

**ADDRESS TO UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT RIO+20**

BY

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Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

The United Nations was founded to take on big challenges. And the issues under discussion and negotiation in this centre are among the most important challenges the international community has every faced.

How to feed and power the world; how to provide the minerals and metals that are essential to economic prosperity; how to alleviate poverty and promote equity; how to safeguard the ecosystem services on which global economies and societies depend. We all know that these are difficult and tightly inter-connected challenges. And we all know that meeting them is immensely more difficult in an increasingly populous and prosperous world.

Twenty years ago, the Earth Summit sought to inspire a generation to meet these challenges. But today, inspiration is not enough. We cannot leave this city at the end of this week with no more than

simplistic messages of inspiration. Instead, we need to agree specific, practical actions that are relevant to today's realities.

And to do so, we need both boldness of vision and an agreement on specific actions that match the scale of the challenges we face.

The boldness of vision should be set out through a high quality set of sustainable development goals as has been discussed in recent days.

But goals on their own are insufficient. If we are to shift the world onto a more sustainable development trajectory, we need the bold vision to be translated into specific, practical actions that sustainably use our planet's natural capital and energy sources for the benefit of all.

These actions will be difficult and expensive, there is no magic way to fixing the problems caused by unsustainable growth in the past. So we need to face up to the need for funding. The international community has acknowledged that today's developed world should pay. This has often been justified on the grounds of fairness – the developed world both caused the problem and can afford to pay for solving it. But that sometimes obscures the fact that the solutions to the major issues we discuss – such climate change, bio-diversity, water regulation – are far more prevalent in the developing world. So we need to see investment where the solutions are – and that will require significant financial transfers.

Just focussing on climate change, commitments have been made – a total of US\$30 billion in fast start funding for the period 2010 to 2012 rising to US\$100 billion per annum by 2020. Experience with fast start funding has not demonstrated either speed or focus, but the commitments to 2020 provide an opening to start the process of correcting the centuries-old imbalances in the global economy which have meant that the natural capital of the developing world was provided to the world for free.

In dealing with this financing, we need to be clear about the special conditions that exist across our countries – especially those that apply to small highly indebted middle income countries.

If the right international conditions are created, Guyana will not be found lacking in the search for solutions. I hope that we are already proving that progress on sustainable development is possible. I want to highlight three ways in which I hope we are helping.

Firstly, three years ago, we started the implementation of our Low Carbon Development Strategy – with the deliberate goal of creating a global model to show how promoting sustainable development could be a positive development choice for countries such as ours.

Working with Norway, we have become one of the first countries in the world to sell environmental services. We are maintaining 99.5% of our forest, the highest rate in the world. We are converting almost the entirety of our energy base to clean energy – and by 2017, will have

delivered a 92% cut in our already low energy-related greenhouse gas emissions. That is significantly more than even the most progressive industrialised countries. 11,000 of our Amerindian and other forest dependent households are receiving solar panels and accessing electricity for the first time. 90,000 low income households are receiving laptops and ICT training, so that we can prevent the emergence of a digital divide and equip the next generation for high value service industries. We are setting up an Amerindian Development Fund, and providing help for small enterprises to start and expand sustainable industries. According to the IMF, our Low Carbon Development Strategy will add 1% to annual GDP growth.

The second area where we hope that our experiences will be of benefit to other countries is in our work with other South American countries. When Guyana was Pro Tempore President of the Union of South America last year, we started work to highlight opportunities for South America to expand its already high contribution to global sustainable development, and are now working to translate that into specific actions that we can take together. South America is 5% of the world's people and 6% of its economy – but the contribution made to global sustainable development is far greater than these figures would suggest. This is true of two assets in particular. Firstly, 62% of South America's energy sources are renewable, the highest of all the world's continents. Secondly, the Amazon Biome, which is the greatest climate utility on earth, contains at least 10% of the world's known biodiversity, 15% of the world's total freshwater discharge from rivers, and sequesters billions of tons of carbon. If the right

international conditions are created, our Continent can make an even greater contribution. Our hosts here in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, are already leading the way. Since 2004, they have cut deforestation and delivered more greenhouse gas emissions reductions than all Annex I countries put together, while at the same time delivering a high rate of GDP growth, lifting millions out of poverty and exporting large amounts of food to help the world with its food security challenges. Continuing from the work we started last year, Guyana is identifying the next wave of priorities we could progress across the Continent.

And thirdly: as well as our work in Guyana itself and with our South American sisters and brothers, we are also working with forest countries from across the world through a variety of groupings, from the Interim REDD+ Partnership to the Three Basins Initiative.

But in all cases, experience has shown that sustainable development requires actions that are complex, long term, at times controversial and politically difficult. It requires courage and political leadership in developing and industrialised countries alike. In all countries, including Guyana, there are regressive forces who don't want to see sustainable development strategies succeed because they threaten deep-seated vested interests. This has been evident for some years in the world's largest economy and most powerful country – but whether in large countries or small ones like mine, these regressive forces can cause immense damage, and leadership from the world's progressives must unite to defeat them.

It is only through first order leadership that this can happen. In the remainder of time for this summit, I hope that the presence of so many leaders will help to create the largest coalition of progressive forces ever seen, to drive back those who would hold us back. History will judge whether the progressive forces united and strongly pushed the agenda forward. And history can be made in the days that remain.

Thank you.