

DRAFT STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY CARL B. GREENIDGE,
ACTING PRESIDENT AND MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE
COOPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA AT THE IDPAD GUYANA SUMMIT
MARCH 8, 2018

Chair and Executives, IDPAD Summit 2018 Committee

- Mr. Vincent Alexander, IDPADA- Guyana and Master of Ceremony
- Dr. Melissa Varswyk, Chair, IDPAD 2018 Summit
- Dr. Norman Ng-A-Qui, IDPAD Conference Committee

Comrade Ministers

- Hon. Cathy Hughes – Minister of Telecommunications and
- Hon. Dominic Gaskin – Minister of Business

Former Prime Minister Samuel Hinds

Heads of Diplomatic Agencies

Members of the heads Table

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Members of the Press

INTRODUCTION

The convening of the Summit on the International Decade of People of African Descent here in Georgetown, Guyana is an undertaking rich in symbolism and potential. I hope that the meeting will contribute meaningfully to improving the situation of People of African Descent within and beyond Guyana.

His Excellency President David Granger intended to join this distinguished gathering but regrettably the exigencies of State do not allow him to do. I can, however, assure you of his abiding interest in the proceedings and especially in the outcomes that you will chart for the way forward.

I am pleased, therefore, in the name of His Excellency and in my own, to extend a cordial welcome to you particularly to our distinguished guests and experts who will enrich the deliberations of the Conference. I trust that in your stay you will have a n opportunity to savour some of the beauty of Guyana and to interface with its very welcoming people. I bid you a most enjoyable stay.

IDPAD

The International Decade for People of African Descent, 2015-2024, was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in Resolution (68/237) adopted on December 23, 2013 under the theme “People of African Descent: Recognition, Justice And Development”. This framework has provided an avenue within which to address the very real, urgent and unique challenges that people of African descent constantly face.

The IDPAD – Guyana Summit has aptly chosen as its theme “where we are, where we ought to be, how we get there”. The theme is intended to facilitate realistic reflection on the challenges and opportunities that define the realities of peoples of African descent.

Such reflection should take account of the historical global legacy of wrongs as well as the moral debt, that still demand redress. The ubiquitous impact and lasting consequences of the transatlantic slave trade have been widely acknowledged including by the United Nations. There has not as yet, however, been an equal and commensurate effort to fully acknowledge the moral debt or to make recompense for the indelible scar on humanity that the unmitigated horrors of slavery represent, especially by those that were the prime beneficiaries of the trade.

It bears mention, that in this regard, many recoil, unjustifiably I suggest, from a full interrogation of this legacy - mistakenly conflating efforts to achieve the wholeness necessary for more pronounced advancement with petty retribution. They insist that we should only look ahead rather than peer into the past. However, the call for both reckoning and reparation in monetary and non-monetary terms is one that cannot be

ignored or forsaken on the altar of altruism. The call is premised on the principles of justice and ethics.

For this reason, CARICOM has committed to the pursuit of this matter and Guyana strongly enjoins those efforts, including the 10 Core Principles to guide efforts at reparation. Its pursuit, beyond all other considerations, is a lasting injunction to watchfulness - Lest We Forget. In actuality, the imperative of watchfulness in reversing the injustices and ignominies of the past is not in any respect misplaced as, increasingly, new forms of slavery and exploitation and some of the old are being visited upon people throughout the world before our very eyes. We forget at our peril.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While watchfulness and reflection constitute core preoccupations, the theme rightfully enjoins consideration of positive endeavours to move to a more desirable situation – where we should be and how to get there. This is important. Chinua Achebe, the renowned Nigerian author and educator, best known for his masterpiece, “Things Fall Apart, has posited that suffering should not be without a purpose. In his novel “A Man of the People” he advances the proposition that suffering should be creative and give birth to something good and lovely. By that I take it that he intends that it be put to that end.

I take it then that people of African descent should turn their trials to that end - to harness the challenges faced as inspiration for greater achievement. In this regard, I wish to commend the initiative and tenacity of the IDPAD Summit Committee in navigating the many and varied obstacles that accompanies the convening of a meeting such as this.

In a special sense, it is fitting that Guyana should have demonstrated leadership in the observance of the Decade by undertaking to host this meeting. Such leadership is consistent with the position Guyana has sought to occupy historically – the 1763 rebellion pre-Haiti revolution, for example - and are consistent with Guyana’s principled approach and commitment even on the occasion of the founding of our Republic:

- At considerable political, diplomatic and economic cost to itself Guyana demonstrated consistent support for the African Liberation Movement.
- At a time when it was not popular so to do, President Burnham highlighted the plight of Africans and opposed the exploitation, inequality and indignity associated with colonial oppression.
- Throughout the decades of independence struggles in African countries in the 1960's to 1970's Guyana would have been a "safe harbor" for Africans in transit and in pursuit of freedom and self-determination in their respective countries.
- Guyana's position was principled – the political praxis being undergirded by the philosophical belief in the indivisible nature of human freedom.
- Guyana could not be truly free while Southern Africa sweltered in an environment of callous oppression.

In sport, Guyana decreed that those who embraced the racist system of Apartheid would not be welcome on our shores.

Regrettably, many of struggles of bygone eras remain with us today. That we still grapple with many of these same issues bespeaks the importance of the framework provided by IDPAD and of this Conference. A weighty responsibility therefore devolves upon you as participants.

The Government of Guyana is committed to playing its part in this regard. President David Granger has committed to supporting the work of the IDPAD – G Committee in achieving the objectives of the Decade. The Government has already made good on the majority of the agreed commitments, including the approval of resources within the 2018 national budget for core undertakings identified by the Country Coordinating Mechanism of the IDPAD – G.

We commend the coordination that has taken place through the auspices of the Country Coordinating Mechanism to ensure focused, consistent and harmonious action to deliver

on the objectives of the Decade in Guyana. The Government looks forward to building a sustainable partnership based on trust, meaningful engagement and a common commitment to the objectives of the Decade.

Distinguished Guests,

One of the primary objectives of the International Decade for People of African Descent is to promote, respect and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms for people of African descent, as recognized in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights - the 70th Anniversary of the signing of which we celebrate this year. The Decade is intended to promote a greater knowledge of and respect for the diverse heritage, culture and contribution of people of African descent to the development of societies. More so, the agenda encourages the adoption and strengthening of national, regional and international legal frameworks in consonance with the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and to ensure their full and effective implementation.

The ancestors of current African people have, for many years, fought and championed the struggle for freedom, selfhood, respect, recognition and equality among humanity. Innumerable persons of African descent have shaped societies across the globe and while some are known and a few recognized, too often many of their stories go untold.

This brings to mind the old adage that until lions get their historians the tale of the hunt will always favour the hunter.

The story of people of African descent ought to be told and, better told. Beyond the challenges and setbacks there are also innumerable stories of the people who have come through, who have indeed “made it”. The story of the people of African descent is very much a story of a people of indomitable will and incomparable resilience, who despite the challenges still stand proud for the contributions that they have made in building this land that has we become home. It is a story that is very much the story of Guyana but which is replicated throughout the Caribbean, in North America and across the globe.

For this reason, the Government of Guyana welcomes the observance of the Decade as an important pillar in our overall efforts to provide the good life for all Guyanese.

So, to those who might be tempted to take the low road in assuming that pride in one's origin or the defence of rights is a zero sum game; or those who consider that in this venture there is somehow an inherent threat to national unity, I offer as a careful reminder or timely entreaty the words distilled through the wisdom of the ages - that those who in pursuit of their own rights and freedoms deny others their own, by their actions engender the demise of the enjoyment of the very rights and freedoms they seek.

In this vein, the objectives of the IDPAD as any other initiative that bring wholeness and healing to the peoples of our beloved country, rather than detracting from social cohesion will contribute to the consolidation, appreciation and preservation of our Guyanese culture. Guyana needs the contributions all its people of African descent. And all Guyanese of African descent in full accord with all other races and citizens of Guyana must truly live our national motto of - One People, One Nation, One Destiny.

On this basis, over the next four days, I am confident that your strong commitment, compassion and solidarity with people of African descent, which has occasioned this gathering, will fuel significant contributions for the realisation of the Summit's objectives. There are critical imperatives to be pursued if all people of African descent are indeed to get to where they should be.

This IDPAD Summit should both impart knowledge and make a tangible and meaningful change to the challenges and adverse condition of People of African Descent worldwide, but more specifically in Guyana and the Caribbean. I understand that it is envisaged that this meeting will produce an outcome document with a template of concrete actions.

I trust that you will be able to tackle many of the pressing issues and offer practical solutions for addressing them – the need for changes in our educational system, especially for our boys, updating the curriculum to take account of the history of people of African descent, the situation with our youth and youth unemployment, the rising tide of the

culture of violence of all types, health and lifestyles - in many instances what we're eating is eating us, the question of ancestral lands, economic inclusion and empowerment, opportunities in the new economic landscape of Guyana, improving ties with Africa and stronger diasporic relations.

Excellencies,

Our national anthem with a suitable note of optimism on which I close:

Green land of Guyana, our heroes of yore,
Both bondsmen and free, laid their bones on your shore.
This soil so they hallowed, and from them are we,
All sons of one Mother, Guyana the free.

It is an honour for Guyana to host the IDPAD Summit 2018 and the Government of Guyana is happy to have partnered in making today's meeting a reality.

In working towards our objectives we can be inspired anew by the examples of our own heroes of yore. We build upon the legacy of the great sons and daughters of the soil of African descent: Cuffy – our national hero; LFS Burnham; Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow – trade unionism; Nana Culley – Political Activist; Walter Rodney; Ivan Van Sertima; Clive Lloyd; and Eddie Grant – through his songs of political protest, to name a few. [Ours is a legacy of resistance, enlightenment, building and restoration]. To these must be added a new generation of outstanding Guyanese of Africans who continue to make their imprint on every walk of life, from Valerie Amos in the UK to those in Wakanda. I see that some of you appear to be perplexed by this reference. That means that you are not cinema buffs. The reference is an acknowledgment of the performance of two Guyanese, Ms. Letitia Wright and Shaunette Rene Wilson in the hugely successful movie “Black Panther”, which is a landmark in very many ways. There is much to celebrate, much to be done, much to offer and certainly much work ahead. I am confident that you are more than equal to the task and the IDPAD Guyana Summit will be a resounding success.

Thank you.