

**Address by
His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali
President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana
at the 76th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations**

Mr. President

I congratulate you on your election as President of the 76th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Your election is a special honour for the Maldives and for all small-island developing and low-lying coastal States.

I also wish to record Guyana's appreciation to the outgoing President Volkan Bozkir who was tasked with navigating the Assembly during one of the most challenging years in modern history.

Mr. President

Our world is a troubled place.

The peoples of our planet are living under a cloud of uncertainty. COVID-19 has stomped across the globe, taking lives, wrecking livelihoods, and paralyzing economies.

And, looming large behind it is Climate Change, growing every day in its capacity to inflict even greater destruction and ruminant than the coronavirus.

Our citizens look to us, the representatives of Nations, who gather here, to create conditions that will ease fear, erase doubt, and give hope.

Yet, what they see are not nations united; they see nations divided.

Secretary-General, António Guterres, described our situation well when he said:

“The pandemic has demonstrated our collective failure to come together and make joint decisions for the common good, even in the face of an immediate, life-threatening global emergency”.

The pandemic has exposed the shortcomings of our international system.

It has revealed that the system continues to be undergirded by nationalism which remains the prevailing force.

After all these 76 years, since the founding of the United Nations, it is not the collective well-being of our one planet and our one humanity that motivates us; it is selfish national interests that drive us.

And, in pursuit of that selfish nationalism, we overlook the truth of our shared cohabitation on one planet, one Earth, and we ignore the reality that what affects one, affects all.

If nothing in the generations of civilization has taught us that nation states are not islands unto themselves but are each part of the main, then the experience of the last two years should be a salutary lesson.

The world will not progress without greed, without war, and without freedom unless we, the leaders of nations – big and small – recall with commitment, the values set forth in the Charter of the United Nations and resolve to be faithful to them.

Mr. President, the pandemic has wrecked Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development that the members of this Organization adopted in 2015.

Development gains have been reversed, poverty has expanded, and inequality has widened.

Widening fiscal deficits, mounting debt, reduced fiscal space and external financial flows have imperiled the capacity of developing countries to attain the sustainable development goals.

Within developing countries, the pandemic has upended growth, increased unemployment, and weakened health and education systems.

Education regression is now inevitable given the long period our children have been forced out of the formal classroom and the challenges which many developing countries face in delivering virtual education.

Given these problems, economic recovery is essential to returning developing countries to the path of attaining the SDGs.

But such recovery will be painfully elongated and slow unless there is international support in the form of debt rescheduling, debt service moratoriums, provision of soft resources to reboot economies.

My government restates its call for increased resources to be made available to States on the basis of their vulnerabilities and not only based on the misleading measure of per capita income.

If these essential measures are not implemented, growth in developing countries will not be restored nor will economic and social policies be realigned along the path set out in Agenda 2030.

The repercussions will be felt by the rich nations because developing countries are markets for the goods and services of the industrialized nations and the source of their raw materials.

Poor countries cannot buy unless they have the means, and they cannot produce unless they have the capacity.

Our world will become a damaged place, reversed to an age of avarice, conflict and plunder.

Surely, such a world – that now looms on the horizon – is one that all leaders should work to avert, and, instead, focus their attention on advancing the progress of our one humanity in cooperation and mutual benefit. Surely, that is the world we all want.

Mr. President, while poor and vulnerable countries will suffer longer, and more intensely from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, rich countries have not been spared.

Those, who at the advent of the pandemic concentrated on making themselves secure, now understand they will not be safe until we are all safe, because the virus knows not – and cares not – about race, ethnicity, age or gender.

It will not heed borders or be stopped by walls.

Belatedly, the rich have come to the realization that on our one Earth, they need the cooperation of the poor to save themselves.

Mr President, we must all welcome that realization if it finally mobilizes the global cooperation and unified action that our world needs to survive.

In this regard, my government welcomes the Summit on COVID that was hosted by President Joe Biden. We are pleased that it resulted, not only in commitments for joint global action, but also in the allocation of resources to achieve necessary and agreed objectives.

Similarly, we welcome the fact that, earlier this month, the Heads of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank Group, World Health Organization and World Trade Organization met with the CEOs of leading vaccine manufacturing companies to discuss strategies to improve access to COVID-

19 vaccines, especially in low and lower middle-income countries and in Africa.

My government is pleased that the Heads of the International Organizations and the CEOs of the major pharmaceutical companies have formed a technical working group to exchange and coordinate information on vaccine production and deliveries.

These are positive developments which are welcome, even though they have come after millions have died and many more millions still live under the threat of death.

The access to vaccines saw the world polarized. I know, I speak on behalf of many leaders when I say that we must not now hurt our efforts at ending this polarization of access to vaccines by now implementing measures that divide us and curtail our movement based on the type of vaccines our people took. Indeed, our efforts must be focused on full vaccination and addressing vaccine hesitancy. Millions took the vaccines which were available at a time of much uncertainty, and they are the unsung heroes. They must not now be the subject of restrictions based on the vaccine they took.

Mr President, we hold out similar hope that the world's worst emitters of greenhouse gases that are threatening the welfare of all mankind, will also come to the realization that in the end it will profit them little to emerge king over a world of dust.

The promises of COP 15 in Paris have not been delivered.

If emissions follow the trajectory set by current national commitments, there is a less than 5 per cent chance of keeping temperatures well below 2°C relative to pre-industrial levels, and less than 1 per cent chance of reaching the 1.5°C Paris Agreement target.

Large polluters have simply not kept their word and mistrust now pervades the air.

That, Mr. President, is failure. It is also deception.

Recent authoritative research by the Royal Institute of International Affairs paints a grim picture of the future.

It forecasts that cascading climate impacts can be expected to kill far more people than COVID-19, from hunger, intense heat, flooding, and more pandemics caused by the rise of pests and diseases.

It concluded that, combined with heatwaves and drought, these impacts will likely drive unprecedented crop failure, food insecurity and migration.

All this would drive political instability and greater national insecurity, and fuel regional and international conflict.

Small island states and continental countries with low-lying coastlines, such as Guyana, would be the first to feel the full brunt of this impending disaster.

Yet, our countries are among the lowest emitters of greenhouse gas emissions, contributing the least to the harmful and destructive effects of Climate Change.

This is not only unfair; it is unjust.

Mr President, the burden of reducing emissions is not being carried equitably. Small island developing and low-lying coastal states are punching above their weight in response to the global climate threats.

My country, Guyana, is a net carbon sink.

Our forests absorb far more carbon than is produced from human activity.

But we have not folded our hands and sat back in satisfaction that we have done enough.

We are continuing to contribute meaningfully to reducing global emissions and to decarbonizing the world's economy, even though our country is now an oil and gas producer.

Apart from containing the CO₂ emissions connected to the industry, we continue to pursue a path of developing energy from sustainable sources.

In these circumstances, we feel we have the right to insist on a fair system of burden-sharing.

Innovative and creative ways have to be devised, Mr President, by which the world must act to avert the catastrophe that Climate Change so plainly portends.

COP26 in Glasgow in a few weeks' time is the right and timely place to start.

The worst emitters must make binding commitments in Glasgow to stop their profligacy.

And they must scale up their contributions to help small and vulnerable economies to build up resilience to the prolonged effects of damage that has already been done.

Failure to do so will shatter even more any confidence that the people of the world may still have that polluting nations will do the right thing.

COP26 not COP15 could become the defining moment at which mankind's future or fate is sealed.

The peoples of the world will be watching.

Mr President, Guyana looks towards a post-pandemic era that will reset international relations by curbing territorial avarice and embracing peaceful cooperation.

In this regard, we draw attention to the continued overt threats to Guyana's territorial integrity and sovereignty by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Just recently, an agreement was issued in Mexico City by which the contending internal factions in Venezuela renewed a baseless claim to two-thirds of Guyana's territory.

We have responded in clear terms. And I repeat our response now in these hallowed halls in which nations of the world meet in peace and cooperation.

Guyana cannot be used as an altar of sacrifice for the settlement of Venezuela's internal political differences.

While my government welcomes efforts to bring about domestic harmony within Venezuela, agreements that defy international law and processes can be no basis for mediating such harmony.

Guyana does not promote the use of violence or threats to settle disputes.

In a 1966 Agreement signed in Geneva, Venezuela consented to allow the UN Secretary-General to decide on the means of settlement of this controversy.

The Secretary-General decided on the International Court of Justice.

Both Parties are therefore bound by the Court's jurisdiction and ultimate decision.

Mr. President, we remain concerned about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Guyana restates its solidarity with the Palestinian people and their desire for a dignified existence in their own homeland in accordance with a two-state solution.

The international community must act to meet the legitimate concerns of the Palestinians who have suffered for far too long.

Mr. President, the strained relations between the United States and Cuba are also a matter of deep concern to our region.

We are convinced that normalization of relations between Cuba and the United States would have a beneficial impact on peace in the hemisphere and greater prosperity for all.

Mr. President, I turn now to my own country – Guyana – a land of many ethnicities, drawn from its Amerindian people, people transported from Africa in the genocidal slave trade, people from India who were indentured to labour in a new land, people from Europe who migrated at a time of want and persecution, and people from China who were also brought to work on the plantations.

They came with different religions; different cultures; and different perspectives.

In the collective of their diversity, the people of Guyana are representative of the peoples of the world.

Whilst politically driven conflicts arise occasionally, and differences have been exploited for narrow political purposes, my government is convinced that the richness of our people's diversity is a gift to our nation.

We continue to build a nation that draws on all aspects of its cultural roots to establish citizens who enjoy equal opportunity in all aspects of our society; a nation that is secure in itself and strong in its outlook.

Our intention is to make Guyana an example for the world, utilizing the strength of our diversity for a single tapestry of One Nation, which is indivisible, strong, secure and prosperous.

My government has set its foot firmly on the ladder to climb to that pinnacle of success.

We are confident that as we foster peace and prosperity within our country, respect human rights, uphold democracy and the rule of law, and abide with our Constitution, we will achieve these noble goals.

Mr. President, it is against this background of ambition for my country that my government embraces the vision set out in the Secretary-General's report entitled, "Our Common Agenda".

We embrace his view that our nations must be driven by solidarity that he has so eloquently described as "the principle of working together, recognizing that we are bound to each other and that no community or country, however powerful, can solve its challenges alone".

Mr. President, “Our Common Agenda” provides the framework for the emergence of a post-COVID-19 era, which addresses the world’s fragilities, injustices, inequalities, conflicts, the eradication of poverty, banishment of racism and gender discrimination, and to realize ecological justice.

Guyana looks forward to a revitalized United Nations spearheading the thrust towards a new era in international relations, in which the world emerges as a better, fairer, and stronger place for all mankind.

I thank you.