarians and all Guyanese to resolutely support the Arbitral Award of 1899 and the

process before the International Court of Justice. Speakers before me have spoken about the Arbitral Award of 1899 and has been stated by other speakers, it was a combination of Arbitral proceedings during which the respective territorial claims of Great Britain and Venezuela were addressed at great length and in great detail by distinguished legal counsel representing the two states, including going through many thousands of pages of written submissions and more than 200 hours of oral hearings before the Arbitral Award. My Friend, Minister Mr. Todd, pointed out that Venezuela received a huge chunk of land out of that Award and Guyana a lesser amount. We must remember that with the Arbitral Award, we won our borders as final, perfect. At the same time, Venezuela benefitted as well; very well. It demanded that it have that land at the mouth of the Orinoco River and Venezuela got it.

We have to be able to tell our people... Someone spoke about fear and that people are afraid. We have to always stand on the ground of righteousness and justice and that is the ground upon which Guyana stands. We stand on the ground of our righteousness and justice that the proceedings of the Arbitral Tribunal were full, perfect and final settlement of all matters regarding the territory of Guyana. I am afraid to repeat some of the other speakers, but we must emphasise a point. That is, for six decades after the Award of 1899 was delivered, Venezuela treated the Award as a final settlement of that matter. For six decades, it consistently recognised, affirmed and relied upon the Arbitral Award as full, perfect and final determination of the boundary of British Guyana. Between 1900 and 1905, Venezuela participated freely in a joint demarcation of the boundary in strict adherence to the letter of the Award of 1899 and emphatically refused to counter even minor, technical modifications of the boundary line described in the Award. It was very meticulous in using the maps. I should pause for a minute to say that in that whole area of the Arbitral Award, the two countries were given signed maps. Maps that it signed that this is the final settlement. There are official maps in the two countries and probably abroad that would show that Venezuela signed on to and agreed to the boundaries which are our land boundaries.

We must also remember that in 1928, our neighbour, Brazil, also had the boundary agreement with Venezuela and Guyana to create the trijunction area allowing for the three countries where they meet. For 60 years, Venezuela gave full effect to the Award and the boundaries of Guyana. What happened as we came closer to Independence? Of course, people have spoken about the Mallet-Prevost letter and all the other things. This may not be the place to go into all the

political history that were occurring in Venezuela at that time, what with the machinations, and what was the concern of external forces, and *the powers that be* that were concerned about Guyana and Guyana's independence. As we came closer to Independence as a nation and, as I said, after more than half of a century of recognition, affirmation and reliance on the award, Venezuela sought to repudiate the Award of 1899 for the first time. On the basis of that departure from its long-standing recognition, Venezuela began to make far-reaching and aggressive claims that it was entitled to three-quarters of Guyana's sovereign territory.

In the decades since Independence, Venezuela has continued to advance these claims with increasing menace and in disregard of the impact of the claims on Guyana and the wider region. In recent times, more so, I think, than ever before – because I am probably one of the older Members of this House – that the aggressive language, the insulting and offensive language, and the threat to us by Venezuela, at this time, is probably worse than it has ever been in the history of this issue. We have seen the interception of vessels on waters and various actions of flying over, as well as, more recently, comments coming out that accused the Guyanese politicians – there is no difference between Government and Opposition – that they were servile. That the Guyanese politicians were servile politicians to ExxonMobil and US imperialism. Unfortunately, Venezuela has not moved off a certain track – an ideological track. It only uses it when it becomes useful as a form of galvanising support in its country.

As I started to say, the issue here today and historically is that the one thing that one can trust in Guyana, even when we are *at loggerheads*, is the fact that whoever is in Government and whoever is in Opposition, have lent unconditional support on the issue of Guyana's territory and integrity. That must be worth something; that must be worth something in the fabric of our society. Whether it was Mr. Cheddi Jagan as Prime Minister and Mr. Forbes Burnham, or whether it was Mr. Forbes Burnham as Prime Minister and Mr. Cheddi Jagan as Leader of the Opposition. Whether it was Mr. Ptolemy Reid as Prime Minister and Mr. Cheddi Jagan. Whether it was Mr. Cheddi Jagan as President and Mr. Desmond Hoyte as Leader of the Opposition. Whether it was Ms. Janet Jagan as President and Mr. Desmond Hoyte. Whether it was Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo as President and Mr. Robert Corbin. Going even closer forward, the relations between President David Granger on this issue and the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo in the 2015-2020 period.

It was in 2014 that a decision was made and the then Minister of Foreign Affairs wrote to the UN calling to find other means under the Geneva Agreement to move the process forward as we had been for decades in the Mixed Commission as well as in the Goodwill Officers process and gotten nowhere. Even in 2017 when the Secretary-General named his own envoy, Mr. Dag Halvor Nylander, to come and talk to both sides, Venezuela continued to be intractable in regard of this position. Hence, the Secretary-General of the UN used his authority under the Geneva Agreement to take us to the ICJ, which is what we wanted. This point here today is one that we must always cherish. It is priceless. Not many countries have their Government and Opposition coming together on one issue. We must not take it for granted. Of course, it is highly possible that tomorrow we will have a sitting and maybe at some point, the *claws will be out, the daggers will be out* – of course, not literally – to score points with each other. That is real *politique*; that is real politics. Today is the day for us, as politicians, as Guyanese, to stand united.

We must also recognise that we have faced many challenges. Yet, ironically, Mr. Maduro may not recognise the many efforts between various leaders of Venezuela and Guyana. The famous visit of Mr. Hugo Chavez Frias to Guyana where it was agreed that the border issue was *back burner* and now it has come to the *front burner* with Mr. Maduro, his *protégé*. I want to say, it is no mere coincidence. On many occasions, as one goes through the years, when these aggressions have emerged, there is a coincidence. I believe that the reasons are clear for all of us. Venezuela, our neighbour, a country we have had trade with from 1958, a country that we sold rice to and bought oil from in our hard times, a country that has welcomed thousands of Guyanese who went to Venezuela in our hard times.

2.29 p.m.

We must never forget that our people have left the country too and they scattered themselves all around the world. It was estimated that 40,000 had gone to the Republic of Suriname and 60,000 went to Venezuela and everyone talks about the estimate that there are more Guyanese in the diaspora than there are Guyanese in Guyana. Venezuela has its difficulties now and it has been having them for quite a while. The number of Venezuelans who are out of their country or who have chosen to leave their country is approximately six million, which is a very large group of migrants, who have not just decided to go to holiday in Brazil or decided to pick up their things and move. When we look at the figures of migrants coming from Venezuela, the

total is now approximately 22,417. The migration started around 2018. You will remember that the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations in the last Parliament had discussions on this issue of trying to find out about the migrants coming in, whether they were Guyanese, what conditions and support they have been given.

We must never, ever lose our humanity, which is special to Guyana, I believe. We must never forget our humanity. Our people fled and we know that. Whether it was politics, whether there were hardships, whether the cost of living was high, our people of all ethnic groups left Guyana. Probably, the Indigenous people had an easier time because they lived near the border and they crossed over and came back and forth. That has been historical in Guyana. The borders have allowed our Indigenous people, on both sides to move back and forth freely and, sometimes, even in both elections in Venezuela and in Guyana. We must never forget our humanity. We and the former Government have offered humanitarian assistance. We have offered humanitarian assistance. We must be our brothers' keepers and our sisters' keepers. We are not a signatory nor ratified the Convention on Refugees. It is very disturbing that we must not bow to xenophobia. I have been long enough in this Parliament when the Brazilians stated coming over to mine - most of you know what the Kaimoo is - and using more sophisticated mining equipment than we had at that time. In this very Parliament, not this building but the Parliament, there was a rash fear, that 40,000 Brazilians were here and we would just become a colony of Brazil because the Brazilians were taking over with their music and their language and everything else. That was in the 1990s. Do you see that happening? Did it happen? Of course, it did not happen.

The migrants coming in from Venezuela are like migrants all over the world and like our people who have been migrants elsewhere. They want a better life. They want a safer life. Those who are coming to Guyana are not your rich elite from Venezuela, they are not your big billionaires of Venezuela. Those get on a flight and go to Miami and New York. We are here and we take care of people, as we do with all migrants. They are entitled to free healthcare, they are entitled to free education, they are entitled during a COVID-19 pandemic to be vaccinated. We are responsible for all who are within our boundaries, regardless of nationality. That is our responsibility at an international level and in terms of human rights. The fact that, when we plot and plan, the events that have taken place over these decades and decades of independence, it is matched whenever the internal difficulties in Venezuela, especially around elections. It is believed that where Venezuela uses the unsubstantiated,

unproven, undefended claims to two-thirds of Guyana as a means to distract and galvanise support of its citizens on this belligerent, nationalistic, jingoistic propaganda against Guyana. Today, while we have been meeting, two songs have come out from Venezuela. One is from some beautiful children singing Essequibo belongs to them. Of course, these are particularly orchestrated public relations (PR) campaigns to carry out psychological warfare on the Guyanese people. I think Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger may have called it one time "psyche-ops". The second song that came out, just about an hour or so, shows Venezuelan soldiers, not in combat clothes but, in uniform, singing and marching and so on that Essequibo is theirs.

We are in a situation where Venezuela is also using this to galvanise and to mobilise their people to go vote on 3<sup>rd</sup> December and also to vote in the elections in 2024. Venezuela is also facing another deadline that it has to deal with, and that is the submission of its Counter-Memorial to the ICJ by March, 2024. That is its deadline, whether it is by the Referendum it wants the majority to say they do not recognise the ICJ, so it does not have to report. This is all an effort orchestrated to allow Venezuela to not stick to the ICJ's process. It is finding one thing after another to pretend that it is not important.

I want to comment on one thing before I go on and that is, the comments about migrants that were made by the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir. I have said it, migrants are migrants and many of us have come from migrants. Our country is based on migrants, whether they are here voluntarily or involuntarily, and that the kaleidoscope of our nation is expanding. We have Haitians, Nigerians, Indians from India, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Chinese. That is who we are. We are a very diverse nation. That is special to our country. It is unique to our country. It is not to see it as a divisive thing but to see it as growing in any country. I have lived in Canada and in the late 1960s, early 1970s, there was a huge influx of migrants into Toronto from many parts of Europe and also some parts of South America. The talk in the place was "migrants taking over our jobs". We have to be sane. We have to take information and analyse it and fact-check. We have unemployment, yes. The Government have the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) programme and the Women's Innovation and Investment Network (WIIN) programme to raise our people's standards. We are also facing very acute shortage of labour. Any migrant who comes into our country and wishes to work, work hard and be law-abiding, we are there to welcome them into our nation to help us build our nation. There will always be "bad eggs" in every migrant group and there maybe, and

you are right, there are security threats and concerns. I have confidence in the Disciplined Forces of Guyana and the intelligence gathering to be on top of what may be threats from those who are coming in.

I have been on the Defence Board and I have sat at different levels, be privy to some of the things that they have to do to make sure that our territory is safe. This moment that we are in, can you imagine if you are a migrant from Venezuela, that you are frightened too because Guyanese are worried. It is their territory; it is our territory but also, they have no security of tenure. We do not need to escalate fear. We need to assure people that this is a place that you ran to, you are safe and we will not encourage xenophobia in our nation. We have never done that before and we should never do it in our history.

I believe that this point where we are at is the worst and most menacing that we are seeing in the long history of Venezuela's claims to two-thirds of our country's territory. One of the most important developments, I think while we were preparing the motion and discussing between the Government and the Opposition to have an agreed on motion was the fact, and it is reflected in the 12<sup>th</sup> "AND WHEREAS" Clause, was to approach the Court for provisional measures to ensure that Venezuela would do nothing to interfere with our territory and so to put a halt to any ambitions or any rabble-rousing regarding our territory. I think this is an indication of the interest of the ICJ and the recognition of the threat that exists here right now. The request to call on the Court to issue an Order for provisional measures, to prevent Venezuela from taking any action to cease acquiring, encroach upon or exercise sovereignty over the Essequibo River or any other part of Guyana's national territory, pending the Court's final determination of the validity of the arbitral award. The fact that we approached the Court and we have a date with such rapidity – 14<sup>th</sup> November is the date when the Court will hear the case – will hear our pleading and the Venezuelans will have a right to respond, I assume. This is not important. The Court does not always rapidly respond. That is not how it works. I think we can feel strengthened and assured that the fact the Court gave this request of the Government such importance.

We can talk about many of the incursions and things that went wrong over the time. I hope that the strength of the statements of the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), nations at an individual level will somehow get through to the Venezuelan nation that they are on a wrong course; that this is a dangerous course; that they

are in fact, violating international law and they are threatening a small country that does not have the means, if we were to really be put against the Venezuelans. We have the power of our motion and our strength as a people but we do not wish this to escalate. The Referendum itself is contrite. It is an engineered thing, again, to try to galvanise the Venezuelan people. I came across a poll that was done. I cannot swear by its legitimacy and it is that of (inaudible). It did a poll concerning the consultative referendum on the Essequibo, Guyana territory. It notes that 68% of those who were polled, were convinced that they should participate in 3<sup>rd</sup> December referendum, while 31% considered that they should not participate in the consultation on 3<sup>rd</sup> December. We must not put everybody into one pot. There are people out there who have no such interest of annexation, of pumping up one's chest and showing maps of the *Zona de Reclamación* which offends us as Guyanese.

2.44 p.m.

It is an illegal map and one that should be shown nowhere at all. We have recognised the two questions that are most contemptuous. We recognise the total disregard for international law. This is a brazen act of 3<sup>rd</sup> December to deny us of our right to live within our agreed borders and to freely develop resources of our entire nation. As Minister Ms. Sukhai pointed out, this by all definitions is an act of aggression. For the CARICOM and the hemispheric...the country is in this hemisphere. This is a zone of peace and has been a zone of peace for decades. For many of the Latin American countries, it is not just Guyana who has a border issue with Venezuela. Venezuela has border issues with other countries including Columbia. There is probably not one nation in the South American continent that does not have a border issue with another country, so any act of aggression will make the entire South America nervous and squeamish about what is taking on.

Therefore, we know that we are not alone as a people. We have not been rabid, careless and reckless. We have stood for peaceful means by legal processes. We have painstakingly gone through years and years of the Mixed Commission, years and years of the Goodwill and the final year with Mr. Nylander. We all thought in the Ministerial Committee that Mr. Greenridge headed, how painful it was dealing with that final year before we moved to the ICJ to convince the Secretary General that there was no go and there was no giving of anything. The call by Mr. Maduro and his insults that we do not wish to negotiate is just hot air. We have dedicatedly been part of talks and there are many people who have gone through that. The Goodwill Ambassadors were

named by the Secretary General. Even the UN Secretary Generals were getting tired of a process that went nowhere. We have stuck to it. We have been honourable partners on this issue and we will continue to be honourable because we will continue to stand for international law and the process of the International Court of Justice. I will give a different example. We had not delineated our maritime boundaries with the Republic of Suriname but when we approached the international convention of the sea to delay those maritime boundaries. We got 97% of what we asked for and the Surinamese got three per cent. It was an expensive operation; a long operation which cost a lot of money, but we were vindicated. We have trust in the international legal system. We have experienced it with the Republic of Suriname maritime boundaries.

The important thing, for all of us as Guyanese, is that we have the right to self-determination. We are a nation. We have a right to self-determination. We set our course whether it is with investors or whether we want to really create a truly democratic nation where everybody is equal and has a chance and opportunity to develop. This is our nation and as we say in creole *our navel string bury* and maybe the young people's navel strings were not buried but, for some of us, our mothers had to bury our navel strings in the ground, so we are tied to mother earth. All of us as Guyanese are tied to mother earth. This is ours. This is what we know. This is not the time for any of us as Guyanese to prevaricate. I am very pleased that in this House so far, we have had one voice. On the motion, we have had one voice that asserts our defence of our territorial integrity and sovereignty. This land, Guyana, is ours. We as a people, no matter what our difference is, must not quibble and hesitate. This is a matter of national importance like no other. Without our lands, we do not exist as a country and if we do not exist as a country then, what are we?

I do not believe the Venezuelan people – I try to separate the people from the Government – want to annex Guyana. I call on them and I use this forum here to call on the Venezuelans, the hardworking citizens of Venezuela to reject questions three and five on the referendum. Question three does not recognise the ICJ and question five, of course, we all know now, is calling for the annexation of two-thirds of our country. I believe that the Venezuelan people are capable of reading through the lines. This decision they are being asked to make will also have enormous impacts on their lives. It will bring no benefit and no progress to their country. In fact, it will do greater harm to their lives and their security, so we need to talk to the Venezuelan people, not just those who

have access to the PR campaigns and to be able at 24 hours every day churning out its psychological warfare.

We just have to look at the world now and see the destruction when it is unilateral annexation by one country of another and what it does to the people, nation and future. These stains do not go away; they last forever. We, as Guyanese, in terms of the motion before us, whether we agree with everything or do not agree with everything, the point is that we, as a people, are declaring through our elected representatives as one that we are affirming our support and recognition of the 1899 Arbitral Awards and the 1966 Geneva Agreement and that we stand by the seven Be It Resolved clauses that affirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a State of Guyana. We reaffirm the recognition and acceptance of the 1899 Arbitral Award as full, perfect and final. We denounce the provocative, unlawful, void and of no international legal effect; the purported referendum in Venezuela that is scheduled for 3<sup>rd</sup> December. We support the Government in its pursuit to ensure a peaceful and lawful resolution of the controversy before the International Court of Justice and rejects the proposal to return to any form of dialogue with Venezuela on the controversy outside of the process of the Court. We support Guyana's formal approach for the urgent protection of the ICJ with the filing with the Court - a request for provisional measures for an order preventing Venezuela from taking any action to seize, acquire, encroach upon us, assert or exercise sovereignty over the Essequibo River. We call for the deepening of engagements of all national stakeholders on issues relating to sovereignty and integrity, and that within the context of the meetings of the bipartisan Ministerial Advisory Committee on Guyana/Venezuela. As one would recall, this Committee was originally set up when Mr. Greenidge was the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and we, in this Government, brought it over lock, stock and barrel as it was including Mr. Greenidge as part of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on the Guyana/Venezuela Controversy. These are bilateral with both the Government and the Opposition.

One must also not take for granted the fact that we, as a people, when we went in November of last year before the world court in the Hague to hear Venezuela's objection to the jurisdictional decision of the court, we went as a bipartisan team. We will do that again on 14<sup>th</sup> November, as far as I understand. At the hearing on 14<sup>th</sup> November in the International Court of Justice, we will also have a bipartisan team. Again, do not take this for granted. In many countries that does not happen. We need to celebrate, as a people, these small overtures and developments that bring us

together. We encourage our citizens to remain fully engaged on developments surrounding the controversy.

Again, as we all said in speaking, we express appreciation to our partners and friends at the international and the regional levels who have come out with very clear messages not waffling but very clear messages to the Government of Venezuela to desist from the line that it has taken and to stay within the international realm of the International Court of Justice. I want that in all of this, as Guyanese, because Guyanese who are coming in from Venezuela returned; things were bad. Some will become citizens and some may not; some may go back to Venezuela, but we have lost many migrants to different parts of the world. Some have come back but not many have come back and so they choose their lives. It is their right to decide where they are. It is for us to do the best that we can to make sure that we have a healthy and secure nation that offers the best that we can offer to our people, our citizens and those who, for many reasons, are in our borders, who have chosen to be here or were forced to be here. This is our responsibility, as a nation, to do what is right. We must always be on the side of righteousness and justice and not on the side of bullyism, threats and aggression. We hope that the Government of Venezuela will see the light and desist from some of the very aggressive acts against Guyana but even if they continue, we will continue to look to the international court, the UN, the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States (OAS), the CARICOM and our neighbouring countries to stand formally with us and not allow any incursion into our territory.

As everyone has said, Guyana is ours; Essequibo is ours. Our navel string is buried here; maybe if that is translated into Spanish it might not mean the same thing, but we are here. It is our country. We intend to do everything possible to make sure that Venezuela or any others in the future who dare to try to take our territory away, that this is ours. We belong here. We love here. We want to see our nation grow and develop for all of our people. Thank you. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Now, we will have the Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Forde, Senior Council (SC).

**Mr. Forde:** Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon, all. In this season of the Venezuela aggression, I rise as a citizen of Guyana ever more conscious of the role of the National Assembly in Guyana's body politics and that of every stakeholder vested in Guyana's interest. I rise conscious of how much the Guyanese people are counting on us, their elected representatives, to protect them and this

beloved land from invaders. It is the duty of all of our political leaders to speak with one accord, to reassure all Guyanese irrespective of race or political association that they are valued. It is our honour and privilege to protect, service and further the real interest of all.

2.59 p.m.

We are living in a very serious and opportune times. How we navigate both realities will assert the Guyanese aspiration of *One People, One Nation, One Destiny* or fall into the wayside, the consequence of self-serving leadership. In other words, would history record us in this moment of time, swimming together or uncaring whether we sink each other because we have not yet learned to appreciate that our lives and destiny are intertwined? While the naysayers may say otherwise, I paraphrased the sage advice of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King that we learn to live together as brothers and sisters, or we will together perish as fools. We meet today to address the motion of Venezuela's continuous sabre-rattling, the presumptuous lawlessness to think that we are going to sit silent and to allow it anywhere near our land and waters that is ours by right as determined by the 1899 Arbitral Award and the International Law of the Sea.

Mr. Speaker, consequent upon the Treaty of Washington in 1897 and the Arbitral Award of 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1899, the boundary between what was then British Guiana and Venezuela was settled, and a Boundary Commission appointed comprising two British Commissioners, Messrs Perkins, and Anderson representing the British Government and two Venezuelan Commissioners, Senores Dr. Abraham Tirado and Elias Toro representing the Venezuelan Government. The task of the Commission was to demarcate on the ground the line of the boundary established by the Arbitral Award and to stain it with clarity on an agreed map. The resulting borderline or boundary line was surveyed by the Commission between November, 1900 and June, 1904 and was set out on a map, an extract from which had been circulated to the Hon. Members and signed by the Commissioners at Georgetown, British Guiana, on 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1905. On 9<sup>th</sup> January, 1905, a report was submitted by Mr. Perkins, the Senior British Boundary Commissioner, to its principles and published in the official records of British Guiana for that year. It should be noted that two identical maps were drawn and jointly signed, one for the Government of His Britannic Majesty and the other for the Venezuelans, containing all the enumerative details related to the demarcation with a clear specification of the boundary line according to the Arbitral Award of Paris. On 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1905, the British and Venezuelan Commissioners

signed a form and agreement at Georgetown referring to the map previously signed by them and endorsing its accuracy and authenticity.

Guyanese know that on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, the Venezuelans will go to the polls to vote on five questions, which are paraphrased from our point of view. Firstly, do the Venezuelans agree to reject by all means the boundary line drawn by the 1899 Parish Arbitration Award, which gave Guyana Essequibo? Do the Venezuelans support the 1966 Geneva Agreement as the only valid legal instrument to reach a practical and satisfactory solution to Venezuela and Guyana regarding the controversy over the territory of Essequibo? Thirdly, do the Venezuelans agree with the misguided historical position of not recognising the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice to resolve the territorial controversy over Essequibo? Fourthly, do the Venezuelans agree to oppose Guyana's claim to dispose of our sea consistent with international law? Fifthly, do the Venezuelans agree with the creation of a Guyana/Essequibo state and the development of an accelerated plan for comprehensive care for the current and future population of our territory, which includes, among other things, the granting of citizenship and identity cards of Venezuela in accordance with the expired Geneva Agreement and violation of international law to covet the land which does not belong to it?

Mr. Speaker, these questions represent Venezuela's latest unilateral act, the latest unilateral act in a long history of Venezuela's violation and disregard of treaties. The second question of the referendum seeks to state that the Geneva Agreement of 1966 is the only binding and valid agreement for the resolution of this controversy. We state that the Treaty of Washington and the Arbitral Award are the full, perfect and final settlement of the controversy surrounding Essequibo. Let us remember that Venezuela has repeatedly breached the Geneva Agreement and rebuffed efforts by Guyana to engage in bilateral talks with Guyana.

Venezuela, in respect of the mixed commission established under the Geneva Agreement, has occupied half of the Island of Ankoko in the middle of the Cuyuni River in breach of this agreement. It has organised within the territory of Guyana clandestine meetings with Indigenous chiefs and citizens of Guyana in a non-successful attempt to delude them into supporting resolutions backing Venezuela's claim. We have mentioned today that it has published a paid advertisement in the London Times, stating that she would not recognise any development concessions in the Essequibo region. It has sought to annex by Presidential decree a nine-

mile belt running along the coast of Essequibo of Guyana and extending within three miles of it. Our Government, particularly for which our party formed on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June, 1968, and the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, 1968, rejected and rebuffed the Venezuelan efforts to take control of our lands by submitting to them notes of protest. In these circumstances, Guyana cannot engage in any further bilateral and similar talks. Guyana should, must and shall remain committed to the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice for the resolution of the controversy. The people of Guyana deserve no less. The sun of Guyana sets in the Essequibo and there must be no further prolonged attempts by Venezuela to fabricate an eclipse of the sun of Guyana.

Venezuela's increase in aggression is not only misplaced but devoid of legitimacy. Even as we acknowledge these, we cannot ignore that in a world where might could supersede right, small nations such as ours must navigate these murky waters sensibly. Young Guyana, going back to 1965, has been unwavering in its commitment to abide by the 1899 Arbitral Award that settled the territorial dispute between then British Guiana and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela under the Colonial Leadership of Britain. Guyanese recall the presence of premier Mr. Forbes Burnham during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of December 1965 at a high-level meeting with the Venezuelan Foreign Minister and the British Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs addressing the 7<sup>th</sup> November 1965 communiqué signed by representatives of Venezuela and Britain along with a representative from British Guiana to quote:

“Find satisfactory solutions for a practical settlement of the controversy which has arisen as a result of the Venezuelan contention that the 1899 award is null and void.”

On the eve of Independence, the Forbes Burnham Government pursued a path to resolve this issue through the Geneva Agreement, which the Desmond Hoyte Government continued and on expiration in 1990, pursued the Good Officer process, which lasted until 2017.

In 2018, the Mr. David Granger/Mr. Moses Nagamootoo Government approached the International Court of Justice, committed to the principle of peaceful resolution. This serves to remind us all, particularly the young Guyanese who may be unaware or are led to believe differently, that any Government, the People's National Congress (PNC) has been part of has consistently navigated this situation with due diligence and sense. In or out of Government the PNC remains committed to protecting and defending Guyana's



sovereignty through peaceful and judicious means; legal and diplomatic. Some 55 years ago, the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, 1968 to be exact, the then leader of the People's National Congress and the Prime Minister Forbes Burnham stood in this very National Assembly and said:

“I cannot tell with any certainty where this ill-advised course of action on which Government has embarked will lead us. We must be prepared, however, for further and even more aggressive demonstrations of international lawlessness from the Government of Venezuela. We will need all our courage and strength to withstand these efforts to break our will and despoil our land. Venezuela has now made clear her intention to seek relentlessly to reimpose the yoke of colonialism on a young and small nation that has only recently succeeded in freeing itself from the tutelage of another imperial power.”

He continued:

“We have no quarrel with the Venezuelan people but we shall not lack courage or resolve in resisting aggressive demands of a Venezuelan Government that is prepared to defile the traditions of Bolivar and to flout the precepts of Hemispheric and world order and security. In our stand for survival, we shall call upon the conscience of all peace-loving people to speak out in our cause and we shall need all our unity as a people so that your voice may be heard in all the corners of the world and in the 11 Councils of the world's institutions of peace.”

When Mr. Burnham uttered those profound words that echo today in the halls of this building, he was addressing Guyana's statement on the Venezuelan's Decree that purported to plan to annex part of the territorial waters and the contiguous zone of Guyana as part of Venezuela, laying along the Coast of Guyana between the mouth of the Essequibo River and the Waini Point. We are here more than a century later, facing a threat of no lesser magnitude, and we cannot pretend that this issue is not a clear and present danger to every citizen of this beloved home and abroad. We are here more than a century later after the Arbitral Award. Mr. Dave Martins captured in a song, *Who we are as a People*, and I quote:

“We are a peaceful people  
Struggle as we struggle  
And we don't look for trouble  
Just ask around

But when outside faces  
From foreign places  
Talk about taking over  
We ain't backing down...”

Again today, we fire this verbal warning shot to Venezuela; as a citizen, a Parliamentarian, and a proud Member of the PNC, I join with my Colleagues in the APNU/AFC and every Guyanese to reaffirm the position taken by the PNC historically and in these times, all Guyana. In its present configuration, it belongs to all of us. We accept the 1899 Arbitral Award as the final settlement of the dispute between Great Britain and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on the matter of the border. At the same time, all Guyanese are relieved to hear similar affirmation from the People's Progressive Party/Civic and the repudiating of any idea and any possibility of giving up a blade of grass, the consideration of an off to Venezuela of a challenge to the sea or anything for that matter that would be construed as unpatriotic and threatening to our territorial integrity. I remind this House that the PPP Leader and the Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Jagan, in his contribution to the 1968 resolution passed in this National Assembly on the 12<sup>th</sup> July, 1968 said:

“In the Resolution, we would like to state that we agree that the Venezuelan Decree should be considered a nullity, that the Decree should be considered an act of aggression. We are called upon by the Government to approve... all the necessary steps to secure the territorial integrity of Guyana. As I said before, our position on this question is clear. We made the point years ago; we put it in a nut-shell when we said “*Not an inch of territory.*”

3.14 p.m.

I look over at the seat of the person who now leads Dr. Jagan's Party, and sometimes, I wonder whether Dr. Jagan will know his Party and support the view of the present leader who stunned the nation on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October, 2015, when he announced at a press conference that his Party and Government were considering offering Venezuela a channel to the sea. How much more disturbing could such a possibility be in the face of the 1968 Resolution passed by this House, which rejected and rebuffed a resolution of the government of Venezuela requiring its armed forces to impose dominion over the belt of the sea? How could that happen in the face of a Resolution in this House which resolved and declared the Decree to be a nullity? There is proof of it being treated so by the Government of Guyana

insofar as it purports to relate to any part of the sea, including the territorial sea, the contiguous zone adjacent to any part of Guyana's coast, and the continental shelf that forms part of Guyana's territory. When the House passed a Resolution to condemn the said Decree constituted as an act of aggression against Guyana likely to endanger the international peace and security, that denounced the act as one of aggression against Guyana.

It was done contrary to the Charter of the United Nations. It was an attempt by the Government of Venezuela to implement the said Decree over part of the sea, including the territorial sea and the contiguous zone adjacent to any part of the coast of Guyana. How could it occur when the House passed a motion to approve that the Government of Guyana was taking all necessary steps to secure the territorial integrity of Guyana, including its rights under international law and over the sea adjacent to its coast? Permit me Mr. Speaker to remind this House and all of Guyana that Dr. Jagan, in that debate, said that we must not only deny Venezuelans radio time, but we must also restrict them in other places. I quote his declaration:

17<sup>th</sup> July, 1968;

“Let them go home.”

He said:

“Let them go home.”

It is amazing that the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, will come here this afternoon and present an image that the People's Progressive Party has been historically accommodating of migrants. The concerns of the Guyanese people are legitimate. A few days ago, I visited the Haslington area, and the only issue on the minds of Guyanese – because of the proximity of this debate – was the situation with Venezuela. There were concerns about the entry, the unregulated entry, the unplanned permission of migration, and the almost open facilitation of a number of persons from Venezuela. There could be no denial that the infrastructure of Guyana cannot support that sort of migration. Whilst the Hon. Ms. Teixeira speaks of a very progressive position, obviously, in comparing what Dr. Jagan said to now, the Hon. Member did not capture the reality of what is happening in Guyana. One of the very first acts of the current PPP/C Government was to impose a visa restriction against Haitians. These are persons who are entitled to the free movement of travel within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Though we join this Government – which is our right and obligation – to stand and defend our country against Venezuela, I wish to

remind this honourable House that in the course of my budget presentations in 2020 and 2021, I said the same thing using exactly the same phrase. This is what I said:

7<sup>th</sup> Sitting; Twelfth Parliament

“The complete overlook in this Budget speech is the need for comprehensive citizenship, immigration and border policies.”

I said it, Mr. Speaker. Today, even in the stage that we are in and in the face of this crisis, this Government has failed to bring before us legislation to govern immigration and access in this country. I reject it as acceptable for the Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira to give us this sort of laissez-faire approach – anybody could simply cross into our country and somehow, we have to accept and bear that. She acknowledged that Guyana is not a signatory to any convention on migration. Trinidad and Tobago is not a signatory to any convention and it is sending back home the Venezuelans. I believe that this matter needs to be addressed. The brushing of it above and off the table onto the carpet and vacuuming is not sufficient. It does not address the concerns of the Guyanese people on a very important issue. The National Assembly must, therefore, be unanimous in its conviction and purpose on the Venezuela/Guyana border controversy. All and any doubts must be removed that successive Governments and the people of Guyana, including the PPP, are not engaged in any nefarious or questionable activities that compromise Guyana's interest.

Guyana deserves a peaceful and lawful resolution of this controversy. As it was led by the Burnham Government to where the matter is presently before the International Court of Justice and as placed by the Granger/Nagamootoo Government, the people of Guyana must hold their elected leaders accountable to this. Failure will be complicit with any action taken by this Government or any other government that does not serve the interests of the nation and its citizens. The last thing we who are alive today would want is a repeat of the Mallet-Prevost situation. This is the lawyer who represented Venezuela in the Arbitral Tribunal and reportedly requested the release of a 1944 memorandum after his death. This memorandum attacked the 1899 Arbitral Award on an allegation that the Award was a political deal between Great Britain and Russia. Whilst Mallet-Prevost's contention could not be further from the truth, given the 1897 Treaty that formed the basis of the Award, both Venezuela and Great Britain agreed:

“...to consider the result of the proceeds of the Tribunal of Arbitration as a full, perfect, and final

settlement of all the questions referred to the Arbitrators.”

Nothing from the grave must haunt us. Mallet-Prevost’s contention lacks evidence, but it is being used by Venezuelans to stir up trouble which we must be guarded against. Hence, it is important to condemn and relinquish any notion of discussing a deal with Venezuela. As we sing:

“We ain’t giving up no river  
That belongs to we...”

As Mr. Forbes Burnham said in 1966 during his presentation in this House, we are:

“... convinced that justice is on our side and our case can stand...thorough scrutiny from any quarter.”

Having addressed the issue of reaffirming our commitment to the peaceful and legal resolution to the border controversy and the condemnation of Venezuela’s aggression, I turn my attention to the internal management of the state. Guyanese are reminded that the strength of our external defence lies in the cohesion within the state. The disquiet and rumblings of Guyanese in this oil-rich, world’s fastest-growing economy are increasing. Guyanese are growing intolerant of the pervasive social, economic, and political injustices, particularly when they are entitled to fair treatment. This Government must be reminded – turning a blind eye and pretending that there is no societal dysfunction could lead to grave consequences. We are *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*. Every Guyanese must feel that he or she has a stake in this beloved country and will be treated with dignity and respect. This is where sometimes the Government and our Party do not seem to share the same beliefs. We believe in the National Motto and not a misguided, visionless, and poorly executed *One Guyana* policy that is not only myopic but anti-national and unpatriotic. It feeds internal divisions and external forces to exploit in the furtherance of their national interest. It is important for this House to record and for all Guyanese to know that whilst we stand in solidarity with the Government and all Guyana on this motion, we would take a momentarily brief pause on our continuous argumentation on this side of the House in relation to the discriminatory management of the state, the continued abuse of public servants and teachers and unionised workers’ rights to collective bargaining. For a moment we will take a break from our argumentation in relation to the demolition of the guardrails of democracy and the Government’s apparent determination to create a one-party state.

We will not stand for the violation of the Constitution and the contempt of the court on the substantive appointment of the Chancellor of the Judiciary and Chief Justice. The court ruled on 26<sup>th</sup> April, 2023 that any protracted or further delay in complying with Article 127 (1) of the Constitution is inimical to the independence of the judiciary as set out in Article 122. For a moment, we will take a break from complaining and standing against the demolition of homes. We will take a break today because we stand together for all of Guyana in relation to the failure to provide equitable allocation of resources across the country. For a moment, we are concerned and remain concerned about the issue of poverty and the failure of the Government to reduce it in a systematic manner. There is the Government’s continuous collapse of the education sector, where more than half of the children in the world’s fastest-growing economy are not literate.

We take a break today and join the Government in support of this motion despite the failure to provide proper health services across the country and the inability to provide basic medication to those in need. We take a break today – just for a moment, just a pause – from continuing to address the lack of accountability in the management of the oil sector and its proceeds and the allocation of contracts to the tune of billions of dollars to PPP’s friends, families, and favourites. We stand for inclusionary democracy as outlined in Article 13 of the Constitution. We demand the inclusion of all stakeholders, organisations, and individuals, in the matter of the Venezuela/Guyana border controversy and every aspect of the management and decision-making process of the state that impacts the well-being of the citizens and their representative body. To pledge allegiance, we on this side of the House, pledge to cherish and defend all 83,000 square miles and 53,347.7 square miles – our exclusive economic zone – from foes external and any who dare to think they can attack us from within. This land and its waters are ours:

“...From the Rupununi, to the Corentyne  
From the green heart forest, to the Atlantic waters,  
This land was made for you and me.”

3.29 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we stand united and all Guyanese are united on the fact that Essequibo is a territory of Guyana. We stand united and all Guyanese are united on the fact that the Arbitral Award of 1899 is the full, perfect, and final settlement of this controversy. We stand united, and all Guyanese are united on the fact that the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice is the only legitimate forum for

the clarification of this controversy. Mr. Speaker, I say Guyanese are united. As the late Linden Forbes Burnham said, on 17<sup>th</sup> July 1968 in his presentation to this House, when this House agrees unanimously, it is the voice of the majority, the overwhelming majority. The People's Progressive Party, therefore, has the duty to partner with our side of the House, our party and civil society as a whole and sincerely fight for this land, its institutions and symbols of State, the welfare of each citizen and everything under Guyana's skies. Political leaders must show the world that in this moment and in this time when issues require putting the Guyanese people first and putting the Guyanese nation first over self, we stood up and delivered. I stand and affirm the immortal words of Linden Forbes Burnham who said in this House as I previously referred to in that speech and I quote:

“We are agreed that Venezuela, notwithstanding whatever friendships they may be at the social and personal levels, is an imperialist aggressor. We are agreed on that. Our collaboration on this question is indeed an anti-imperialist exercise.”

“In the final analysis, Mr. Speaker, even if we have no friends with weapons or prepared to supply us with weapons or assist us with weapons, we the Guyanese people have faith in ourselves and come to Venezuelans to every thousand blows, we shall be prepared to deal one death blow and even if we have to die, we shall not die like hogs, but like men.”

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

#### **Attorney General (AG) and Minister of Legal Affairs**

[Mr. Nandlall:] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a Guyanese, as a Member of Parliament (MP), and as the Attorney General, it is indeed a great privilege for me to be afforded the opportunity to speak on this momentous occasion, on this motion that is of fundamental national importance that is before us today. The tone, the atmosphere and the climate that ought to have governed and have permeated the debate today has been largely fashioned and structured by the importance of the issue at hand, the responsibility and duty that we owe to this nation's state as her children and more latterly, born out of an engagement between His Excellency, the President and the Leader of the Opposition. If I read the signals correctly, we were supposed to come here and speak in one united voice for the protection of our territorial integrity and our nation's sovereignty. We had agreed by common sense and decency and a political pact. We agreed to suspend all ranker, rhetoric, and petty politics; as I have said in the main, we have observed that. Where we have

departed, where we have faltered, on behalf of the people of Guyana, I offer them our apologies.

There are two things that I want to say quickly, simply because it is wrong to leave them on the record. I do not wish to traverse what the Hon. Member who proceeded with me said on many matters, but there are two things that are simply too dangerous to leave on the public record. One is the allegation that the People's Progressive Party (PPP) Leader made certain statements that would lend to the interpretation and inference that we are seeding territorial sovereignty to Venezuela. I want to absolutely reject that contention. There is another contention that I want to traverse: that my distinguished elder, the Hon. Mdm. Gail Teixeira, in advocating in accordance with international law, the fair treatment of those who come to this land as refugees is something. When we did it, we committed some error and somehow compromised our position on this question of sovereignty. All we are doing, as articulated by the Hon. Gail Teixeira, is complying with international law. Those who lack the strategy or the intellectual depth to appreciate that if ever there is a moment in our history when we must demonstrate our compliance with international law, it is now. We cannot invoke international law in our protection or aid when we trample upon international law when the occasion presents itself. Having put those matters to rest, I will now move to the text of my presentation.

Your Honour, permit me to begin with Article 2 of our Independence *Constitution of Guyana*, emulating the path already travelled by my distinguished Colleague, the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation. That document, in Article 2, declared the territory of the State as comprising the areas that immediately before the commencement of the *Constitution of Guyana* before 26<sup>th</sup> May, 1966. Those areas of the territory that was British Guiana are now Guyana. That is the fundamental declaration from our supreme law and our most supreme legal instrument giving birth to the nation's State or Guyana. For the purpose of this debate, the boundaries of this landmass, which we know as 'Guyana,' were conclusively and lawfully carved out since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in 1905. From this manifestly settled position stretching over 100 years, how then have we arrived at this place today where Guyana faces an existential threat of conquest of nearly two-thirds of that very territory by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela? This is the issue that I want to interrogate. In so doing, permit me, Mr. Speaker because I will *run the risk* of travelling past already threaded speakers before me. I have chronicled my understanding of this historical narrative, attaching to it my own emphasis and nuances, which I

believe are important to place on the record of this Assembly. It reads:

“In the second half of the nineteenth century, a dispute regarding the location of the boundary between Venezuela and the then-British colony of British Guiana arose. The United States took Venezuela’s side in the dispute, based on its “Monroe Doctrine”, by which it opposed territorial claims by European colonial powers in the Americas. Tensions rose to such a level that the United States even threatened war against Britain, but diplomacy prevailed...”

I pause here to remind that this was the time when the United States of America Hegemony was being birthed, nurtured and engendered. It was the time of the Monroe Doctrine, the manifest destiny and Roosevelt Corollary.

“Facilitated by the United States, in 1897, Venezuela and Great Britain concluded an agreement — the Treaty of Washington — by which they agreed to submit the dispute regarding the location of the boundary to binding arbitration (“the 1899 Arbitration” or “the Arbitration”) before a tribunal of eminent jurists, including the heads of the judiciary of the United States and Great Britain.”

This entire process was consensual and Venezuela sat and participated at every step of this process.

“On 3 October 1899, the Arbitral Tribunal delivered its Award, which determined the boundary between Venezuela and British Guiana (“the 1899 Award”). The 1899 Award was the culmination of arbitral proceedings during which the respective territorial claims of Great Britain and Venezuela were addressed at great length and in detail by distinguished legal counsel representing the two States, including through many thousands of pages of written submissions and more than 200 hours of oral hearings before the Arbitral Tribunal. Under the terms of the Treaty of Washington, Great Britain and Venezuela agreed that they would “consider the result of the proceedings of the Tribunal of Arbitration as a full, perfect, and final settlement” of all matters referred to the Tribunal.”

Indeed, history has recorded that Venezuela interpreted the award as favourable to it and celebrated it as a victory, and indeed, it was. It won the Arbitral Award. In the main it got almost everything that it was asking for. The Hon. Minister

of Foreign Affairs gave the House the landmass and its comparative size to the entire Guyana, which it could secure from that Arbitral Award, and it rightly celebrated as its victory. It further states:

“For more than six decades after the 1899 Award was delivered, Venezuela treated the Award as a final settlement of the matter: it consistently recognised, affirmed and relied upon the 1899 Award...”

3.44 p.m.

Again, I quote. They kept using the terminology whenever they were persecuting the case for the Award, “... a full, perfect, and final...” determination of the boundary dispute with British Guiana. During those 60 years, they published maps, they signed international documents, and they published stamps. We have before, in our case at the ICJ, a bundle of exhibits of all of Venezuela’s national expressions embracing, recognising, affirming and reaffirming that boundary in accordance with the Arbitral Award.

“In particular, between 1900 and 1905, Venezuela participated in a joint demarcation of the boundary, in strict adherence to the letter of the 1899 Award, and emphatically refused to countenance even minor technical modifications of the boundary line described in the Award.”

They were the ones, during the demarcation of the boundary disputes with Brazil, in particular... It was the Award and the negotiations with Brazil - they were unprepared to cede an inch from the letter and spirit of that Award.

“Venezuela proceeded to formally ratify the demarcated boundary in its domestic law...”

It went to Parliament, and passed the domestic laws incorporating, as part of the *corpus* of the laws of Venezuela, the pith and substance of that Arbitral Award.

“...thereafter published official maps, which depicted the boundary following the line described in the 1899 Award. In July 1928, Venezuela concluded a boundary agreement with Brazil that expressly confirmed the tri-junction point of the boundaries of British Guiana, Venezuela and Brazil as described in the 1899 Award.”

Consequently, it means that in the laws of Brazil now, that Award is entrenched, it is recognised and it is assorted as part of the demarcation tool by which that tri-junction boundary was ascertained. So, it is not only in Venezuela’s laws, but you also have it in the laws of Brazil as well.

“For more than sixty years, Venezuela gave effect to that Award, and never raised a concern as to its validity and binding legal effects.”

Six decades of positive adherence, both at the national level and at the international level, by any act, whether under domestic law or international law, in any civilised legal system on any part of planet earth. If a party has committed an act consistently for 60 years, no legal system will allow it to reprobate from that approbated act. That is a question of principle of law, both at the international level and at the national level. That is one of the many hurdles that they have to face. They have everything they have done over the past 60 years – over that period – that they now have to undo. How they will do it, I do not know.

“As British Guiana’s independence came... in the early 1960s, however, Venezuela abruptly and drastically changed tack. After more than half a century of recognition, affirmation and reliance, Venezuela sought to repudiate the 1899 Award for the first time. On the basis of that departure from its longstanding recognition of the Award, Venezuela began to make far-reaching and aggressive claims that it was entitled to three-quarters of Guyana’s sovereign territory. In the decades since Guyana attained independence, Venezuela has continued to advance those claims, with increasing menace, and a disregard of the impact of its claims on Guyana and the wider region.

Venezuela’s words have been reinforced by aggressive actions, including unlawful occupation of Guyana’s sovereign territory, interception of vessels in Guyana’s territorial waters, and various other actions designed to interfere with and prevent economic development activities authorised by Guyana in its territory west of the Essequibo River.

Venezuela’s contention of nullity on the eve of Guyana’s independence set in train a protracted process during which Venezuela was given every opportunity to explain, investigate and substantiate the allegations underlying its new contention, including by appointing a panel of experts to review previously confidential archival materials relating to the 1899 Arbitration.”

They were given another opportunity when they made this allegation for the first time to go back to the records and review it. They hired a team of experts and came up with something of substance.

“Despite this extensive investigation, Venezuela was unable to produce any documentary evidence to support its contention that the Arbitral Tribunal or any of its members acted improperly in carrying out their mission to determine the boundary between Venezuela and British Guiana. Nevertheless, Venezuela persisted with its claim that the Award was null and void due to such alleged impropriety.

...on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1966, the Governments of the United Kingdom, Venezuela and British Guiana concluded the Geneva Agreement. This was intended to establish a binding and effective mechanism for achieving a permanent resolution of the controversy arising from Venezuela’s repudiation of the 1899 Award.”

I will come back to the Geneva Agreement because we are glossing over this Geneva Agreement.

“Under the auspices of the Geneva Agreement, a Mixed Commission was established for the purpose of “seeking satisfactory solutions for the practical settlement of the controversy” arising from Venezuela’s contention of nullity. The Mixed Commission held numerous meetings during its four-year term between 1966 and 1970 but was unable to make any progress towards the settlement of the controversy. Following a twelve-year moratorium between 1970 and 1982 and a seven-year period of consultations on a means of settlement between 1983 and 1990, the Parties then engaged in a twenty-seven-year Good Offices Process, under the authority of the United Nations Secretary-General, between 1990 and 2017, including a one-year Enhanced Mediation Process. Once again, this process yielded no significant process towards the resolution of the controversy.

Venezuela has been afforded ample time and opportunity to explain and substantiate its contentions of nullity under the various procedures established under the Geneva Agreement in the six decades since it first formally sought to question the validity of the 1899 Award. Nevertheless, it has adduced no evidence that is remotely capable of substantiating its claim that the Award was the product of coercion, collusion, fraud or some other nullifying factor. On the contrary, the evidence overwhelmingly confirms what Venezuela itself accepted for more than half a century: namely, the

1899 Award was lawful, conclusive and binding delimitation of the Parties' boundary."

I want to digress here a little to investigate with you this sudden change after 60 years by Venezuela. How did it evolve and originate?

"...on 14 December 1960..."

The United Nations General Assembly passed a Resolution No. 1514 titled: *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*.

"That historic..." Resolution "...called upon all colonial powers, *inter alia*, to respect the right of self-determination of their colonised peoples, including the right to choose independence from colonial rule. One year later, on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1961, the Premier of British Guiana, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, petitioned the Special Political and Decolonization Committee of the General Assembly... to support "the... political independence of his country". In response, the United Kingdom informed the Committee that it would soon hold a constitutional conference on the independence of British Guiana.

Within one month of Dr. Jagan's petition... on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1962, Venezuela delivered a memorandum to the United States Department of State in Washington... indicating that it would bring its complaint to the attention of..."

The UN General Assembly to delay British Guiana's independence and calling for negotiations with the United Kingdom to reach agreement on a new border with British Guiana.

"The memorandum to the U.S. Department of State took pains..."

I want you to pay careful attention now because you will see how Venezuela is shifting its case within its case.

"The memorandum to the U.S. Department of State..."

That is the memorandum from Venezuela.

"...to the U.S. Department of State took pains to make clear, however, that Venezuela 'was not questioning the legality of the Arbitral Award'..."

This is what the U.S. State Department said on the matter:

"Inasmuch as Venezuela has long cherished the aspiration of having the 1899 Arbitral Award revised, it felt obliged to put its aspirations on the record of the United Nations.

Venezuela was not questioning the legality of the Arbitral Award..."

I repeat:

"Venezuela was not questioning the legality of the Arbitral Award but felt it only just that the Award should be revised since it was handed down by a Tribunal of five judges which did not include on it any Venezuelans;"

That was their first contention. They were not challenging it legally but 60 years after they participated in the composition and constitution of the Tribunal, they come now belatedly to say that no Venezuelan was on that Tribunal. On that basis, they are objecting. As my Friend is reminding me, they nominated the people who sat on the Tribunal. I continue with the quote:

"...Venezuela believes that the two British judges and so-called neutral Russian judge had colluded in arriving at a decision to support the British claims; and only valiant action by the two US judges prevented the Award from recognising the extreme..." British claim.

This was after they won.

"For these reasons Venezuela *considers the Award to have been inequitable and questionable from a moral point of view.*"

"Despite Venezuela's assurances to the United States that it was not questioning the legality of the 1899 Award, just one month later it changed position and did just that. In a letter from its Permanent Representatives to the United Nations, Dr. Carlos Sosa Rodríguez, to the U.N. Secretary General, U Thant, dated 14 February 1962, Venezuela declared for the first time that "it cannot recognize an award" that was "the result of a political transaction"..."

"The basis for Venezuela's claim that the 1899 Award was the product of a "political compromise"..."

Arose out of:

“...a memorandum allegedly drafted on 8<sup>th</sup> February, 1944, by Venezuela’s counsel in the arbitral proceedings...”

3.59 p.m.

Now here is where the basis for where they got this belief and change of mind came from. It was from a memorandum by the lawyer who participated in the case, forty years ago, he wrote something, put it in an envelope and said that it must not be opened until after he died. It will be noted that,

“...this was some forty-five years after the Award.”

The document was only made public in 1949, a month after the death of the author. I think it was my distinguished Colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation who pointed out that it was so conveniently structured that the maker of the document could not have been questioned. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] I am learning that the original document cannot be found. This was an edict that was coming from a grave, in essence. It made the bizarre allegation that the Russian Chairman of the Tribunal, essentially conspired with British judges to give more land to Great Britain, and in exchange, Great Britain would allow Russian influence in the hemisphere. No documents were cited in support of this allegation, and no other supporting evidence, whatsoever, produced or referenced. Naturally, the British Government emphatically rejected Venezuela’s 1962 contention at the United Nation and made it abundantly clear that this matter was already settled by the Arbitral Award of 1899 and, consequently, that the frontier had already been demarcated by the Joint Boundary Commission, jointly appointed by British and Venezuelan Governments and recorded an agreement signed on 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1905.

The question that one may ask now is, if this was the settled question, if this was the settled position of Great Britain, why then did it sign another agreement in Geneva on 17<sup>th</sup> February, 1966? I want to dilate a little on that issue. The Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom (UK) at the UN, Mr. Colin Crowe – not Croal, Colin Crowe – who dealt with the matter, made it abundantly clear on repeated occasions that the British Government did not accept that there was a boundary dispute as it considered the matter conclusively and perfectly settled by the Arbitral Award. Going into the Geneva Agreement, I want to paint what I understand to be the mindset of the British Government. This is on the eve of us attaining independence. It was the British Government acting on our behalf. It is important that we understand the minds of the parties when

they were going into the Geneva Agreement. That will inform our interpretation of the language expressed. When one interprets any legal instrument, the purpose of the interpretation is to understand the intent of those who made it. I am trying to dilate a little here to explain the mindset of the gentleman who negotiated the Geneva Agreement and did the preparatory work to the signing of the Agreement. However, British Guiana was proceeding to independence and Great Britain feared that given Venezuela’s change of position, a new and independent Guyana would be vulnerable to a military seizure of its territory by a far superior Venezuelan armed forces. That was not an unreasonable and unjustifiable fear at that time. It is in those circumstances and while maintaining most resolutely, that Venezuela’s claim was entirely without merit; that Mr. Crowe made a proposal to the UN for a peaceful resolution of the controversy.

“Mr. Crowe made it clear that this was not “an offer to engage in substantive talks about revision of the frontier”, as this been settled by the Arbitral Award in 1899. Instead, he explained, the British offer was intended only “to dispel any doubts which the Venezuelan Government may still have about the validity or propriety of the arbitral award”.”

It was really to investigate the circumstances of the Award. Not the text. We have gone much further. We have submitted the entire thing to the United Nations for review. So magnanimous we have been as a nation state. In short, it is common knowledge that the Geneva Agreement outlines several processes for engagement. It is common knowledge that several of these processes were activated but yielded no success. It is in these circumstances that the Government of Guyana invoked Article 4 of the Geneva Agreement. In short, this Article prescribes that if the channels employed did not bring a resolution to the dispute, then the UN Secretary-General could recommend any of the processes laid out in Article 33 of the *Charter of the United Nations*. It is in the exercise of this power, upon the request of the Government of Guyana, that the UN Secretary-General referred the controversy to the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial arm of the United Nations, for resolution. That is where the matter remains up to now.

As a member of the United Nations and by virtue of the *Charter of the United Nations* which has the force of and is recognised as part of that corpus forming international law, Venezuela is bound by the Charter and by decisions of the United Nations. It is also bound to comply with and accept the jurisdiction of all UN organs, including the International



Court of Justice, save on very limited grounds. As an expression of sovereignty, it can refuse to submit to the jurisdiction of that Court on those limited grounds. Those grounds do not exist in this case. It is for this specific reason that the court chose to hear arguments on jurisdiction *in limine* before proceeding to deal with the merits of the case. The court was very careful. It was dealing with a sovereign state that had a right, as an expression of its sovereignty, not to submit to an international tribunal on certain stated grounds. The court allowed a hearing to take place to fully ventilate that issue before it made its ruling. This jurisdictional question was thoroughly interrogated by the court. Venezuela first refused to participate, but eventually did. In a ruling delivered in December, 2020, the court made it abundantly clear that it had jurisdiction to hear and determine the case. That concluded whatever ability Venezuela had not to subject itself to the jurisdiction of the court. Once the court makes a ruling, Venezuela is bound under international law by it.

Perhaps, Venezuela recognises that its case at the Court is hopeless. Faced with that very real prospect, and an impending general election, in an environment of great economic depression and resultant social chaos, the Maduro Administration has chosen the controversial referendum as *a silver lining in the dark clouds* hanging over that society. In the meanwhile, Guyana continues resolutely upon its reliance on international law and the process engaged at the International Court of Justice. Additionally, we have been able to secure from some of the most powerful voices in this hemisphere, expressions of support and solidarity. These have come from the United States (US), the United Kingdom, the Caribbean Community, the Commonwealth of Nations, the Organization of American States (OAS), the European Union (EU), Brazil, *et cetera*. I just returned from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the largest assembly of parliaments in the world. The Speaker and the Clerk of the National Assembly were also there, as well as my sister, Dawn Hastings-Williams. We received expressions of support from dozens of parliaments across the globe. I take this opportunity on behalf of the Government and people of Guyana, to offer our most profound gratitude to all these organisations and the many people across the globe who have stood with us in this moment of tribulation. I wish to offer them also, our warmest congratulations for standing on the side of the rule of law, diplomacy, justice, and peace.

It is now common knowledge that Guyana has approached the International Court for certain interim measures. Anyone familiar with the curial process would know that a party in a litigation has a right to seek appropriate legal remedies,

interlocutory, if the other party in the litigation is taking steps that can defeat, compromise or render nugatory, the legal proceedings itself, and/or, its final outcome. At the same time, every court has a duty to protect the integrity of its process and proceedings before it. In short, it has an inherent and unmitigated duty to prevent its process from abuse. Guyana is of the considered view that the impending referendum slated for 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2023, is intended to and will compromise the legal proceedings pending at the International Court of Justice, if not to subvert the legal process all together and prejudice its outcome. That is why we are approaching that court. I have elucidated the historical evolution of this controversy in such detail with the hope that every citizen of Guyana here and abroad can acquaint themselves with the material facts and become fully engaged on the developments surrounding this controversy. As a Government, we hope the National Assembly, without its usual rancour, but speaking in unison with one voice, will send that clear and present signal that this is not an issue upon which we are or can be divided but one on which we are unconditionally united. The existential nature of the threat at hand leaves us with no alternative. Similarly, we expect deepening engagements among all national stakeholders on this matter of fundamental national importance. What is at stake here is our nation's sovereignty. By Article 9 of our Constitution, it declares that:

“Sovereignty belongs to the people...”

It therefore means that we, the people of Guyana, are at stake and so is our country. In our short history as a nation state, if there was ever a time to transform the words of our national pledge, our national anthem, and our national songs into action, that time is now. That commitment which we make every time we sing our national anthem must reverberate into actions across this land. I quote:

“Dear Land of Guyana, to you will we give  
Our homage, our service each day that we live;  
God guard you, great Mother, and make us to be  
More worthy our heritage – land of the free.”

Before I conclude, I must issue a cautionary admonition to all our citizens. Be careful with what you say and do, particularly on social media. Irresponsible publication will only increase existing tensions. While we must stand strong in the expression of our patriotism, we must not commit acts which can be viewed as provocative. Neither must we illtreat our Venezuelan brothers and sisters among us. In the main, they are here simply to pursue a better life. I end with a quote from our national poet, Mr. Martin Carter, who said:

“...all are involved!  
all are consumed!”

I support absolutely and fully, the motion that is on the floor.  
Thank you very much. [Applause]

4.14 p.m.

**Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]:** Mr. Speaker, I stand on all protocols previously observed. I stand before you today to address a critical matter of concern facing our country, a matter that threatens our sovereignty as a nation and which has plagued our history for more than a century, as you would have heard before from the previous speakers - the continued unlawful and baseless claim by Venezuela to more than 2/3 of Guyana's national territory, a claim that goes directly against the 1899 Arbitral Award between British Guyana and Venezuela.

Mr. Speaker, I submit to you at the start of my discourse this afternoon, that Essequibo belongs to Guyana. I would like to say it in Spanish so that President Nicholas Maduro, known as *compañero* Maduro, understands me clearly - “*Esequibo pertenece a Guyana, Esequibo pertenece a Guyana, Esequibo pertenece a Guyana*” loud and clear to *compañero* Maduro. Venezuela's appeals to peace and international law are those of an aggressor with evil intent. They are not real. I wish at this stage to compliment our Foreign Service Officers and our officers and ranks of the Guyana Defence Force and the Guyana Police Force for keeping us secure as a nation, in the observance that diplomacy being our first line of defence. They have acquitted themselves well and we can stand here today and say Essequibo belongs to Guyana because of the work of our Foreign Service Officers, because of the work of our Guyana Police Force and the Guyana Defence Force, in securing our borders and defining aggression 24/7 for us. Twenty-five hundred years ago, the historian and military-general, Thucydides, writing on the Peloponnesian war said, and I quote:

“Right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must”.

Today, in 2023, that does not apply because we have the United Nations, to which all states, over 200 states that is, belong to and which is supposed to mediate relations between and among them in the spirit of multilateralism. As we all know, the story of this controversy is long and arduous. Still, despite Guyana's consistent attempts to cooperate and act with diplomacy and integrity as a nation and follow international standards with regards to settling

this controversy, the continued attempts by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to disrupt our territorial sovereignty and threaten the peace and stability of our region, must be addressed steadfastly. To be clear, I wish to emphatically condemn the unwarranted and unjust claims by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on our sovereign territory. The international community has rallied behind us, recognising the injustice we face, and we call upon all nations to support our cause. However, Mr. Speaker, I pause to caution, today we are sending a message of unity in the face of a *clear and present danger* from the Nicholas Maduro Government of Venezuela. We must guard against simultaneously politicising this topic for political gains which are deemed selfish. If Guyanese are not mobilised around this issue, it becomes a lost cause. Our nation has a long and storied history that predates any territorial controversy – any territorial dispute. Our history is lined with the origins of our Indigenous people who have inhabited our lands for generations and the subsequent arrivals of the Africans, Indians, Chinese, Portuguese and Europeans, as a result of the Atlantic Slave Trade.

Our sovereignty over this territory means everything to our people whose ancestors made Guyana their home. Our position is non-negotiable, and it is a fundamental right that all nations must respect. I reiterate that the claims made by Venezuela are baseless and a blatant disruption of our territorial integrity. Our people and our Government have endured threats and aggression for far too long. Venezuela has shown inconsistency, as you would have heard from several speakers before, in its commitment to following the 1899 Arbitral Award, which determined the boundary between Venezuela and British Guiana, though having treated the award as a final settlement for more than six decades. Then, in 1944 Venezuela invoked a secret memorandum purportedly authored by Severo Mallet-Prevost, a junior member of Venezuela's legal team, at the 1899 Arbitral Award and has since made continued actions to question the award despite its initial acceptance. Guyana's willingness to cooperate was evident in the Geneva Agreement, between British Guiana and Venezuela and I quote:

“to resolve the controversy between Venezuela and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, over the frontier between Venezuela and British Guiana”.

Our cooperation was further evident in the Good Offices process of 1990 and 2017, as you heard before, which was conducted by the United Nations Secretary-General to find a

solution to the matter. In 2018, the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres determined that the Good Offices process did not resolve the territorial dispute between Guyana and Venezuela. Thus, Venezuela's determination to uphold conflict, persists. When the UN Secretary-General referred the matter to the International Court of Justice to determine the validity of the claims, Guyana dutifully filed a request with the ICJ in that regard. Venezuela's claim at that time was that Secretary-General Guterres had exceeded his authority, the same authority that has been relied upon and trusted for 27 years during the Good Offices process and, further, Venezuela refused to recognise the ICJ's jurisdiction. Guyana continued to follow the rule of law and invoked Article 53 of the ICJ statute, allowing the court to rule in their favour, if only one party failed to participate. In December, 2020, the court established its jurisdiction on the case. It set deadlines for the submission of legal documents by both parties. In June, 2022, Venezuela raised the preliminary objection to the admissibility of Guyana's claims, leading to a suspension of the proceedings.

Guyana responded in July, 2022, and oral arguments were heard in November, 2022. On 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2023, the court issued a final judgement, ruling that Venezuela's preliminary objection was inadmissible, rejecting it by a majority vote and allowing the court to proceed with the merits of Guyana's claims within specific parameters. The court also set a deadline for Venezuela to submit its counter Memorial by 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2024. Recognising the increased aggression by Venezuela, Guyana received resounding international support on this matter, including from the United States of America. We are well aware that in this current time, much of Venezuela's contention stems from Guyana's growing oil and gas industry, following the worldclass oil discovery in Guyana's territorial waters. Venezuela's claims include the waters off the Essequibo Coast, where much of those oil discoveries exists. In its most recent development, Venezuela's unlawful persistence is seen in the unanimous approval by Venezuela's National Assembly for a national referendum slated for 3<sup>rd</sup> December, with a list of five questions that it intends to put before the people of Venezuela to support its claim over our territory.

Continuing along the lawful and respectful path, Guyana in October, filed a request with the ICJ for an intervention against this action, as it sought to support... Venezuela's intention to continue to bypass international law. Guyana is thankful for the ICJs intervention through a public hearing, slated for 14<sup>th</sup> November. We want to emphasise that Venezuela's refusal to accept the 1899 Award and its on-going hostile actions and insistence of acting in opposition to

the word 'provisions', erode the fundamental principles of international law. Upholding these principles is crucial for preserving global peace, security and stability. The stubborn and malicious persistence of Venezuela towards Guyana's territory has seen the international community, represented by numerous nations around the world, voicing their unequivocal support for our cause.

4.29 p.m.

In a statement made in September, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) voiced deep concerns regarding Venezuela's threat to use force against Guyana's licensed operations in its waters, describing it as a violation of international law and at odds with the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) Region's commitment to maintaining our Region as a zone of peace. The CARICOM also expressed its concerns over Venezuela's plan for a referendum on its territorial claim and expressed optimism that Venezuela would engage fully in the ICJ's process. The CARICOM reiterated its steadfast support for Guyana's sovereignty, territorial integrity and legitimate right to develop its resources peacefully. The Commonwealth expressed its solidarity with Guyana and CARICOM, affirming concerns about the upcoming referendum. The Commonwealth, in its statement, also strongly emphasised its support for the rule of law and Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The five referendum questions, particularly question five which suggests the creation of a Venezuelan state in the Guyana/Essequibo region, are viewed as violations of international law leading to heightened tensions and jeopardising regional peace. The Commonwealth also reiterated its endorsement of the ICJ's legal process and encouraged Venezuela's participation as the referendum goes against the principles of peaceful conflict resolution.

In a recent address at an Extraordinary Special Session of the Permanent Council within the Organization of American States (OAS), I took the opportunity presented to me to, once again, emphasise the direct threat that Venezuela's claim poses to Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity. During that event, Guyana received strong backing, including a clear reaffirmation, from the OAS Secretary-General, Mr. Luis Almagro, in favour of a peaceful resolution to the dispute in alignment with international law – a commitment that Guyana has consistently upheld. Additionally, Member States of CARICOM, the United Nations (UN) and our neighbouring country, Brazil, reiterated their support and called for a peaceful resolution of this issue. Support was also provided by the European Union's (EU) Ambassador to Guyana, who also expressed

confidence in the ICJ's authority in settling this matter and urged parties to avoid unilateral actions that could escalate the situation. We deeply appreciate the solidarity and understanding demonstrated by these and other international bodies and their unwavering confidence in pursuing a lawful and peaceful path along with the recognition of the ICJ's jurisdiction. It is a clear endorsement of the shared values of justice, fairness and the rule of law that unite us all. As a Government and a nation, we remain steadfast in upholding the sanctity of sovereign borders and the principles governing international relations.

We call upon the international community to continue their support for our just cause. We urge all nations to recognise that this issue transcends a bilateral dispute. It is about upholding the international legal order and the principles that bind us. It is about ensuring that justice triumphs over aggression and intimidation. The ICJ, as an impartial and reputable institution, is well equipped to objectively assess the situation and ensure a fair resolution. We maintain our trust in the rule of law and have confidence that the ICJ will uphold the principles of justice and respect for sovereignty. Our Government's stance on this issue is unequivocal. As articulated in an official statement from our Administration, Venezuela's actions represent a blatant violation of the fundamental principles outlined in the Charter of the UN, the Charter of the OAS and general international law. The seizure of Guyana's territory, if allowed, will amount to the grave international crime of aggression. It is essential to understand that neither a government nor its people, under international law, possess the authority to cease, annex or encroach upon the territory of another nation. International law strongly prohibits such actions. Guyana formally rejects Venezuela's persistent attempts to undermine the sovereignty and integrity of our nation.

Further, I wish to unwaveringly support His Excellency the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali's, consistent stance on this matter over the past weeks. While we view Venezuela's decision to hold a referendum as a violation of international legal norms, we remain steadfast in our commitment to a peaceful approach to resolving this issue. We maintain our trust in the ICJ, believing that its judgement will align with international law. Most importantly, as a nation and a people, we stand resolute in defending our country's sovereignty and territorial integrity while respecting boundaries and our neighbouring nations. We formally reject any attempts to disrupt peace and, as His Excellency emphasised, we will continue to advocate for the cause of international law to achieve a peaceful resolution. I want to underscore another significant aspect of the collateral

damage caused by this issue – its impact on the people. This controversy has given rise to conflicting ideologies among generations in both countries. In Guyana, our education teaches us that the entire 214,970 square kilometres marked on our map belong to us, and quite rightly so. While in Venezuela, its narrative insists that it rightfully claims nearly 160 square kilometres, comprising more than two-thirds of Guyana's territory. We are witnessing decades of division among our people resulting in social fragmentation stemming from contradictory narratives. This, in turn, has had adverse effects on economic development and investment between our neighbouring nations. It is a conflict that incites geopolitical tension that can affect regional stability and international relations.

The endurance of this controversy has been excessive, and Venezuela's unrelenting pursuit of unfounded territorial claims not only insults our nation but also undermines the cherished principles of justice and sovereignty held by the international community. Guyana vehemently denounces Venezuela's actions with the utmost strength and urges the global community to stand by us as we pursue a peaceful and equitable resolution through the International Court of Justice. There must be no "Bolivarian diplomacy of peace" in our diplomatic language with Venezuela. There must be no resumed legal behaviour between us and Venezuela. President Ali would not have to sit down to negotiate with Venezuela, according to Delcy Rodriguez, whether we want it or not. That will not happen. The matter is before the International Court of Justice. The time for negotiation is over. There would be no need for any dialogue with *compañero* Nicolas Maduro. There will be no meeting, not now, between *compañero* Maduro and President Irfaan Ali. Essequibo is no bird island, no concessions through bilateral, no to invasion, no to annexation and other acts of aggression. Let the ICJ rule. Let the ICJ be the judge and deliver a final judgement on this controversy that has outlived its usefulness to both the peoples of Venezuela and Guyana.

Guyana remains a democracy and if Venezuela is a democracy, then *compañero* Nicolas Maduro must face his electorate and defend his Government's successes in righting the social economic conditions that led to over seven million Venezuelans seeking betterment by running out of Venezuela to every other South American country. *Compañero* Maduro must not be allowed, by the international and regional communities, to use Guyana's Essequibo as a rallying point or as a clarion call for his re-election in 2024. Essequibo belongs to Guyana and Guyanese only. Together, we will secure the triumph of justice and preserve our nation's sovereignty. This is a whole

of Government approach, in fact, a whole of country approach as we once and for all defend our territorial integrity and national sovereignty. Thank you. May the cause of justice and peace prevail. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I think every one of us would want to hear all of the presentations in their entirety so let us take a short 10-minute break and come back with the Leader of the Opposition.

4.44 p.m.

*Sitting Suspended at 4.44 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 5.21 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you. Please be seated. Now for the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Member, Mr. Aubrey Norton.

**Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Norton]:** Mr. Speaker and Members of this august body, permit me, at the outset, to thank and congratulate all the Members of the Opposition for their contributions. It would be remiss of me if I do not do the same thing for the Government and so I do. When this recent crisis with Venezuela began, I got a call from the President for a briefing on the issue. I said to him, at the time, that he could be reassured that the Opposition will support the Government on this issue of the Guyana/Venezuela territorial controversy.

Politically, we have fought for years but one reality that we should be proud of is that throughout the history of our country, we have always been united on the Guyana/Venezuela territorial controversy. For us to even consider fighting over political power, we must first own our country. There will be nothing to fight for if we are not united in defence of our sovereignty and territorial integrity. I rise in support of the motion before the House today, confident that I am uniquely qualified to do so. Firstly, I am a proud Guyanese who believes that every square inch of this country belongs to the people of Guyana. Mr. Speaker, our ancestors, those who were here before Columbus, those who came from Europe, Africa and India, fought hard in difficult circumstances to create a human landscape which allowed us, over more than 350 years, to make Guyana what it is today.

Secondly, I have also been a member of the Guyana Foreign Service and have been able to witness, first-hand, the constant aggression of Venezuela and how the instructions of the Ministry and the rest of the Government fashion our response at various times. But Mr. Speaker, we inherited this

land, it is our inheritance, and we will do everything to protect that inheritance. Despite our difficulties, our differences, political and otherwise, we have fashioned a society that is politically dynamic, culturally rich and with great economic potential. I can see that creating this country and society has not been an easy task. The Africans, according to our great history, later joined by our Indian brothers, moved tons of soil to build our coastland and where most of our people live, work and struggle to fashion a place where our people could live and create the environment for meaningful human existence. All of our people contributed to the creation of an emerging society which saw the development of professionals, artists, cricketers, writers, dynamic entrepreneurs, celebrated scholars and a people who have a reputation of being intellectually gifted. I do believe we have the intellectual capacity to take on Venezuela. All our people must benefit from our national patrimony. That is our reality. As we develop, our people yearn for the freedom to build our own society and create our own destiny.

As a people, it is not by accident our motto is *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*. It is a manifestation of our aspirations and therefore we are obligated to work to bring it to fruition. Many contributed to this great experiment, including our own Mr. Forbes Burnham and Dr. Cheddi Jagan, both of whom were distinguished Members of this House. Political freedom eventually came in 1966. Even though it is hard to accept, that freedom was qualified by threats to our territorial integrity and sovereignty by our neighbours. I think that of all the colonial territories which have gained independence, none has reached that milestone with neighbouring countries making substantial claims to its national patrimony. Unfortunately, Guyana finds itself in that position. As we all know, both Suriname and Venezuela cast covetous eyes on our land. In other words, the hard work that we as a people had put into the creation of a country and society was going to be taken away from us. We must never permit that. That will not happen. Of the two claims to our land, by far, the most sinister and persistent comes from our neighbours to the west, Venezuela. I am sure that this honourable House will bear with me as I briefly recount the background to this threat to our territorial integrity. Might I say, we must not tire of learning about this threat. Our children need to know; our people need to know.

The background history must become our catechism. We must understand and inwardly digest the fact that all we have achieved, indeed our way of life, is threatened by the persistent greed of our western neighbour, Venezuela. This is a threat like no other. Venezuela seeks our entire Essequibo region, our richest county. Let me quote one of

our former diplomats, Dr. Ishmel, the author of *The Trail of Diplomacy*. He said the following in the second volume of his book:

“The part of Guyana claimed by Venezuela – is extremely rich in forest, water, and mineral resources. For instance, the Imataka mountain range, extending into both Guyana and Venezuela, has huge deposits of iron ore. In addition, manganese deposits are located in the North West District of Guyana, while gold and diamonds, among other minerals, are found in the Barima, Mazaruni, Cuyuni, and Potaro districts.

In addition, we know that we have oil because oil has been found by ExxonMobil and other major oil companies. Guyana cannot afford to lose this treasure. Recent discovery and production of oil have resulted in an intensification of Venezuela’s greed.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to turn to the background of what we now refer to as the territorial controversy. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, stood the mighty British Empire and the emergent United States of America (USA). The latter’s economic development was so rapid that it overtook the economic strength of the former by the turn of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. And like any state which was becoming powerful, it wanted to set rules for the area in which it would dominate. In 1823, therefore, the American Government promulgated the Monroe Doctrine. This doctrine said, essentially, that no European power would be allowed to dominate the American continent. This worked in Venezuela’s favour just after it had won its independence from Spain. Venezuela found itself in contest with the British Empire over the frontier with the British colony of British Guiana. The British Government, therefore, sent one of its explorers to determine the boundary between its colony and the Republic of Venezuela. The explorer was a man called Mr Schomburgk. He demarcated the border line between the Republic of Venezuela and British Guiana in 1840. The Venezuelans were not satisfied with this boundary, especially after there was a suggestion that gold was found in the area between itself and British Guiana.

Even at this time, greed demanded urgency. The Venezuelans appealed to the Americans to compel the British to open discussions on the boundary between itself and the British empire. I want it to sink in that was Venezuela that engaged the Americans and then it happened. Please pay close attention to what happened here because Caracas, in the later years, would claim, erroneously, that it

was not represented on the 1899 Arbitral Tribunal when it asked American lawyers to do its representation. Indeed, it can be said that throughout the demanding and challenging period of the controversy between Guyana and Venezuela, there was a slew of mistruths on the part of Caracas from the dismissal of the significance of the 1899 Arbitral Award to the true historical meaning of the 1966 Geneva Agreement. It has also sent up a cloud of misinformation when it is caught violating our territorial integrity. In the words of a British statesman, the representatives of the Republic of Venezuela often were economical with the truth. I take up, once again, the thread of my presentation by stating that, in the face of credible threats from the United States of America and the reality that the United States of America had appointed a commission to demarcate the border between British Guiana and Venezuela, the British agreed to the Treaty of Washington of 1897. This treaty is important for many reasons, but its enduring significance must be that in creating the 1899 Arbitral Tribunal, it stated explicitly that the decision of the tribunal will represent:

“...full, perfect, and final settlement of all the questions referred to the Arbitrators.”

The Venezuelan Government of the time signed on to this agreement and that must be established. A subsequent Venezuelan Government also agreed to the demarcation of the border between British Guiana by participating in the established Boundary Commission in 1905. To this end, Mr. Mr. Cedric Joseph noted in his book, *Anglo American Diplomacy and the Reopening of the Guyana-Venezuelan Boundary Controversy 1961-1966* that:

5.36 p.m.

“The implementation of the award by the two parties, Britain and Venezuela, followed without any undue delay. From late 1900 to early 1905, an Anglo Venezuelan Boundary Commission marked on the ground the boundary defined by the arbitral award. The joint Commission identified the geographical positions of twenty-five boundary markers.”

Caracas repudiates the 1899 Arbitral Award and the legitimacy of the border between the two countries without any justification. This is a matter of significance in the relations between our two countries. This refusal to honour the agreement solemnly arrived at must warrant both study and condemnation. Let me say a few words about this very disturbing behaviour about an important state in the Latin America and Caribbean Region. This refusal to honour agreements is likely to pose a serious threat to the peace and

stability of the Latin America and Caribbean Region. As a student of politics and international relations, I have been intrigued by Venezuela's almost casual disregard for international agreements as far as Guyana is concerned. I have therefore examined Venezuela's behaviour over the decades, and I have come to the conclusion that its flouting of international norms and mores is the mechanism to facilitate its geopolitical ambitions. That Caracas has strategic ambitions in the Caribbean is beyond dispute. As early as 1955, it had proposed that certain Caribbean states should be handed over to it. Sometimes we forget that Venezuela said very early that certain Caribbean states should be handed over.

In the Mixed Commission, created by the 1966 Geneva Agreement, Venezuela proposed the joint development of the Essequibo. Is our population aware of this and its significance? Are some of our politicians aware of this? We cannot concede an inch to Venezuela. It has always come up with some backdoor means to get at our territory. We must see Venezuela as an adversary that wants our territory. We must remember that Venezuela always comes up with some scheme to get our territory. We have to be ever vigilant. It is in this context that I want to say to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation that he closed by suggesting that the ruling of the ICJ will end Venezuela's aggression. I want to caution that if one follows the history of Venezuela, that is not likely possible. In fact, if one looks at what is happening, one sees that Venezuela is preparing the pitch to be able to say that it is not accepting it. So, we have to now look at the options. We have to be careful not to create a false mood that, once the ruling comes, Venezuelan aggression will end. I just think it might take different forms. We cannot concede an inch to Venezuela. I repeat, we must see Venezuela as an adversary that wants our territory. We must remember that Venezuela always comes up with some scheme. I pause here to tell you what the late Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and one of the world's greatest historians said in addressing the General Council of his party in 1976. Dr. Eric Williams said:

“This is an official proposal of the Government of Venezuela for the joint development of the disputed region which constituted in effect a total economic and cultural take-over of the disputed zone,”

Trinidad. Mr Burnham, the late leader of our party and also a man of strategic insight, said in the Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) held in Jamaica in 1982, that the threat to Guyana represented a threat to the entire Caribbean

Community. I believe this is a message we must carry to the Caribbean Community. He went on to say that if Guyana loses five-eighths of its territory, CARICOM will be greatly diminished. Lastly, in this context, we keep at the front of our minds that Venezuela has already taken over Bird Island, which was once owned by Dominica, and has made inroads into the eastern Caribbean states through the mechanism of PetroCaribe. An economic largesse had made inroads into our support among these states. It is in this context I want to recommend to this House that the Government should develop a proper system of sending envoys to engage these Caribbean leaders so that outside of the general CARICOM support, we can regain and maintain the support of the individual countries. It is critical.

Only recently, a Caribbean politician called on Guyana and Venezuela to ensure that the Caribbean remained a zone of peace. I could not believe that. Honestly, I cannot accept that a Caribbean sister state will cast us in that kind of light. They having said that, are we to conclude that Guyana has threatened the territorial integrity and sovereignty of any state in the Caribbean? We never did. Have we issued decrees to take over another state's maritime space? We never did. Have we rejected the decisions of any international tribunal? We never did. It was Venezuela that did. Therefore, to say Guyana and Venezuela must ensure a zone of peace is classic *eye pass* because we have always maintained that there must be the peaceful resolution of this matter. It is really disturbing.... [An. Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] I did not call name. It is really disturbing that a Caribbean nation can say that and implicate Guyana when Guyana basically lacks the means militarily to even conceptualise that approach, much less implement it. So, I think it is necessary that the Opposition put on record that we disagree totally with that position. I think I have made the point that we are dealing with a dangerous and sinister enemy in the form of the Venezuelan state. We will have to take measures not only to defend our territorial integrity and sovereignty, but also our place in Latin America and Caribbean Region. We need to hurtle to take action to do that. Clearly, there is a need for a more robust and aggressive foreign policy, *vis-à-vis*, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Mr. Speaker, I hope I have belaboured the point that when states such as Venezuela do not fully honour agreements, in time tension ensues. So, if there is any tension in this part of the world, it has been created by the aggressiveness of Venezuela. I cannot leave this part of my presentation without observing that Venezuela has proved to be nothing but a regional bully. I say that and will qualify it – a regional bully of small states. The 1899 Arbitral Award was the basis

of the trijunction point which fixed the boundaries for Guyana, Venezuela, and Brazil. In this exercise, Caracas lost territory to Brazil. I repeat that. In this exercise, Caracas lost territory to Brazil but has never once contested the legitimacy of the award with Brasilia. That says to you that it is not only a regional bully, but it is also specifically targeting small states such as Guyana. Yet, it has done so with the smallest state of Guyana. It reminds me of one of the Melina's Dialogues from the Fifth Century where the great historian Thucydides made the Greeks say during the Peninsular War – tell the lowly millennials that the powerful have the right to rule the weakest state. We say no. We say that our western neighbour is mistaken in the belief that Guyanese will succumb to its bullyism and attempts to take over our land and riches. We will not. We will never.

I want to speak to the recapitalisation of the Guyana Defence Force (GDF). We have always been a weak state. I do not think that we can take on Venezuela. It is very important that we keep a ready force that instils hope in our people. I remember in the 1970s we boasted of how we were better than them in jungle warfare. Let us not operate as if we can do nothing outside of diplomacy. We have to take every measure to deal with this issue. After having accepted the 1899 Arbitral Award and the legitimacy of the frontier between Guyana and itself, Venezuela suddenly decided in 1962 to overthrow it based on the infamous Mallet-Prevost memorandum. Venezuela made its claim at the United Nations (UN). We must pay careful attention. Venezuela made its claim to the UN. The British government, to allow the principle of justice to prevail, agreed to a re-examination of the document in relation to the territorial controversy for Caracas to have the opportunity to prove the nullity of the 1899 Arbitral Award. I want us to understand what is happening here. Venezuela went to the UN and the UN indicated that they must be able to prove it. Of course, you know, it never did and would never, ever be able to.

However, the British Government, in making this concession to reexamine the documents, said clearly that it was standing by the validity of that Arbitral Award. What that means is that our border with Venezuela was settled by the Arbitral Award of 1899 and there is no border dispute. There is no border dispute and a controversy emerged based on the Mallet-Prevost spurious claim that there was a deal that caused Venezuela to lose territory. It is very important for us to understand that. That is why I feel offended when I hear people talking about Guyana/Venezuela border problem and border dispute. There is not dispute over a border; it was settled. There is a controversy that emerged over the Mallet-Prevost claim. Until this day, nothing has been proven. Mr.

Speaker, it is useful to note here the language used in Article 1 of the Geneva Agreement:

“A Mixed Commission shall be established with the task of seeking satisfactory solutions for the practical settlement of the controversy...”

There is no border dispute. It states:

“...of the controversy between Venezuela and the United Kingdom which has arisen as the result of the ... contention that the Arbitral Award of 1899 about the frontier between British Guiana and Venezuela is null and void.”

5.51 p.m.

I think we need to let all our children know that we do not have a border dispute with Venezuela. Our borders were settled and, in the interest of justice, the British agreed that the United Nations (UN) reopen it for the facts to be produced. The examination of the documents led to the meetings in Geneva between the representatives of British Guiana, the representative of the British government and the representative of Venezuela. They met for a two-day conference on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> February, 1966. The Geneva Agreement consists of eight articles. The most important of which can be said to be article 4(2) which gives the United Nations Secretary-General the right to choose a means of settlement. Also, it created the mixed commission, which met for four years until 1970. Here again, the conduct of Caracas at this period was one in extremely bad taste. We see Venezuela talking about the settlement should come from the Geneva Agreement. We should be saying to Venezuela that we are at the International Court of Justice and it is as a result of the Geneva Agreement.

The mixed commission gave the Venezuelan government the opportunity to prove the nullity of the 1899 Award. It never did and it cannot. Instead, it made claims to the Essequibo and proposed its joint development. Venezuela did more than this, it displayed naked aggression even as the commission met by seizing the eastern half of Ankoko Island which belongs to Guyana and fostered the Rupununi Rebellion of 1969. This created great difficulties for the newly independent Guyana; but I say to you, in every negative, there is always a positive. Venezuela's aggression steeled this nation and made us more hardened and more experienced to take on the challenges of national development and skillful at holding the available diplomatic and national security instruments for the survival of this nation. This opportunity is taken to record our appreciation



of all those who played a role in laying the foundation and developing a diplomatic and national security framework to protect our interest and our sovereignty.

Mr. Speaker, too regularly we do not put in our records many of the people who contributed. We have heard about the late Mr. Burnham, we have heard of Dr. Jagan; all of them have contributed. I want to say special thanks to these people: Sir Shridath Ramphal, Mr. Frederick Wills, Mr. Hamilton Green, Mr. Rashleigh Jackson, former President David Granger who contributed both as a diplomat and a soldier, Mr. Carl Greenidge, Mr. Clement Rohee, Dr. Barton Scotland, Messers 'Ralph' and 'Boysie' Ramkaran, Mr. Lloyd Searwar, Mr. Winston Murray, Dr. Rudy Insanally, Mr. Ronald Austin (Snr), Dr. Rudy Collins, Dr. Tyrone Ferguson, and the one who probably would have written the most, Mr. Cedric Joseph. I mentioned Dr. Odeen Ishmael's book already or else I would have to go back and mention the late Mr. Burnham and the late Dr. Jagan again. The terms of the mixed commission ended in 1970. Fortunately, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Eric Williams, used his good office to broker the protocol of Port of Spain which froze the border controversy for 12 years. This deserves our appreciation and commendation since it was the European and American statesmen who fashioned agreements to resolve our problems and dispute. Therefore, it was the first time that we did it ourselves, in the Caribbean, when Dr. Eric Williams led it. The protocol was ratified by the Venezuelan congress, but the relation with our western neighbour was never peaceful.

On his visit to Guyana in 1978, President Carlos Andrés Pérez proposed a symbolic secession of territory, Venezuela to Venezuela, but this was firmly rejected by Guyana under President Forbes Burnham. This must be a lesson to those modern-day politicians who are transactionalists and seem not to appreciate that we must not cede one inch of what belongs to us. The decade of the 70s was to prove more pacific than that of the 80s. President Burnham was invited to Venezuela on a state visit and, at the end of it, President Luis *Herrera Campins*, who had been a member of the mixed commission, bluntly refused to renew the Protocol of Port of Spain. This unleashed Venezuelan economic, military and diplomatic aggression against Guyana which was summarised in the Budget Presentation by the then Minister of Finance, Frank Hope, to the National Assembly in which he stated:

“The Venezuelan Government has not only intensified its economic pressures against us in pursuit of its spurious claim to our land, but it has

also been indulging in dangerous adventurism in violating our airspace and our territorial integrity. During the past year there were over eighty violations of our airspace by Venezuelan aircraft. Their aircraft have penetrated as far as Timehri as they try desperately to gather intelligence about our preparedness and our capability to defend our country.”

He continued:

“Their military personnel have from time to time violated our borders and actually entered upon our soil. They have been engaged in a flurry of military maneuvers and activities contiguous with our borders. The squandering of oil money on such activities cannot covert a baseless and immoral claim to a legitimate and just one, but it puts a heavy burden upon our resources and diverts from our developmental purpose. Countering the Venezuelan threat has an absolute priority claim to our time, energy and our resources.”

It must also be a priority today. I have quoted Mr. Frank Hope at length. I do not take a delight in making quotations, but he struck on themes which are relevant to us today such as economic aggression, the threat to our developmental purposes and the need to harness our collective energies to oppose Venezuela – a theme to which I soon return after I conclude the narrative. The story of the adoption of the ‘good officer process’ must be told. After the protocol came to an end, a new mechanism had to be found to replace it. The UN played an active role. When the UN Secretary-General dispatched personal representatives in the person of Mr. Diego Cordovez and Mr. Morales Paúl to determine what the next step would be in the territorial controversy, in this exercise, they were aided by the brilliant written and oral intervention of Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Mr. Rashleigh Jackson, Attorney General, Mr. Mohamed Shahabuddeen, who often acted as the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Ambassador Noel Sinclair and the strategic direction of President Burnham. As a result, Guyana and Venezuela agreed to the ‘good officer process’; yet, even as this unfolded, Venezuela still tried, through such concept as globality and an environmental treaty, to get its hands on the Essequibo. It continued to issue threats to investors, which began in 1966, continued with its opposition to the Upper Mazaruni Hydroelectric Scheme and continues to this day.

Economic aggression has become an art form and Caracas has squashed such ventures as the ‘Beal deal’ and aggressively opposed the sale of oil blocks and threatened oil companies that are illegitimately exploiting our petroleum resources in our maritime space. As Mr. Hope had warned, we will have to devote our energies towards defending our nation and preventing a disruption of our developmental process. I believe all of those are valid today. It was recognised that after approximately 26 years, despite the excellent efforts of the good officers and the facilitators and the enhanced ‘good officer process’, no solution has been found to the territorial controversy which has been a *bugbear* to our national development. In this circumstance, there was no other sensible option than to request the United Nations Secretary-General to refer the matter to the International Court of Justice. The Nation knows that the UN Secretary-General acceded to this request and the matter is now before the world court.

Mr. Speaker, I said before that Venezuela does not honour international agreements solemnly arrived at. I add to this its disregard for international institutions; it has now added the ICJ to that. Having agreed to the referral of the territorial controversy to the ICJ, it embarked on its obstructive tactics. At first, it signalled its intention not to be involved in the judicial process, then it claimed that the ICJ had no jurisdiction to hear the case involving the validity of the 1899 Award. The ICJ did rule on the 18<sup>th</sup> December, 2022, that it has such jurisdiction. In a quandary, Caracas then filed a preliminary objection to the ICJ proceeding to deal with the merits of the case. Success did not attend those efforts either.

We have arrived at the point where Venezuela, through the device of a referendum, is seeking to make a naked attempt to annex the Essequibo. This is a dangerous moment in our history. We must be united in the face of this new phase of aggression. I do not think this will be an aggression as in the past. President Maduro is in the coils of sharp economic problems, which has led to the exodus of thousands of citizens, and thus, the decline of its economy and his popularity in Venezuela. The referendum, and the mobilising of troops on our border by the Maduro Administration, is an attempt to regain popularity and appease a volatile people and end apparent erosion among his political bases. This is a dangerous game. What happens if President Maduro gets the ‘yes vote’ which he and his top officials are campaigning for? What does he do before or after he wins the election next year? He might decide to take direct military action using a potential fifth-column in our midst. Whatever happens in this neighbouring state, we must be prepared.

This opportunity must be taken to condemn the attempt by Venezuela to withdraw from the judicial process under the guise of a referendum. The peaceful settlement of the controversy demands that Venezuela adhere to international law and morals. Permit me to also register our support for the decision to approach the ICJ for provisional measures against the convening of that sinister referendum. I should inform the House that the President did engage me, and I quietly gave him a written document supporting these measures. We now publicly support it here.

6.06 p.m.

A central theme in the narrative I just outlined is the unity that Guyana has shown over the years. That unity has often been expressed in parliamentary committees, and it may be right and appropriate to single out those Guyanese who supported this nation at a critical moment of its history by serving on those committees. I refer to such men as Mr. ‘Boysie’ Ramkarran, Mr. Marcellus Fielden-Singh and our own Mr. Bishwaiswar ‘Cammie’ Ramsaroop among others. I am also not above praising the PPP/C for a steadfast but sometimes qualified support on the border controversy. On this, we have done well as a nation. Now we must summon the will and steel ourselves for yet another challenge from Venezuela. I offer the Coalition’s support for this resolution. We have already taken steps to prove our seriousness in this matter by issuing a joint statement with the Government, a statement which we carefully crafted. We have a *caveat*. It is: we urge the Government to put the question of the education of this population on this matter on a permanent basis. We believe that there has to be continuous, permanent education as it relates to this matter. The territorial controversy must be in our schools and studied by our academics at the university. It must be part of the discussion with the trade unions, the non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the private sector and with every segment of our society, regardless of which political party is in power. In this regard, we wish to recommend the formation of a non-partisan and non-political commission on which experts can sit and offer recommendations on this vital question. It is one of the few issues we did not agree on in the discussions, but I believe it is necessary to state it here. The handywork of the state and society we have fashioned over many long years must endure.

In the 1980s, Dr. Ptolemy Reid, the then Prime Minister who was born in the Essequibo, stood before the podium of the United Nations and declared that if Venezuela had its way, he would become a refugee in his own land. Dr. Reid is not alone in this. If Caracas has its way with our land, we will

become refugees of one kind or another. Now is the time to reject Venezuela's claim to our land and declare once more that the 1899 Arbitral Award is valid. It has defined our border with Venezuela and has been recognised by all appropriate international organisations, including the United Nations. We also believe the restatement to our commitment to the sanctity of treaties, the peaceful resolution of disputes between states, and the peaceful development of nations will be in order on this occasion. I also wish to add my voice to Ms. Walton-Desir's contribution and Mr. Forde's question on the migrants. We do believe that there is need for a structured system for us to deal with migrants so that they do not become a burden to us. I will ask the Government to make a commitment that Guyana comes first and that a migrant who is not entitled to a birth certificate and citizenship, we must ensure that he/she does not get it. That will be a great signal of our unity. I recommend a halting of documents to Venezuelans and let us put a proper register and system to evaluate each applicant, screen and monitor their activities. It will be *naïve* of us to believe that Venezuela will not send its agents into Guyana.

It will be remiss of me if I take my seat without thanking and praising those governments and organisations which have come out in support of our territorial integrity and sovereignty. It is particularly comforting to have the European Union (EU) states, the United States of America (USA), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organization of American States (OAS) stating their commitment to a peaceful resolution on the territorial controversy. I would be equally remiss in my duty if I did not at the same time praise the Guyana Defence Force (GDF), the Guyana Police Force (GPF) and all Guyanese who have over the years offered their services and worked with the Government of Guyana to oppose Venezuela's aggression against our state. I mean every soldier, every constable, those who might have stood as 'a lonely guard' at Eteringbang and those who might have had to make sacrifices to serve, we should respect them and honour their sacrifices. For those who went to Eteringbang, they will know it cannot be an easy thing spending life there. So, these ordinary soldiers and these ordinary policemen deserve our support and our commendation. The nation must thank them. I also must not forget the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which over the duration of our history, has worked, sometimes beyond the call of duty, to defend this country of ours.

Mr. Speaker, before I close there are two points I want to make. The resolution is clear and I want to read. At number 4 it states:

“Supports the Government in its pursuit to ensure a peaceful and lawful resolution of the controversy before the International Court of Justice and rejects the proposal to return to any form of dialogue with Venezuela on the controversy outside of the process before the Court;”

I raise this because I raised it with my good friend and villager, the Prime Minister, that I do not think it is appropriate for us to say we will have no dialogue with Venezuela. This language was carved to establish that we will not dialogue on the Guyana/Venezuela territorial controversy which is before. As people running a government, you can never close the door totally to... [Mr. Mahipaul: You hear Mark?] [Mr. Nandlall: I still get the feeling that Mark [*inaudible*] from Plaisance.] It is not the first time you are wrong.

I think it is our task to rally all Guyanese in support of this country. I would not be truthful to myself if I say I believe the Government is doing everything necessary. I think there is need for more action; I think there is need for more public education; I think there is need for more involvement of our people. Our people will only be with us if we involve them. I want to stress that and to conclude by saying you have, the Government has, the people of Guyana have, our full support for this resolution. I close by saying, every inch of this territory belongs to us, and I do believe we will make the reality of Dave Martin's song 'not one blade of grass'. Thank you. [*Applause.*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Leader of the Opposition. Now to hear his wrapping of this special sitting, the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Hon. Hugh Todd.

**Mr. Todd (replying):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think we have accomplished our task today. The people of Guyana and Guyanese all over this world will be very proud of this noble House representing the interest of each and everyone here in Guyana and abroad in ensuring that we preserve our territorial integrity and sovereignty. Before I proceed in wrapping up, I would just like to, for emphasis – because I know my colleagues have dealt with it – highlight briefly the work of President Ali's Administration since taking office in 2020. I know that the Hon. Member Ms. Walton-Desir mentioned a few matters concerning the migrants from Venezuela, but I want to inform the people of Guyana that we have, back in 2020, resuscitated the Multi-Agency Coordinating Committee on migrants from Venezuela. That mechanism was defunct and we sought to

reestablish it because we recognised it needed that level of energy and oversight from government.

Mr. Speaker, just allow me to highlight the activities that we undertake when we meet. My colleague, Minister Gail Teixeira, is also the Co-Chairperson of that Committee along with me. The Committee aims to harmonise the response of the Government in the following areas: one, monitoring and tracking; two, access to documentation registration and the regularisation of services; three, timely data gathering and analysis on movements and needs; four, assistance to survivors of gender-based violence and trafficking in persons; five, socioeconomic and cultural integration; six, livelihood opportunities where available; seven, humanitarian support which includes... I would not go into that. You get the gist of it. This Committee is made up of Government ministries, agencies and our international partners. We would meet regularly to ensure that we could have a comprehensive understanding and approach in treating with the migrants from Venezuela. Might I also add that just about 80% of those migrants returning from Venezuela are either Guyanese or of Guyanese parentage. We have a smaller percentage of those persons who are Venezuelans and who are seeking refuge here, as well as other nationals who are also fleeing the crisis in Venezuela. We are doing our part as a responsible Government in treating with the situation because we know, all too well, during the hardships of the 70s and 80s, many of our Guyanese fled Guyana for the exact, same reason. So, for us, it is our people returning home. They are returning home because we have provided stability and a prosperous environment, notwithstanding what is going on in Venezuela. We are happy to be able to receive those migrants because we are in a good position now to provide for all Guyanese, not only here, but Guyanese who are returning from abroad, including those returning from Venezuela. I want to put that on the record.

6.21 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to also inform the House that I have submitted, upon her request – the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir – statistics dating back from 2018 to date on the entire migrant flow from Venezuela by region. This data collection, as I mentioned, dates back to 2018. Clearly, we were not in government at that time. We have continued with that. I have also provided the Hon. Member with an entire document for her to read on the Ministry of Education's school support services – the Risk Management and Migrant Support Section. It is very disingenuous that she did not highlight this today. Today, we are here to make and inform

the people of Guyana on all the progress we have been making together, as a people, as a nation.

I want to also inform the House, just to update... The Hon. Leader of the Opposition mentioned the establishment of a commission. We have dealt with this situation or request before and I have also spoken to the media. We have inherited a ministerial advisory committee from the Granger-led Administration. The President Ali Administration has maintained that mechanism. It is chaired by yours truly when we are dealing with policy, and when we are dealing with technical issues, the agent, Mr. Carl Greenidge, who is the former Minister of Foreign Affairs – not immediate but immediate, immediate past. We have members such as Mr. Hari Narayan Ramkarran, Dr. Barton Scotland, Major General (Ret'd) Joseph Singh, Ambassador Rudolph Collins, Ambassador Frederick Joseph, Ambassador Elisabeth Harper, Ms. Donnette Streete, Ms. Kezia Campbell-Erskine, and sadly, we have lost Mr. Rashleigh Jackson who was a former Minister of Foreign Affairs and the late Mr. Duke Pollard, former Judge of the Caribbean Court of Justice, all being members of that advisory committee. What we have also indicated to the Opposition is that we are willing to broaden that mechanism to cater for more of the national stakeholders who should be on that commission.

I must also mention that it is a bipartisan advisory committee between Government and the Opposition to discuss policy initiatives. If one speaks about being a nonpartisan, it may be too broad to contain what we need to do. What we need to do is to keep it focused so that we can arrive at decisions, so that we can move forward on advising, not only the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, but the executive branch of this Government. It is working fine. I must add that my shadow Minister, Hon. Member... [An Hon. Member: Your shadow minister?] The shadow Minister... Enjoy it. The shadow Minister, the Hon. Walton-Desir, attended the last advisory committee meeting. She was there so she can also inform the Leader of the Opposition on how well a functioning committee we have. Did I mention the National Security Advisor? He is also on the committee – Captain Gerald Gouveia. I want to clarify those two outfits for the people of Guyana, for their understanding, for them to recognise that we have provided continuity and enhancement and ensured that we were able to bring benefits to the people of Guyana by giving strong and effective representation.

Now that we have put that aside, let us get back to the substance of what we were here to achieve. We agree... When I say we, I am speaking not only about this Assembly,

but the people of Guyana. We agree that the 1899 Arbitral Award is final, perfect and complete. We have agreed to that; that is our sovereignty. Our foremost foreign policy objective is the preservation of our sovereignty and territorial integrity. We stand by that as *One people, One Nation, One Destiny*. The support for the 1966 Geneva Agreement is also the united effort of us here in this Assembly. We should not forget that behind that document of 1899, that Award, there are individuals. There are people who, with the failed efforts of that young attorney on the Venezuelan team that tried to cast *a shadow of doubt* over the validity of that award... We are here today, after 57 years of political independence, to continue to fight that struggle to ensure that we see this entire process to fruition in the International Court of Justice where this case belongs and where we will see the *light at the end of the tunnel* to ensure that those who have been fighting with us, many of whom we have lost... Thankfully, we have Sir Shridath Ramphal who was there at the time of the Geneva Agreement, who was there throughout the process, and who continues to serve. We would like to see him alive and well to be in this process to show that together, united, we can bring this process to an end.

I also want to say that – and this was raised by the Leader of the Opposition – of course, there is no power above the nation state. Of course, we are of the strong view that Venezuela would not want to accept that award. One can see it throughout the history in terms of their in-compliance. What is good about this process is that at the end of this process, the voice of the world will be so loud that Venezuela will be isolated, and *no country is an island*. They will not be able to survive and have interstate relations without being part of an international system that is rule-based, that is focused on international law and global governance. That is the framework that we work within. They will not be able to survive and run their country. We are committed; we remain strong and focused. At this point in time, we want to not only commend this House for such an outstanding effort, but we also want to commend all those persons throughout the length and breadth of this country including those of the disciplined services who are *putting their lives on the line* so that we can have the defence that we want. Of course, we have a President and a Government that is very proactive, that is speaking to various capitals. Let me also inform the House that I have been in constant communication with the foreign ministers within CARICOM. I have written to the foreign ministers throughout this region as well as the Commonwealth of Nations (Commonwealth) and we will continue to remain

engaged at the political level to ensure that every capital is briefed, updated, and remains fully aware of the process because we believe that the attention that we deserve and need, we have to go after it. That is what we are doing as a people and as a country.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that this has been a very good day for Guyana. It has been a good day for democracy, for partnership, for this branch of Government as the second arm, and we have demonstrated the political maturity, to a large extent, that we as a sovereign state – the Co-operative Republic of Guyana – remain firm, true, and committed to the process of the International Court of Justice. We will continue to be steadfast in our convictions. With that, I want to commend this motion to this House for its unanimous adoption. Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Minister Hugh Todd. Hon. Members, I now put the motion.

*Question put and carried.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, this concludes our business for this special sitting – the extraordinary sitting – of the National Assembly, the 68<sup>th</sup> Sitting of our National Assembly. Hon. Prime Minister, you have the floor.

## ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.”

[*Prime Minister*]

**Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips:** Mr. Speaker, I move the adjournment of the Assembly to a date to be fixed.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the Assembly stands adjourned to a date to be fixed.

*Adjourned accordingly at 6.31 p.m.*