



## **Inaugural Address**

**by**

**His Excellency Bharrat Jagdeo,**

**President of the Republic of Guyana**

**at the**

**Presidential Investiture Ceremony,**

**State House, Georgetown, Guyana, March 31, 2001**

My Fellow Guyanese,

Thank you for electing me as your President.

I humbly accept your mandate to serve all Guyana and each and every Guyanese in this capacity for the next five years.

The recent elections tested the strength of our fledgling democracy. These reflected the resolve of our people to strengthen our democratic institutions and traditions.

It is my fervent hope that the recent acts of disruption and violence will cease. These prevent our children from going to school, disrupt our people's lives and stall the progress of our country. They do not solve anything.

I am aware that the electoral process was not without shortcomings. These affected all the contesting parties. But we are encouraged by the declaration of the independent local and international observers that the elections were fair, and that the results are the free expression of the will of the people. The elections are over. All partisan political signs and symbols must be put away as we embrace each other as Guyanese.

At elections time, contending political parties engage in keen contest, and the environment, quite naturally, becomes tense. But Election 2001 is past. I want to assure my political opponents in those elections that we are not enemies. As President, I will strive my utmost to include everyone in the process of working to achieve common goals for the whole nation, and for making life better for all Guyanese. For too long - over generations, in fact - the bitter perception has developed that party connection and consideration come first in all aspects of administering this country.

I will try hard, I promise you, to win the confidence of my opponents that this will not be so in my governance of Guyana.

No doubt, winning trust in this regard will be gradual. But I declare today that I am determined to try to win that trust. However, my willingness to address this perception must not be interpreted as an acceptance that anyone has been deliberately marginalised because of his or her ethnicity by our administration or an acceptance of the spurious claims that this country has not progressed.

In fact, in every single area: education, health care, housing, water, job creation, local government, strengthening of the armed forces, public sector wages, public accountability and economic governance - there has been tremendous advancement.

This country has moved forward. Stable and prosperous societies are built by genuine concerns being addressed and not by rhetoric and spurious charges.

This is the reason why I am urging that we move on so that the politicians of this country could never be accused of wasting the dreams of our young people.

I can assure Guyana that the hand I reach out will be friendly and brotherly, and that in accepting it, the PNC leadership need have no fear that they are doing so as anything other than as equals. I will shortly convene a "National Conference" to discuss ways of taking Guyana forward in this century and millennium.

This platform will be constructed within the context of the National Development Strategy and the programmes advanced by the various political parties. My vision is to create a country in which everyone has a sense of belonging and an opportunity to contribute to its development.

I want to speed up the process of Constitutional Reform and expand the role of the legislative arm of government in the task of governance.

However, inclusivity must not be restricted to the legislative arm of government. I hope that when I meet with the Leader of the Opposition we will discuss this matter further.

It is critical that we engage one another in dialogue. We should always reach out and talk to each other. In this way we would be really fulfilling the mandate of all Guyanese as we share our differing views in the search for national consensus on the common objective of making this country a better place for all. Together, we can work on issues and programmes that really matter to our people. There is so much we can achieve through genuine partnership.

There is much more still to be done to enable our people to live a good life. The level of poverty must be further reduced; our people must enjoy peace and security; every family needs to be adequately housed; every person in every nook and corner of Guyana needs to have affordable health care; every child must have a good education to prepare him or her for a creative and fulfilling life in the technological age; our young people must be provided with job and other opportunities; our elderly must be cared for; our workers must receive better salaries and improved working conditions; we must attract more investment and support the expansion of our private sector; we must continue the rebuilding and expansion of our infrastructure; and we must preserve our national patrimony.

The country needs to experience that flourishing of culture that makes of this plural society, a richer tapestry because of the colour variegation with which history has released us. Together we must devote special attention to the development of our children, young people, women and indigenous people.

This is a time for all citizens to reflect on what their responsibilities are and how they can make their contribution to nation building. We need to pay more attention to issues of law and order. We have to work to improve the justice system so that all of our citizens feel that they are equal before the law and that their rights are protected.

The unity of our diverse ethnicity must become a beacon to others and Guyana's international image should be one which makes us all proud.

This will put Guyana in a more respected position to advance our foreign policy initiatives. Guyana must play an enhanced role in CARICOM and other regional and hemispheric bodies. At the multilateral level, we must continue to offer leadership for the promotion of meaningful North-South and South-South dialogue and cooperation, and aggressively safeguard the interests of developing nations such as ours in the face of threats of marginalisation from globalisation and trade liberalisation. Further it is important that we strengthen ties with our neighbours and continue to work for the peaceful resolution of our differences. But even as we work to build a modern society, we must not let go of traditional values such as our warmth and hospitality, and our sense of charity and fair play.

Rather than becoming a divisive event, we can let these elections remind us of the necessity for our coming together for the common good of our country and people. Here is a real opportunity for national healing and reconciliation.

I urge all our people to dedicate themselves to the mission of national reconciliation. Let us make an agreed day of reflection, prayer, and re-commitment to the ideal of national unity.

I want to assure the people of Guyana, who have deep religious convictions, that I will seek guidance and advice from our religious leaders as we try to break down barriers and create a more compassionate society.

I extend deep gratitude to all those who worked so hard to make these elections an expression of democracy.

To the Chairman, and Commissioners, members of staff of the Guyana Elections Commission who organised the election, to the international and local observers who selflessly dedicated themselves to support our young democracy, to the security personnel who kept the peace, to the leaders of all political parties and their supporters, and to the supporters of the PPP/Civic, I say thank you.

Over the past few months, I travelled around and through every corner of this vast and beautiful country listening to you. Over the next five years, your words will guide me as I seek to realise your dreams for a better life and a united Guyana. Today I renew my faith and pledge to you. Our course is set. There is wind in the sail of the Guyana ship and there is room for everyone to come onboard. Let us move on. The future beckons and where we go from here is up to all of us.

Long live Guyana!

Thank you