

## **Address to the Nation**

**By**

**His Excellency Donald Ramotar**

**President of the Republic of Guyana**

**On the Occasion of**

**The 46<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Guyana's Independence**

**26 May 2012**

Let me first express my appreciation to all those who organized and are participating in tonight's proceedings. I am sure you will agree with me that we have been thrilled and entertained so far on this enjoyable evening.

I thank all of you for your attendance here tonight. I greet all those who are following these proceedings on television and radio and to the many others in other parts of the country or within the Diaspora who are either having their own observances or are enjoined to the celebrations of our country's 46 anniversary of Independence.

Forty six years ago the British Union Jack was lowered for the last time and the Golden Arrow Head rose for the first time over our land.

It was a very emotional time for many who were involved in the struggle for Independence and social progress. We recall two of the principal actors who were leading different parties, Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham put aside their differences and embraced each other right here on the tarmac of the National Park.

The emotions stemmed from the fact that the ceremony right here more than four and a half decades ago marked the culmination of a long struggle. That struggle started from the time that people were forced into slavery and other oppressive relationships.

However, from the earliest days people fought to break down the barriers of oppression and for freedom.

It was also time of some uncertainty that stemmed from the knowledge that we were beginning a new journey as a nation and a people who had varied origins in a land that we called our own. We were now in charge of our own destiny to build a country that would be strong and viable.

Tonight we will reenact the raising of that very first raising of the Golden Arrowhead that took place on that that glorious night that is permanently etched in our country's history.

What an emotional occasion it must have been for those of our countrymen and countrywomen to have witnessed that first flag-raising ceremony!

What intense national pride it must have evoked to have seen our national flag flutter in the light wind as we greeted the birth of a nation after centuries of struggle for national liberation!

Tonight we recall that grim and epic struggle, the great human toll that was paid and the enormous sacrifices involved in winning our freedom. On this the forty sixth anniversary of the culmination of that struggle, we once again register our homage to all of our ancestors who both overtly and covertly made their contributions to the discrediting of the oppressive colonial system. They unreservedly cast their lot in favor of freedom. They fought for liberation from bondage. Tonight we salute their unyielding spirit, their unremitting toil and we embrace their dreams for a better future for their descendants.

Tonight we say thanks to the generations of outstanding Guyanese who built this country from scratch, eking out in many instances a mere subsistence existence for themselves. We remain confident that their sacrifices were not in vain. We are secured in the knowledge that future generations have and will continue to ensure a strong, safe and unified Guyana.

Fellow Guyanese,

We can today look towards the future with great optimism confident that the sacrifices of those who went before us laid the foundations for the bright and promising future that lies in front of us. As we focus on the task ahead, may we never lose sight of the economic and political lessons of the past forty six years.

Foremost amongst those lessons is the realization that we are a small developing nation existing in a world dominated by the powerful countries. Our economy remains susceptible to market volatilities and especially today to the adverse effects of climate change. There are other countries both large and small with similar vulnerabilities. In advancing the development of Guyana we must be able to see the wisdom in protecting and furthering our national interests and in building political and economic resilience through the establishment of good

relations with our neighbors and with other friendly states and by deepening and expanding our participation in regional integration at the level of CARICOM and in wider hemispheric groupings.

Internally, there have also been important lessons over the past forty six years. Amongst these is the importance of catalyzing growth in a balanced economy with limited restrictions on economic activities. While promoting a more open economy we must learn from the mistakes of many countries which did great harm to their societies because they failed to observe some regulations by the state to protect the masses and the most vulnerable in the society.

The years since Independence have also instructed us on the vital link between economic development, political democracy and social freedoms. The right of the people to elect a government of their choice, the enactment of an inclusive constitution and respect for civil liberties have all brought about improved national cohesion and created the conditions for increased economic growth.

Over recent years, Guyana has enjoyed unprecedented economic growth. We have become the object of attention within the region. Our policies are being analyzed for the lessons they can hold for other countries. Foremost amongst those lessons has been the importance of macro-economic stability. Holding inflation in check amidst turbulence in commodity markets, stabilizing foreign exchange markets in a period of international financial volatility and reduced interest rates for lending have boosted investments and economic activities in Guyana.

Our traditional sectors have also served us well in the face of daunting exogenous shocks. Despite the challenges since independence, our traditional sectors have continued to bring benefits to our people: creating and sustaining employment, earning valuable foreign exchange and boosting output. These sectors remain pivotal to economic growth but it is now necessary for them to become modernized and for the emergence of new sectors to lead economic diversification and growth.

Our educational system has also been a tremendous asset to us since independence allowing us to produce graduates that have distinguished themselves both at home and abroad. It is apposite to point out that our economic growth has coincided with a rise in the quantity and quality of education that we have provided. We have to continue to improve the delivery of education and configure it to meet the growing demands of the new economy that we are building in an ever growing and competitive world.

Nurturing an open economy, safeguarding political freedoms and civil liberties, retooling our traditional sectors and improving our educational system remain important to our future progress.

However, our greatest assets over the past forty six years have undoubtedly been you, the people of this country. Guyana is blessed with a diverse population of warm, friendly, hospitable, generous and hardworking people. Your yeomen service, selfless sacrifices and your ability to see the bigger picture have allowed us to overcome many of the daunting difficulties that we have faced since Independence.

Tonight, I salute the people of Guyana, especially working people through whose toil and sacrifices this country was built. As we enter a new exciting phase of our development, I want to assure all of you, workers, entrepreneurs, farmers, intellectuals, all that you will be an integral part of national development.

As we go forward together towards greater economic prosperity, let us bring to the process of development those virtues bequeathed to us by all of our ancestors. Let us imitate their capacity for hard, diligent and honest work, their wisdom in setting aside something for a rainy day, their strength and forbearance in the face of difficulties, their pride in their possessions and their willingness to sacrifice today so as to create a better tomorrow for their children and grandchildren.

Fellow Guyanese,

Like our fore-parents did in the past for us we must provide for a better future for our children and grandchildren. At the level of the government, we intend to assure this future through the process of economic transformation.

Economic transformation involves investments in critical infrastructural projects, initiatives and policies capable to leapfrogging Guyana's development to new heights. This includes the search for oil and rare minerals, the development of hydroelectricity, building an all-weather road to Lethem, bridging the Corentyne River in cooperation with our neighbour Suriname and constructing a deep water harbor. Through the stringing of fiber optic cable from Brazil we intend to revolutionise bandwidth and internet services throughout our country, make these services more affordable and accessible to the average consumers and allow for the creation of data and call centres capable of providing employment for thousands of our young and old people alike. The fiber optic cable will also facilitate our e-governance programme, allowing government services to be more easily available to all our people, wherever they may be.

Our one laptop per family project will ensure that no one will be left out of the process of keying Guyana into the digital world. It will make every Guyanese computer literate and bring significant benefits especially in educating our children.

Economic transformation also entails modernizing the traditional sectors such as bauxite, rice and sugar, developing agro-processing and eco-tourism and cementing our status as a global leader in the provision of environmental services under our path-breaking Low Carbon Development Strategy.

Economic transformation will entail greater diversification of the economy with emphasis on increased value-added activity. It will involve additional investments in agriculture so as to position Guyana in the long term to capitalize on the inevitable demand for food as the world population rises and per capita consumption grows. All the predictions suggest that there is a great future in agriculture and this is why we have to encourage more of our people to work on the land, it will pay great dividends.

Our transformative agenda thus involves catapulting our economy to a higher stage of development by fostering increased industrialisation, reducing our carbon footprint, assuring us cheap, reliable and renewable sources of energy, keying our people into the exciting possibilities of the cyber world, and allowing for the emergence of new poles of economic growth while modernising the traditional sectors.

It is equally about creating a balanced economy, a mixed economy where various forms of ownership will complement each other, where investors will feel secured and encouraged to participate in the exciting task of nation building. The state has an additional role to facilitate development and in a situation where the market is evolving, to correct distortions.

Development ultimately has to be about people. We must therefore reconfigure our development models to ensure that the benefits of development are spread more widely and more evenly throughout our population.

Fellow Guyanese, our country has come a far way in building a dynamic society. This was possible through the democratic system that we chose as our path to prosperity and peace. However, we must acknowledge that in some areas we have a far way still to go.

Local democracy is one such area.

This is important to create the conditions for the full participation of the people in the work of their own areas. Here I am not only speaking about municipalities and Neighbourhood Democratic areas, but also of the village. We want to see every village, having a vibrant economy.

We will work towards breathing new life into our village economies so as to increase economic

activities, provide jobs within villages for residents, promote inter-village economic exchanges and encourage the growth of businesses, large and small, including cottage industries. It is our hope that in so doing our villages will become vibrant hubs of development. I believe that this revitalisation will help to reduce rural unemployment and poverty.

We have to make our communities safer and equipped to contribute to enhanced quality of life for residents. Improved quality of life cannot just be measured in terms of material possessions but must also address the need for recreation and the development of the artistic talents of everyone. Special attention will therefore be paid to improving the physical well-being of communities and to develop the skills and talents of residents. Through our e-learning programme, we eventually hope to develop a national database that would catalogue the various resources and skills available within all communities so as to allow for greater utilization of these skills.

As we revitalize our communities we will be linking them through an improved road network system. Many of you would have already seen the ongoing road works taking place on the East Bank and East Coast public roads as we extend the four lane highways. These extensions and the other transport infrastructure that we are putting in place have become necessary because of the increased number of vehicles on the roadways.

Despite the increase in the number of vehicles and especially public transport vehicles, many of our workers still have to wait, sometimes for hours, each afternoon to get home. We have recognized the problem and we are committed to ensuring that workers can get to and from work without undue delays. This is one of the reasons why we will continue to upgrade the road network system and why we are actively considering the encouragement of new shuttle services between large population centers. In this regard we are open to various models of organizing and financing this initiative. The aim is to get commuters home safely and on time.

It is not our intention to displace private transportation services but if our people are suffering because of the inability of public transport operators to provide a satisfactory and adequate service, then we are duty bound to assist where we can.

In as much as we are duty bound to intervene to correct imbalances and inefficiencies in the provision of services to our people, we would wish to encourage greater public/private partnerships. We have seen this model successfully being implemented within the health sector where we have teamed up with private health care providers to offer specialty services.

I envisage the day is not far off when Guyanese would no longer have to fly overseas to seek medical attention since all of the specialist health care services would be available right here in

our country. We can do this through partnerships that allow us to source the skills and expertise of foreign and local professionals in hospitals in which the government has a stake.

We have already identified the land for the construction of a specialty hospital that would provide more affordable world class surgeries and offer A grade medical services which we still have to source overseas at an astronomical cost. This is all part of our program to look after the interests of our people.

People for us come first and everything we do is intended to redound to the benefit of everyone in this country. We are interested in ensuring the best for our citizens. In order to do so we need to work together, to break down suspicions and foster greater understandings and appreciation for the conditions that determine our decisions and actions.

The 2011 National elections have created new challenges to all the leaders in this country. It is a time to show maturity and to put the interest of our country and our people ahead of all narrow self-interests.

No matter what side of the political divide we are on, let us remember that forty-six years ago we assumed the responsibility for our own destiny.

This great responsibility which we all carry for this country must never be forgotten and with political will and trust we can make Guyana achieve the great potential that we so often speak about.

I am committed to working with all those who are interested in moving our country forward. I know that the people of Guyana would like to see us working together. This was also the dream at independence and it remains today a major national aspiration.

We need to safeguard our freedoms, defend our democracy and allow the ingenuity and resourcefulness of our people to flourish. A great Guyana will not be measured only in terms of what we build and what we create but also in our character as a nation, including our ability and willingness to set aside narrow interests for the greater good of all Guyana.

Tonight on this forty sixth anniversary of our country's independence, when we recall that historic moment in our history, let us all commit to making our beloved Guyana better for our sake and for the sake of those who will come after us.

Happy Independence! Long live Guyana!

Thank You