

**Inauguration Speech of His Excellency  
Desiré Delano Bouterse  
President of the Republic of Suriname**

**12th August, 2010  
Paramaribo, Suriname**

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Madam Chairperson of the National Assembly of Suriname, Dr. Jennifer Geerlings-Simons

Your Excellency, Mr Vice-President Robert Leo Ameerali,

Your Excellency Samuel Hinds, Prime Minister of the Cooperative Republic Guyana,

Your Excellency Nicolas Maduro Moros, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Bolivarian Republic Venezuela, Special Emissary of the President of Venezuela,

Your Excellency Samuel Pinheiro Guimares, Minister of State for Strategic Affairs at the Cabinet of the President of the Federative Republic of Brazil,

Your Excellency Abelardo Moreno, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba,

Your Excellency Ambassador Richard Barbeyron, Special Emissary of the Republic of France,

Your Excellency Ambassador Kanwaljit Singh Sodhi, Special Emissary of the Republic of India,

Your Excellency Ambassador Yuan Nansheng, Special Emissary of the People's Republic of China,

Your Excellency Ambassador John Nay of the United States of America,

Your Excellency Endah Rachmi Yuliarti, Special Emissary of the Republic of Indonesia,

Ambassador Albert Ramdien, Assistant Secretary General of the Organization of American States,

Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Honorable Members of the National Assembly,

Other Dignitaries,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to acknowledge and express my heartfelt gratitude to President Ronald Venetiaan and Vice-President Ramdien Sardjoe for the manner in which they have performed their duties in their respective offices. Let me take this opportunity to wish them well in their future endeavors.

I also wish to take this opportunity to thank the official guests from abroad for taking time to be present and witness this Inaugural Ceremony today. We appreciate your presence at this democratic and peaceful transition of government. Excellencies, your presence, demonstrates your true friendship with the people of Suriname, and in the coming days we will lay the foundation for strengthening our cooperation based on true friendship, mutual trust, mutual respect, and the deepening of our relations. We all have the common objective of bringing about sustainable development for our nations.

Madame Chairman, on this special occasion, may I take the opportunity to congratulate our people on the recent celebrations of the National Day for Indigenous People (Amerindians) and the 120<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Javanese Immigration to our country. May I also wish our Muslim brothers and sisters strength and Allah's blessings on the commencement of the Holy Month of Ramadan.

It is with the deepest of gratitude and faith that today I accept the Office of President of the Republic of Suriname. This is not the celebration of a personal victory, but the fulfillment of a lifelong mission to serve my country and my people.

I give thanks to the Almighty Creator, and before Him and you, I solemnly pledge that the guiding principles of my actions and deeds as President will be service and sacrifice to you, the nation.

I express my gratitude to my Party, the National Democratic Party and the Mega-Combination, as well as her political partners, the A-Combination and the People's Alliance, for their support of my candidacy as President of the Republic of Suriname which resulted in my swift election in the National Assembly with more than the required two-thirds majority vote. This in itself is a historic milestone.

My government is fortunate to count on the political support of an overwhelming majority of our people. I wish to assure the nation, however, that we will not arrogantly use this majority. On the contrary, we will always value the principles of consultation and cooperation across the spectrum of the nation. In accordance with

this policy, we will forge consultation and cooperation with opposition parties. In fact, we do not see the opposition as adversaries. Rather, in order to realize the broadest possible support, we see them as partners to work and cooperate with in the implementation of tried and tested policies.

We will present you with a cabinet which not only has politicians from our coalition, but also representatives from other political parties, business and industry, and the trade union movement. So our new government will assuredly benefit from inputs from all important groups in our society.

I also thank the Surinamese people for the way in which they have welcomed my election. We commit ourselves fully to meet your expectations.

I express my thanks to all the government officials of friendly nations and the representatives of international organizations for their congratulatory messages. On this occasion, allow me to also give special thanks to my wife and children for the support you gave me during my three decades of political struggles. No one else knows the sacrifices you have made to give me the opportunity to achieve my political ideals for our nation.

Madam Chairman, prior to my election in the National Assembly on July 19<sup>th</sup>, Suriname had already made a choice at its May 25<sup>th</sup> General Elections. Suriname was at a crossroad in its history. The electorate wanted to give its leaders a mission to create a society in which everyone participates, everyone shares in what the country has to offer; in which people's basic material needs are met, and in which solidarity prevails. They also wanted a society in which people are able to develop themselves to their highest potential, and become international role models and leaders in areas in which our society excels. We will never exclude any person or group in this task of nation building.

Our government pledges not to waste, but to protect our national inheritance and assets for future generations. Moreover, we will seize every opportunity to generate greater national wealth.

I accept this duty to be your President, and I see my greatest mission as strengthening national unity. I will lead this nation in words and actions that will always inspire and motivate our people to work together. This President will therefore be a President for all Surinamese people regardless of where they may be.

We will offer everyone equal opportunities for development. We will devote special attention to groups who have in the past had limited scope for development. In this regard, I'm thinking about our indigenous peoples (Amerindians and Bush-negroes), our countrymen living in tribal communities. Our intention is to gradually break the cycle of their isolation and disadvantaged living.

When we look at the many national challenges facing us, it is clear that our task is not going to be an easy one. In almost all sectors of the economy and society, we have suffered enormous neglect, and there has been a decline, stagnation and reversal of national growth. As a result, today, many segments of our society have become desperate and hopeless. We therefore need a bold, new visionary approach to give our people what they justly deserve as co-owners of this nation that is endowed and blessed with so many riches.

However, we need to overcome two huge challenges that, since colonization, has haunted and blighted us our national destiny as a people.

First, we must dismantle any lingering remnants of the colonial police state which blocks and obstructs the establishment of a free, democratic, constitutional state that has as its pillars: an independent judiciary, a government that is free of corruption, a legislature that acts in the interest of the people, and a free and independent press that is committed to the honest dissemination of information.

Madam Chairman, another major challenge we face is the transformation of our society from an economy which is merely a source of profit for foreign interest groups into one that is based and built on a healthy, international interdependence. Suriname needs a new national economic approach created by Surinamers and for Surinamers. International interests must respect our national sovereignty as we respect theirs.

Today, a number of basic assumptions and essentials for life - such as predictable climate, readily-available productive land, access to potable water, and safe food production - they have become unpredictable and uncertain.

There are major changes in the relationships between nation-states, and the balance of power among major state is shifting so dramatically that it is difficult to ascertain the eventual outcome.

Although the way the future will play out is unclear, what is clear is that the entire world must chart a course through turbulent waters. Humanity will have to become more flexible and adaptable. This is the puzzling environment in which Suriname will have to grow and develop in the coming decades.

Despite the fact, we are confronted by these daunting challenges, there are certainly numerous new opportunities before us. We will, however, only be able to take full advantage of them if we have sufficient faith in ourselves, if we are clear about exactly what we want for our country, and if our new leaders work tirelessly and selflessly for this beautiful country and its peoples.

Madam Chairperson,

For decades our precious natural resources have been used to fulfill the needs of other nations in the world. The largest portion of the profits from our resources was not for Suriname. Other nations used our resources to develop their societies while we remained under-developed and not sufficiently able to lift our people from circumstances of mediocrity which at times led their sense of despair and hopelessness.

The time has come for us to dedicate ourselves to achieving true independence with a sustainable economy and genuine social justice – all of which will lead to happiness and national prosperity. Faith in our national leaders and institutions of government has been gravely eroded, and so we have a greater duty to restore this faith.

May I take a moment to express deep heartfelt gratitude to the Almighty Creator for the wealth He has bestowed on this nation. I further affirm that like a worthy steward, our government will devote itself with heart and soul to cherish this gift and also to make every citizen share in this wealth.

Madam Chairperson,

We present to you a new government that will truly be of service to the people. We will regularly let our people know what policies we have implemented and how well we are managing the nation's financial affairs.

We regard it as our constitutional duty to ensure that every citizen of this country – regardless of belief, ideology, ethnic origin, political orientation, or whether resident on the coastal plain or the interior – be given every opportunity to be directly involved in the harmonious development of our country.

We set as our standards and values: Hard work, honesty, openness, responsibility, and tolerance towards each other.

We know that the road of change and betterment of our society will be long and have obstacles. This means we must be tenacious in our efforts. We fully believe that every step we take on the road towards achieving our goals will produce joy - if we join hands and work to achieve it together. Each milestone we achieve will generate the hope we need to overcome the challenges of the next stage.

Madam Chairperson,

As President of Suriname, I am going to lead the way by personally ensuring the implementation of the social contract we presented to you, the people, during our election campaign.

I ask you to join us in making it possible for our children to learn and to study wherever they are living in Suriname; we must be able to offer them jobs when they finish their education.

I ask you to join with us in seeing that their parents' income, particularly those underprivileged, become sufficient so that they no longer have to think where their next meal comes from, and be able to greet tomorrow with joy.

I ask you to join with us so that our goal of building adequate housing can be achieved quickly for those in need, thus meeting one of the basic requirements for healthy life.

I ask you to join with us in giving youths and students the guarantee of a golden national future, giving them a deep sense of safety and security, instead of their present doubt and despair.

I ask you to join with us in ensuring that the average working person has a secure wage or salary, and that their buying power will be strengthened instead of being eroded. Our government wants a working force that would be able to provide for themselves and their families.

I ask you to join with us in honoring our senior citizens and giving them the resources they need for a life that shows respect for their years of diligent work for our country and people. We cannot accept the idea that these senior citizens have to labor with an inadequate income and in an undignified way.

I ask you to join us in our goal to guarantee personal safety and safety for the property of all citizens.

I ask you to join with us in creating a modern educational system which contributes to our national goals in such a manner that joy comes to the hearts of teachers as well as students.

Madam Chairperson,

I appeal to the entrepreneurs and members of the business community to join us in creating and developing the ideal conditions and initiatives for employment, prosperity, well-being for all, and a superior quality of life in Suriname.

Finally, I ask you to join us in an unceasing war against all forms of corruption and squandering of national revenues. It is critical that we free ourselves of these unwholesome habits, and so remove obstacles that hinder healthy societal development.

The efforts we will make to bring about prosperity and well-being for our people need to be embedded in the world which is becoming smaller and smaller through

Information, Communication and Technology. We will do everything to be a part of a new world order marked by a healthy mutual dependence, mutual respect, and the use of peaceful means to resolve conflicts.

Madam Chairperson,

Just as we are convinced at a national level of a breakthrough regarding the discordance that has marred and marked our politics for years, we are convinced that we will succeed in being and remaining proactive regarding our full integration in South America and the Caribbean.

We do not wish to be strangers any longer to any of our immediate neighbors. We refuse in the future to take a greater interest in what happens in Europe over what we can share with our own immediate neighbors. In the first place, we wish to maintain the best possible relations with our immediate neighbors – but not just at a political level. We wish to encourage our entrepreneurs to venture together - with the Brazilians, with the French, with the Guyanese, with the Venezuelan people, and all other Caribbean states. We also yearn to share with them through the creative arts the full spectrum of our cultural heritage. We wish to play sports together, we wish to combat crime together, we wish to minimize the pest of the HIV-virus together, and we are dedicated to the goal of making malaria and other cross-border diseases a thing of the past.

In the cooperation and collaboration with our neighbors, what binds together will be our first consideration, and this we will elaborate on in concrete terms and programs.

We firmly believe that this is the only way to create the conditions to effectively solve and deal with the issues that have divided us or have kept us divided.

Suriname intends, under the leadership of my government, to participate even more actively in the multilateral initiatives within the framework of the Union of the South American Nations (UNASUR), within the framework of the Organization of American States, and within the framework of all international collaborations that focus on the Amazon region.

Madam Chairperson,

Suriname finds itself in the most fortunate of circumstances in that we border the Caribbean, we are part of South America, and we also have Europe as a neighbor. This enables us to function naturally as a bridge between these regions. A wonderful example of this is that Suriname and Guyana have the potential to supply the Caribbean with proteins, minerals, and carbohydrates. We can become the agricultural bread-basket of the Caribbean. Collaboration with Brazil should assist our two nations to maximize on the advantages this possibility offers.

From the beginning of 2011, there will be a bridge between Brazil and French Guiana. This means that for the first time in our history the exportation of goods from Suriname overland to northern Brazil becomes a real possibility. When we

think further about a bridge between Suriname and French Guiana, then, through such a physical connection, we are really implementing the Union of South-American States (UNASUR). While such a permanent bridge across the Marowijne River will shape our goals within the frame of the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure in South-America (IIRSA), the creation of a similar bridge over the Corentyne River – a study of which will be undertaken shortly – will vastly open up and create even more possibilities.

In this respect it is important to point out that we support the best possible relations between the Surinamese and Dutch people. An intensive cooperation between Surinamese in the Netherlands and Surinamese here at home will be pursued with new zest. This will not only be visible through the introduction of a lenient visa policy, but also our strengthening of business ties on the basis of mutual advantage in the penetration of South American and Caribbean markets.

France is our immediate neighbor, and as such, plays a role in the intensification of good neighborly affairs of state. In this circumstance, France offers us immediate access to Europe.

At a bi-lateral level, there is far-reaching cooperation with Brazil. Cooperation with the northern states that border Suriname is to be placed high on our agenda. With France, plans to engage in an intensive exchange and cooperation in the areas of safety and fighting criminal activity will receive high priority. We intend to give similar attention to development on both shores of the river-border between our two countries.

Madam Chairperson,

We are convinced that a good cooperation with Guyana, with support from Venezuela and Brazil, should enable both of our countries to provide food, water and building materials for both the Caricom and the French-Antilles market.

With Venezuela we hope to work out as soon as possible ways we can work together for our mutual benefit in the areas of Information Technology, the cultivation of rice aimed at the Caricom market, and improved fishery operations.

We will move very rapidly to become a part of the possibilities offered to us through cooperation in the Petrocaribe initiative.

In this context, we are extremely happy to note that Suriname's proposal with regard to aspects of the content of this initiative is now being employed in the protocol of cooperation between Venezuela and other states.

Madam Chairperson,

People often say that a good neighbor is better than a distant friend. In international relations, this adage is much truer. The extent to which we succeed in becoming part of the integration process and movement taking place between South America and the Caribbean, will be defining for the success with which we can



achieve the sustainable development of our economic, technological, and cultural goals and objectives.

Historically, we, as a people, have had strong cultural relations with Indonesia, India, China and Africa. We have embassies in Jakarta, New Delhi, Beijing, and Johannesburg. With the exception of South Africa, all of these states are also represented in Paramaribo. Due to important mining activities in Suriname, the United States of America and Canada have also become important partners. It is almost self-evident that based on our national goals, we intend to pursue a more intensive cooperation with India, China, Indonesia, South-Africa, the United States of America, and Canada.

Madam Chairperson,

Suriname still offers us everything we need to guarantee a good and prosperous future.

Leadership, political will, and active participation by our people will set us on the path to achieve our goals. Let me issue a call to all Surinamese people: "Wherever you may be, join me in this challenge."

Madam Chairperson,

We, as Surinamese, are aware of the fact that we have at our disposal all the ingredients to build and establish in a sustainable manner a wealthy nation. For this we are grateful. At the same time, however, we are aware that our history has been one in which division has incapacitated our ability to make one fist to hold national prosperity and well-being firmly in hand.

A similar picture of division between the nations of South America, which were colonized by various European powers, has inhibited the formation of a prosperous United States of South America, which should be comparable to the prosperity of the United States of America and Canada.

The wave of history and the consciousness of our peoples and leaders have brought us to this point where our divided past lies behind us – thus enabling us to take hold of opportunities based on the exercise of the greatest possible unity. This is our mission: advancing in unity through the sustainable development of Suriname and our neighboring countries.

I have accepted this challenge of history, and I am assured of the fact that large sections of this nation and large segments of this region are determined and will remain determined to pursue collective peace and development successfully.

Madam Chairperson of the National Assembly, I thank you!