



**Statement by His Excellency Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali,
President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana at the
General Debate of the 77th Session of the United Nations
General Assembly**

UN Headquarters in New York, 21st September 2022

Mr. President,

- I extend my heartfelt congratulations on your election as President of the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. I am confident that your stewardship will lend further credence to the impactful role of multilateralism in resolving global challenges.
- I thank your predecessor Mr. Abdulla Shahid for his shrewd leadership over the past year. I had the distinct privilege of welcoming him recently to Guyana and benefitting from his experience in championing an inclusive future for our youth.
- Congratulations to him, the Secretary General and the General Assembly for the recently passed resolution on the establishment of a United Nations Youth Office. One month ago, in Guyana, I launched the Youth Advisory Council as part of my government's commitment to ensure the involvement of young people in decision-making and development as government works to build Guyana's future.

- We are living in a troubled World which has lost its balance.
- Indeed, our collective actions, as leaders today, will convey to the next generation that their aspirations, their future, and that of the planet are worth fighting for.
- The international community is facing a series of interlocking challenges -
 - a global pandemic,
 - climate challenges,
 - energy and food crises and
 - inter-State conflicts.
- A consequence of the pandemic, approximately 97 million more persons are living on less than \$1.90 per day, significantly increasing the global poverty rate and inequalities.
- The developing world lost revenues and income that were earmarked for the achievement of many Sustainable Development Goals, pushing us further away from our 2030 targets.
- A UN Report in March 2022 spoke definitively to the unequal distribution of covid 19 vaccines and its impact on widening the economic impact between the rich and poor. The study found that low-income countries could have increased their GDP by US\$16.7 billion in 2021 if they had a similar vaccination rate as high-income developed countries.
- HOW ARE WE GOING TO ADDRESS THIS INEQUALITY?

- HOW ARE WE GOING TO ADDRESS THIS INJUSTICE?
- Guyana's position is that there MUST be an immediate re-examination of the financing gap and the debt portfolio of the developing countries to open fiscal space and create an opportunity for -
 - recovery,
 - bridging the gap and
 - attaining the SDG goals.
- Guyana welcomes the global initiatives around pandemic preparedness. It is imperative that we collectively discuss how to address any potential pandemics and health threats so that we are better equipped in the future to avoid the inequalities that exist.

Food Security

Mr. President, Excellencies

- The global food security problem has disproportionately affected us.
- The prevalence of moderate and severe food insecurity trended upwards since 2014, with the estimated increase in 2020 equalling that of the previous 5 years combined. In 2020, 2.37 Billion of the world's population were food insecure.
- Additionally, the World Food Program and FAO warned that acute food insecurity would worsen in 20 hunger hotspots in June – Sept 2022.
- Since the start of the pandemic, global food prices have surged by 65% and are expected to remain high in the medium term, as a result of –
 - Supply chain constraints

- A hike in energy costs,
 - Higher shipping costs,
 - Climate issues and
 - The war in Ukraine.
- Further, since the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war, global food prices increased sharply reaching an all-time high in February 2022. The FAO projects that the production of cereals – a crop relied on the most in the world, would decline by 40 million tonnes or 1.4% when compared to the preceding year.
- The **global food import bill's** trajectory is a whopping **US\$1.8 trillion** this year – a new record (FAO).
 - The **global food import bill** is projected to rise by US\$51 billion from 2021 – \$49 billion of which reflects higher prices (FAO).
 - The question is WHAT ARE WE DOING ABOUT THIS?
 - Can the reversal of export bans on rice and wheat and freeing up of grains, help this situation?
 - The answer is a **resounding YES**. For example, export bans of rice from India and wheat from Russia contributed to a price increase of 12.3% and 9% for rice and wheat respectively.
 - **AS WORLD LEADERS, WE MUST FIND THE BALANCE NOW.**

- In honouring our commitment to promote peace, stability, respect for territorial integrity and democracy, and the human rights of all, we must work collectively to prevent situations that can widen inequality and create social and economic havoc.
- **NOW IS THE TIME** for us to decide if a new approach is needed to guarantee food security, access to health care and quality education, and security from conflict and wars.

According to World Bank and Global Trade, between January – June 2022, 135 policy measures were announced or implemented that affected trade in food and fertiliser. During the same period 34 nations imposed restrictive export measures on food and fertilisers.

The questions, therefore, are –

- whether globalisation is only applicable under normal conditions? Or
- whether it is opportunistic in its application and when a crisis arises, we lock ourselves in and forget about multilateralism and globalisation?

The evidence is glaring: covid-19 vaccination and now access to food and fertiliser.

- **A welcomed initiative is the FAO's Global Food Import Financing Facility (FIFF)** which seeks to respond to the prevailing soaring food import costs and addressing the needs of the most exposed.
- However, there is need to revise the eligibility criteria to accommodate countries beyond the categories of low-income and lower-middle income

groups. This narrow grouping heightens the chance that many at-risk, economically vulnerable countries, such as the Caribbean with large food and food import needs, will be excluded.

Climate Change

Mr President, Excellencies

- We all recognise that there is climate crisis. We must go back to some of the decisions. For example, at COP26 We agreed - no more coal-fired power projects – what is the reality?
- While policies and planning for climate change adaptation are expanding, according to The Adaptation Gap Report 2021: The Gathering Storm, financing and implementation are still far behind where they should be.
- This analysis shows the costs of adaptation are most likely to be higher than the predicted range of USD 140–300 billion annually by 2030 and USD 280–500 billion annually by 2050 for developing nations. In 2019, USD 79.6 billion was allocated to developing nations for planning and carrying out mitigation and adaptation measures. The gap between predicted adaptation costs and existing public adaptation finance flows is generally growing and ranges from five to ten times.
- The paltry \$100 billion pledge (and the failure to meet it) must be viewed in the context of the likely costs of climate action for mitigation, adaptation and addressing loss and damage. It is not enough!
- The adoption of broad rules on carbon markets in Glasgow, has the potential to unlock critical resources for forest-rich countries.

- Forested countries, like Guyana, can potentially earn billions of dollars accessible through the **Voluntary Carbon Markets**.
- However, the current approximate price is US\$10.00 per tonne on the voluntary market - Whilst according to an IMF Report, the price should be closer to US\$70.00 per tonne.
- COP 27 must make progress in refining the rules for the implementation of Article 6 of the *Paris Agreement* and make decisions that would increase the price of carbon traded in voluntary carbon markets.

Energy Security

The world is also faced with an energy crisis -

- In 2019, almost 10% of the world's population did not have access to electricity.
- Electricity generated by fossil fuel increased by 178% between 2000 and 2021.
- Electricity generated from coal increased by 173% for the corresponding period (between 2000 and 2021).
- Based on a recent Energy Outlook from the US Energy Information Administration (EIA), coal-fired generation is expected to be a key energy component as a result of several factors including –
 - a drop in the share of natural gas and
 - rising oil prices.

- Whilst all of this is occurring, the global energy demand is projected to increase by 47% in the next thirty (30) years. According to the IEA, global electricity demand grew by 6 percent in 2021 and is projected to grow by 2.4% in 2022, of which only 50 percent is expected to be met from renewables. As such, the other 50 percent would have to be met from nonrenewable energy sources.
- Furthermore, analysis by the IEA indicates that getting on the path to net-zero emissions by 2050 would require a three-fold increase in the current level of investments in the clean energy transition, to about US\$4 trillion by 2030.
- The question is, therefore, how do we realistically strike this balance?
- This conversation must be practical, comprehensive and fact based. We all recognise that adjustments must be made to save our planet. But how will we craft this adjustment, considering the energy and food crises which are also critical and ensure that inequality and access do not widen.
- In this energy transition, fossil fuel remains necessary. In this context, we are convinced that new entrants like Guyana must be part of this balanced approach. Even as a new entrant, Guyana proposed, at COP26, the removal of subsidies from fossil fuel production and advocated the need for a strong global carbon price.
- We however do not believe that new entrants should be punished by removing access to financing and increasing costs of financing. This in effect will

- protect an existing monopoly,
- drive up the costs of investments and
- deliver a higher priced product.

What is Guyana doing to bridge the gaps of inequalities?

Mr President, Excellencies

We are committed to building a Guyana that addresses issues of food security, climate change, energy security and inequalities within our country and the region.

Under the banner of ONE GUYANA, my government has embarked on many initiatives to help bridge the gaps of inequality and access.

Food Security

- We are on a path to reduce Guyana's food import bill and increase food security- through cultivation and investments in new technology and smart agriculture to position Guyana as a leading food producer in Caricom, providing incentives, capital, land and opportunities for youth and women to participate in the agriculture transformation.
- To this end, we have earmarked 35% of all new agro business to be led by women and have increased youth participation in agriculture with the use of technology by more than 40%.

Climate change:

We are pursuing a Low Carbon Development Strategy which aims at creating a model for –

- Value Ecosystem Services and sustainably developing and managing the blue economy
 - Investment in Clean Energy and Stimulate Low Carbon Growth
 - Protecting Against Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss
 - Alignment with Global Climate and Biodiversity Goals.
- Our forests, which is the size of England, store 19.5 gigatonnes of carbon with a deforestation rate of less than 0.05%
 - We intend to continue the sustainable management of our forest as a key national and global good.

Energy Security:

- Having already achieved net zero, we are working steadfastly in our transition from a 2020 status of 95% dependence on Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) and Diesel to an energy mix which includes -
 - hydropower, solar, wind and natural gas, from which more than 500MW of new generating capacity will come on stream;
 - of which 87% of this generated energy will be from clean and renewable sources.

Education

- Human resource transformation through education is a key driver of our development. The achievement of inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all is inextricably linked to attaining other sustainable development goals, including full employment, poverty eradication and gender equality.

- Access to free quality primary and secondary education will soon be followed by free tertiary education.
- The Government of Guyana has
 - invested in our Indigenous Communities in infrastructure, education, training, health care and installing internet access capabilities; and
 - commenced the training our workforce for 2030 and beyond.
- Soon we will be offering **coding skills** at our primary and secondary levels.

Gender equality

- Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all spheres of life is a national priority for Guyana.
- We are committed to ensuring equal access to education for girls and boys. Indeed, more girls are attending school in Guyana and graduating from university. Our focus now includes ensuring that our boys are not left behind.
- We have initiated several programmes to create earning and employment opportunities for women and promote their financial independence, recognizing that empowerment, is inextricably linked to addressing the root causes of and eradicating discrimination and gender-based violence.

To achieve balanced growth and sustainable and resilient development for Guyana, our strategies must focus on

- developing a diversified economic base,
- strengthen our agricultural systems,

- human resource transformation,
- investing in the social sector to deliver world class health, education and housing for all our people,
- ensuring an inclusive and equitable society in which prosperity is enjoyed by all,
- Building our future, through the strengthening of our democratic values and respect for the rule of law.

Rules based international Order

Mr President, Excellencies

As part of the global family Guyana

- Subscribes to a rules-based international order as well as the need for a resurgence of political will and commitment to protect the multilateral architecture.
- We are deeply concerned about the number of persons living in conflict situations.
- The ongoing war in Ukraine is having terrible effects on the region and country, the impacts of which are disproportionately felt by women and children.
- We urge a speedy and peaceful resolution of the conflict and express support for the efforts of the United Nations' Secretary-General in this regard.

- In our own region, we again join the overwhelming majority of members of the international community in reiterating Guyana's rejection of the sanctions imposed on the Republic of Cuba.
- Guyana also restates its solidarity with the Palestinian people and its support for their dignified existence in their own homeland in accordance with a two-state solution.
- Guyana does not condone or support the threat of, or use of force in relations between states or in the resolution of disputes. Consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, Guyana subscribes to the use of peaceful means to settle disputes.
- In this context, Guyana thanks those who have already expressed support for our candidature for non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council.
- In the matter of Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity - challenged and threatened by Venezuela as it is, we remain – to quote the Secretary General at the opening of the General Debate yesterday – *“committed to make the most of every diplomatic **tool for the pacific settlement of disputes, as set out in the Charter of the United Nations”**”*.
- In this case, 'judicial settlement' as determined by the Secretary General himself.

- The world's nations can be assured that Guyana shall remain true to those peaceful processes and deny every effort to depart from them. The International Court of Justice has already affirmed its jurisdiction in the matter.

Mr President, Excellencies

- This Assembly must reinvigorate the spirit of multilateralism in finding solutions to the extant challenges which bedevil the global community of States.
- I close by reminding us all of an old quote “A hungry man is an angry man”.
- Global inequality is linked to global security and global security is linked to the prosperity of all humanity.

I thank you.