

Guyana People's National Congress Reform

14th Biennial Congress: August 27, 2004

Message by the Hon. Robert Corbin MP

Excerpted from their website:

SALUTATIONS

Madam Chairperson

Comrade Chairperson, members of the Central Executive of the Peoples National Congress Reform, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, distinguished guests and friends, Delegates and Observers from Guyana and our overseas groups in North America & the UK.

WELCOME

I wish to bid you all welcome to our 14th Biennial Congress and to sincerely thank our special invitees, who have considered it worthwhile to share this opening session with us.

We extend a special welcome to the representatives of our overseas Party groups and other overseas Guyanese organizations. You have demonstrated your commitment to our Party and continued interest in the land of your birth and, at great expense, have traveled to join us at this time as we seek to concretize our plans for the future development of our green and great land of Guyana. I salute your presence and assure you of our deep gratitude for your moral and material support to our Party over the years. You have inspired us to continue the struggle for peace, development and justice here on the home front. Your participation in this Congress is significant and I hope that you will share your knowledge and ideas with us over the next two days, as we seek to finalise the architectural and engineering plans for building a platform for peace, national cohesion and reconstruction of our country.

We also say a special welcome to our comrades who have traveled from the far reaches of our hinterland,

- from the Mabaruma, Kaituma and Matthews Ridge sub-regions of the North West District, through the mighty rivers of the Barima, Kaituma, the Atlantic Coast, the Pomeroon river then along the Essequibo Coast crossed the mouth of mighty Essequibo river and then by the west coast and west bank demerara highway to be here;
- from the North, Central and southern savannahs of the Rupununi leaving the pristine beauty of the rolling hills of the Kanuku mountains crossing the mighty Essequibo at Kurupukari and traveling those twelve long hours via the Lethem / Georgetown Road to be here;
- from the Pakaraima mountains in sub-regions one and two of Region 8, Potaro/Siparuni by air and overland through difficult terrain to be here;
- from the mountainous and riverain regions of Region 7, Upper Mazaruni/Potaro by air and through the Kamaramg, Cuyuni, Potaro Mazaruni and Essequibo rivers to be here;

Comrades I salute you and congratulate you for defying the odds at this very difficult period of Guyana's history to be here with us.

We also welcome our comrades who have come from the Coastal Regions. From the far east in Corentyne to the far west of the Pomeroon River of Region 2 and from the far south in Kwakwani, Region 10. I thank you for considering it important enough to be here.

We also want to extend a special welcome to our Youth. Your presence here in such large numbers provides assurance that the future of our Party is secure and in safe hands. To our young delegates- I salute you and invite the entire Congress to acknowledge your presence. Indeed, without you, the entire Congress would be meaningless.

Esteemed Delegates, Observers and Friends,

We value and appreciate the sacrifices you have all made to be with us. I am convinced that you have undergone such great sacrifice and made such a mighty efforts because of your love for this great Party and your concern for the future of our country. You are also here because of your conviction that the only party that has the vision and competence to lead the Guyana rescue effort and save our country from descending into total economic collapse and social disintegration is the Peoples National Congress Reform. Your interest in the affairs of our native land and, more particularly, the work of your party is a source of strength and encouragement.

As we commence this 14th Biennial Congress we must first give thanks to the Almighty for guiding us safely through the last biennium. Without his blessings and grace we would never have been able to overcome the many difficulties, trials and tribulations, temptations and provocations that we have faced throughout the period. Indeed, it was a period during which our country remained in serious crisis and our very survival was threatened. I thank God that we have persevered and we must invoke his presence throughout this Congress to guide us to make the correct decisions that would redound to the benefit of all the people of our dear land. I wish to personally thank Him for his aid and guidance. Without his help I too might not have been here today, fully inspired and invigorated, filled with the mood of optimism that this Congress will be a historic one: one that redefines our Party and its role in reconstruction of our fractured society. So I will continue to lift up my eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help.

THE PURPOSE OF CONGRESS

Congress is a time for assessment of the progress made during the period since the last Congress. Assessment of how we have implemented decisions. Assessment of how the country has progressed. Assessment of how we discharged the mandate given to us by the members at the last Congress.

Congress is also the time to examine our successes and our failures. Of even greater importance, however, Congress is a time for analyzing our circumstances and planning for the future.

Over the next two days we must approach these tasks with frankness, seriousness and objectivity. We must ensure that at the end of our deliberations, we leave the Sophia site with a renewed sense of purpose. We must leave Sophia determined to implement decisions that will ensure that our suffering country and its many peoples are rescued from the present journey to destruction.

TRIBUTE TO OUR FALLEN STALWARTS

August is a significant month in the history of our country. Historian David Granger reminded his audience of this in his address two Fridays ago at the Pan African Congress and I invite you to obtain and read a copy of that address.

August is also a significant month for our Party and not only because it has become the month of our Biennial Congresses. Nineteen years ago, on the 6th August some four months before scheduled General Elections, our Party suddenly lost our founder Leader, Linden Forbes

Sampson Burnham. He had led our Party for thirty continuous years. Many felt the Party could not survive without him. In August 1985, our Party demonstrated its strength in adversity. We arose, like the proverbial phoenix, from the ashes of our grief and within thirteen days, held our Biennial Congress between the 18th to the 25th August under the theme, "WE CAN, WE MUST, WE WILL."

In that very year and month we concluded the smooth transition of leadership when we elected our second Leader, Mr. Hugh Desmond Hoyte.

Today, as we open the First Biennial Congress since the sudden departure of our late Leader, on December 22, 2002, we pay tribute to him for so heroically bearing the torch passed on to him by Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham.

Our tribute is for not only assuming the Leadership in difficult times, but also for having the vision to chart a new course for our Party and country. Hugh Desmond Hoyte understood changing conditions and he recognized the need for our Party to adjust to new circumstances. In his last Congress address he stated:

"Guyana must change to survive. And we must be in the forefront of the battle to bring about such change. Our Party will have to transform itself to cope with the inevitable change. It is not reasonable to believe that we can continue along the same old paths and use the same old methods.

Change is as necessary a part of politics as it is of life. Those who do not change become dinosaurs, irrelevant and extinct. If we do not adapt to new circumstances, new challenges and new responsibilities, we cannot survive, much less overcome"

All quarters - friend and foe alike - paid tribute to him and acknowledged his contributions for the development of our country; charting a new political direction; introducing electoral and other reforms for which others want to claim credit; and successfully implementing the Economic Recovery Programme. For his outstanding contribution to this Party we pay tribute to him.

Since our last Biennial Congress we have also lost several old stalwarts who made valuable contributions for the development of our Party. The list is too long to recite. During this Congress, we have set aside time for a roll call of names of our fallen comrades so that we can properly honour them. I must, however, mention the names of Stella Assanah, our late Cde. Viola Burnham and our indefatigable former Deputy Leader and General Secretary, Ptolemy Alexander Reid.

We salute our fallen stalwarts and pledge that their sacrifices for our Party and Guyana would not have been in vain. I am sure that this Congress is with me when I say: We will not let them down. Their spirits provide us with vision and inspiration for the difficult tasks ahead. I am satisfied this will be a good Congress. I am convinced we will leave here on Sunday ready and re-energized for the work begun by our founders and for which we have the honour to be tasked with completing.

REVIEW OF THE WORK OF OUR PARTY AND THE STATE OF OUR NATION **THE PARTY**

Since our last Biennial Congress, we have managed to make progress in very difficult circumstances. Despite tremendous odds, we confronted the challenges and have been able to

triumph. Notwithstanding Hugh Desmond Hoyte's sudden death, we fulfilled his prediction of a seamless transition, which culminated at our Special Congress on February 1st last year. We also held our strategic Leadership retreat in February to redefine our vision and reorganize our Party for greater efficiency. We concentrated our efforts on Good Governance in order to make real our Congress decision of promoting a model of Shared Governance for Guyana. We worked to give meaning to the long fought-for Inquiry into Extra-Judicial Killings. We resuscitated many non-functioning groups. We engaged in outreach activities in all the Regions of Guyana.

We strengthened our contact with Guyanese organizations and stakeholders, including trade unions, religious and private sector organizations.

We initiated and developed the programme for economic self-sufficiency in various communities.

Indeed, there are several projects in East Coast villages which are still active and which changed many unemployed youth into self-employed poultry farmers. I wish to thank those who helped and the Congress ought to congratulate all those who worked to make this programme successful.

Internationally, we expanded our outreach to the Guyanese Diaspora and re-established our overseas groups and formed new ones. The presence at this Congress of delegates from groups in Toronto, New York, New Jersey, Atlanta, Miami, Washington DC and from the United Kingdom is evidence of our successes in this area.

We strengthened our contacts with Guyanese and Guyanese organizations in CARICOM and farther afield. Indeed, I have had the pleasure of being sponsored by many of them to address gatherings in Antigua, St. Martin, St. Eustacius, Miami, Atlanta, Washington DC, New York, New Jersey, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Vancouver and London. We strengthened our links with political Parties in CARICOM.

In his Report tomorrow, the General Secretary will provide details for us to evaluate. Given our limitations in financial and human resources, we made progress. That does not mean there were no failures or room for improvement. As examples, our Party's Education programme lagged behind and did not achieve our stated objectives. Our programme to promote economic projects in the depressed communities did not expand as we had hoped.

One of the weaknesses I identified at our last General Council was the poor performance of some of our Leaders and their loss of contact with the grass roots. I suggested then, as I do now, we must seriously consider a System of Recall when persons fail to perform. We have lamented the failure of some of our elected representatives to honour their obligations to the people in their constituencies. We have had to resort to extreme measures to remove the Mayor of Linden. He felt he was elected in his own right and not as a representative of the Peoples National Congress Reform. He did not see himself as accountable to the people of Linden. These and other matters will engage your attention during this Congress.

However, the most dangerous development since we last met has been the growth and murderous activities of Death Squads. Our greatest failure was our unsuccessful attempt to re-engage the PPP/C to operate in the interest of all Guyanese. We failed to convince them that Guyana is doomed unless there is a reorganization of our system of Governance.

THE NATION

Since our last Biennial Congress, Guyana remains in crisis. The economic crisis is characterized by mismanagement and the absence of significant new investments; the continuous closure of businesses; the flight of human and financial capital; the loss of entrepreneurs and the spiraling cost of living.

Indeed, everyone in Guyana has felt the impact of outrageous electricity bills, high water rates, rates and taxes, taxes on telephone calls, and even more devastating the assault on our senior citizens and pensioners. The unprecedented levels of unemployment; the rising levels of poverty; the decline of the social and economic conditions in many depressed and marginalized communities all over Guyana; and, unparalleled levels of corruption and the blatant lack of accountability: Just think of the scams.

The stone scam. The gold scam. The law books scam. The re-migrant duty-free-vehicle scam. The Cane Grove Conservancy dam scam. The IAST scam. The export of dolphins scam.

The flagrant and continued abuse of Lotto funds. The specialized cell phone tracking computer and the Good Hope trio. These are all national and international embarrassments together with the cocaine-in-lumber, cocaine-in-molasses, cocaine-in rice, cocaine-in-cricket-bats and cocaine-in-fish and other such criminal enterprises.

I could go on to continue listing these unsavory developments. But, would publicity of these issues change anything? Regrettably, embarrassment, humiliation and shame are not words in the vocabulary of the ruling elite in Guyana.

The security situation has deteriorated. Violent crime has reached uncontrolled levels. Drug trafficking has assumed monumental proportions. Guyana's new international reputation now stands tall as a Narco-State. The HIV-AIDS pandemic challenges our survival as a nation. And, as if these are not enough self-inflicted wounds, the trafficking in persons has attracted international attention.

Young people continue to lose hope in our country's future. The rich, and those who with opportunity, leave and seek their fortunes in other lands. The poor, the powerless and the patriots have resigned themselves to a future of despondency and despair.

MY DEAR COMRADES, DELEGATES AND SPECIAL INVITEES

It gives me no pleasure whatsoever to present such a report on the condition of our people and the state of our country.

I would have preferred to report that there was substantial improvement in the quality of life and the state of our Republic. I would have preferred to report to you that the Government and the Opposition were hard at work putting in place the Constitutional requirements that would allow for effective parliamentary operations, respectful political interface, successful collaboration our between public and private sector organizations and effective cooperation between our many different races and participation and involvement by civil society organizations in the tasks of building ONE GUYANA.

Instead, as I speak with you today, the Government steadfastly refuses to respond coherently to the most basic requirements for completing the Constitutional Reform procedures and bringing closure to the Constructive Engagement process.

How insulting are their vacuous claims after the visit of that distinguished American statesman who they invited to our shores.

The end result of our continuing crisis is that our hopes for integrity in our political culture, progress in our race and social relations and growth in our productive activities are all in tatters. Instead, we have achieved new levels of indecency, poverty, disenchantment and hopelessness. Whereas we had hoped for collaboration and consensual politics for the good of

the country and the welfare of our peoples, we must now accept that the PPP is only concerned with promoting its agenda of self-interest, division and democratic centralism.

The PPP refuses to recognize that it has chosen a path which can only lead to further decay and destruction. The President and the Government cannot see that unless Guyana truly belongs to all Guyanese, we can never gain international respectability. Justice, progress and prosperity will continue to elude our people. The uniting of our many peoples into **ONE GUYANA** is the pre-condition for achieving **PEACE, NATIONAL COHESION AND RECONSTRUCTION.**

What we cannot do is give up hope or give in to despair. We cannot accept a country in which death squads roam the streets plundering and killing innocent people. We cannot accept the wanton and incompetent destruction of our major industries. We cannot accept the demolition of our private sector.

We cannot accept the squandering of public funds without due regard for rules or regulations. We cannot accept that the President of this country walks about our country doling out the peoples' money as if it were his own personal property. And this he does in defiance of the very laws for budgetary control and expenditure that he is constitutionally required to uphold. He strangles the elected Local Government bodies that his Government has starved of resources while he insolently boasts of local Government reform.

We cannot accept the inhumane and deplorable conditions in which market vendors have been forced into an Arcade on the Toolsie Persaud site, while the President implements a political vendetta by refusing to honour the rulings of the Courts that required the Government to pay adequate compensation.

We cannot accept the continued misuse, mismanagement and corruption of taxpayer resources provided us by aid agencies, while the Government tramples on workers rights, violates Court Orders and seek every opportunity to vilify and destroy the Trade Union Movement.

I ASK YOU COMRADES! CAN WE CONTINUE TO ACCEPT THIS TREATMENT?

We believe that Guyana could and should do better. There is no reason why we should accept the plan for us to become the region's pariah for notoriety because of the irregularities and indecencies in our system of governance.

BUILD AND STRENGTHEN ALLIANCES

We must now build and strengthen our alliances with others. We must and reach out to those who, like us, also see brighter horizons and are willing to struggle for a more disciplined, orderly, productive and prosperous Guyana.

ONE GUYANA in which we all citizens, irrespective of race, religion and political persuasion can be freed from the threat of unchecked crime, can utilize public services without paying bribes, can tender for contracts knowing that awards will be made solely on merit, and can send their children to write examinations knowing they are not competing with those whose parents have already bought their results before entering the examination room.

The most regrettable casualties of these conditions are our youth who have become so disillusioned that nearly three-quarters of all of them have not only lost all hope for a future here and fervently wish for a future elsewhere.

If Guyana is to survive we must all find ways of acting now. There is no time left. We must seize what may well be our last opportunity to save Guyana. The alternative is to spend our remaining days in gloom and despair and sadly reflect that we have bequeathed no worthwhile legacy to future generations.

This situation that confronts us is the reason why we have chosen as our theme for this Congress, the building of a platform for PEACE, NATIONAL COHESION AND RECONSTRUCTION.

FAILURE OF CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT

We re-entered discussion with the PPP/C Government under the banner of Constructive Engagement. Our aim was to resolve our differences and improve the quality of the lives of all Guyanese. Our particular concern was for our supporters. They were being, and are still being methodically marginalized and impoverished by the PPP/C administration. This is not an emotional statement. It is not political propaganda.

In the bauxite industry, every single worker at EVERTON in New Amsterdam, KWAKWANI on the upper Berbice River and LINMINE at Linden has been dismissed since our last Congress. Prime Minister Hinds has refused to support a financial recovery plan submitted by the Management. He has signed away agreements on the use of the Berbice River and the future of LINMINE. These agreements have provided for Pensioners to lose substantial benefits and for misery for every former bauxite worker.

After several discussions with President Jagdeo, I signed, in good faith on your behalf, a Communiqué dated May 6th 2003, and a subsequent Follow-Up Agreement dated 18th June, 2003. These documents brought an end to the long political impasse and detailed the decisions made and set out a time-frame for implementation.

Many Guyanese breathed a sigh of relief. There was a new mood of optimism and expectancy. I too hoped that this was the beginning of a new era. I hoped that trust would be developed and the foundations would be laid for future relations in which all Guyanese would benefit.

These hopes and expectations were short lived. No sooner had the ink dried, the PPP propaganda machinery, the misused state media and the phantom letter-factory, went into full gear. They peddled the line of the Government's generosity of spirit and referred to what was called as 'major concessions to the PNCR'. However, the agreements dealt mostly with matters enshrined in our amended Constitution, unanimously approved by Parliament and assented to by the President.

For example, the work of the Public Procurement Commission, the Parliamentary Sector Committees and the Rights Commissions.

For example, the urgent matters agreed in the St Lucia Statement of 2nd July 1998;

For example, establishing the Parliamentary Management Committee of the National Assembly and the Ethnic Relations Commission;

For example, the failure to complete projects agreed under the Depressed Communities Needs Committee and delay in implementation of its decisions.

The only really new items were a development programme for Region 10, and Inclusive and Shared Governance. This item of inclusive and shared governance was not strictly new. It is

the subject of an entire Chapter, Chapter 3: on Governance, in the “National Development Strategy (2001-2010) - A Policy Framework for eradicating Poverty and unifying Guyana.”

The National Development Strategy represented a turning point in our history. For the first time, one-hundred-and-eight-nine (189) Guyanese from all walks of life; from all geographic regions; from our villages, town and hinterland communities; from all racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds and across all political persuasions came together, discussed together and worked together on the future of our country.

They produced the National Development Strategy, long identified as the absolute pre-condition for good governance. The NDS is a framework for us to follow. It is a policy paper that should be recommended reading for every Guyanese.

It states that there can be little lasting and sustainable social and economic development in the absence of good governance.

It states that there is little participation by Guyanese non-governmental groups and other sections of civil society, in the formulation of public policies and in their implementation.

It states that Opposition parties, as always in the country’s political history, are not routinely and formally consulted on legislative matters. Nor are the trade unions and the private sector.

It states that participation in decision-making processes is sought only in times of crisis, particularly when there is industrial strife and political violence.

It states that most Guyanese do not appear to have developed that level of political sophistication which demands good governance as of right. This is the basic reason for the necessity to establish guidelines, rules of procedure and laws to ensure inclusivity.”

To suggest that Guyanese are unaware of the solution to our problems would be to engage in self-deception. The irony is that the NDS was developed under the direction of President Jagdeo, who was then Minister of Finance. Indeed, my high hopes for the success of the Constructive Engagement process was born out of this knowledge.

Since our last Congress, our best efforts have failed to establish Constructive Engagement as the basis for good faith and frank discussion. We have failed to reach an agreement on how we must attend to the many urgent and critical problems which our country faces. Every citizen knows what those problems are. Every citizen - now fearful and despondent about the future - still hopes that we will find a way to resolve these problems.

How more ridiculous can we get when the President seeks to trivialize the clear suggestions of President Carter by using a private-sector business lunch to tell the Leader of the Opposition to call him on the telephone! Are we really serious about the future of Guyana?

COMRADES, DO YOU THINK THEY ARE SERIOUS?

The National Development Strategy represents the wisdom and the strength of our people. It suggests the way forward out of our interminable predicament. We are prepared to use its model as the basis for working together, for uniting our many peoples into ONE GUYANA and as the means for achieving PEACE, NATIONAL COHESION AND RECONSTRUCTION.

THE DEATH SQUAD ISSUE

One of the most shocking developments in Guyana since we last met was that of the Death Squad, the manner in which the Government sought to respond to the calls by all major stakeholders in Guyana for an Inquiry, and, the implications for the future of democracy in Guyana. In typical Guyanese style, not many took this matter seriously until January 2004 after the brutal and shocking gunning down in Georgetown of Axel Williams followed by Shaffie Bacchus and the revelations by George Bacchus that the Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Ronald Gajraj, was involved.

The PNCR also gave early warning to the Nation on the emergence of these death squads and their implication, similar to those that were given with respect to the impending failure of the Constructive Engagement process. I read without comment some excerpts from a Statement made by the PNCR on March 4, 2003 condemning the brutal murder of a talented young Guyanese Student, Yohance Douglas, who was gunned down on Sherrif Street on March 1st last year:

“ However, PNCR intelligence sources suggest that the group included persons attached to the new and dangerous “Phantom Force”. The politically hand picked Fountain Squad of the Guyana Police Force is reportedly, the replacement for the notorious “Black Clothes Police” and reports directly to Home Affairs Minister, Ronald Gajraj. Its apparent purpose is to summarily execute anyone whose name is placed on a special list given to them.

There can be no other public policy purpose served by this madness. The PNCR hopes that those in the PPP/C regime who may still have consciences will have enough moral fibre to disassociate themselves from this action, publicly, and preserve some of their integrity and reputations.

No one has been fooled by the supposed substitution of the notorious Black Clothes Squad by the Fountain Squad. This has further been accentuated by Gajraj handpicking this gang to carry out the nefarious activities of his Party. This is dangerous and sinks Guyana further into crisis and anarchy.

Let this be a wake up call for all of us. Yesterday it was Yohance. Tomorrow it could be you or your child.”

All are involved. All are consumed.”

Now this statement was made on March 4, 2003 not January, 2004. Time does not permit me to point to the various other warning signals. A perusal of our web site would indicate how much has been said by the PNCR before the monster grew beyond control. I have only pointed to this early statement to illustrate that the PNCR has been behaving as a responsible Opposition Party. Sufficient, however, has been placed in the public domain about this Death Squad issue. At this time, I only repeat the position of the Party on this matter.

A basic tenet of democracy is the right to life. If this right is being routinely and systematically violated by the PPP/C Government's reluctance to act appropriately, Guyanese must judge the value which the State places on the life of each citizen. The fact that Guyanese must picket and march to get the State to address the issue of organized murder is a clear indication of the state of our democracy. There could be no doubt that the scourge of death squads in Guyana has undermined the democratic process, in so far that people feel this new situation will affect their freedom of choice in the electoral process and renders meaningless the concept of free and fair elections. This issue, therefore, goes to the core of good governance and must be addressed

within that context. Unless the issue of good governance is addressed, the democratic process in Guyana will also be dead.

The question that this Congress must answer is the extent to which we are prepared to continue our resolute stand on this matter.

FACING THE CHALLENGES

Many persons have suggested that most of the problems confronting Guyana will miraculously disappear if and when the PNCR returns to the National Assembly of the Parliament. Our Party has, however, always contended that the economic crisis was not a result of the political impasse, but a direct result of ill thought out, lopsided, incoherent and discriminatory policies. In short, Bad Governance.

There is one most glaring example. There was a heated public debate about the PNCR's non participation in the 2004 Budget debate. The PPP passed a Budget which identified and allocated expenditure. The President now proceeds to make unilateral allocation of public funds as he tours around Guyana as if he has assumed the powers of National Assembly. In these circumstances, of what benefit was that budget debate.

Our Party also pointed out that the security situation deteriorated because of a combination of factors, not least of which were the politicizing of the crime situation by the Government for narrow political gains; the decline in the morale and efficiency of the Guyana Police Force; the deteriorating economic situation; the escalating drug trade and the apparent collusion of the State with criminals and criminal enterprises.

Many, including the Government, found it convenient to find scapegoats, rather than dealing with the root causes. First, it was the PNCR, terrorists; then it was PNCR inspired crime; then the jail break escapees and later still, it was the escalating Caribbean crime situation. Every other reason was found except the Government's incompetence to provide security for its citizens. Today, citizens may be in a better position to evaluate the security situation and draw their own conclusions on the daily phantom killings and the unexplained involvement of some members of the Police Force and high ranking political functionaries.

I recommend as compulsory reading the National Development Strategy Paper for those who still labour under these misconceptions that the simple return of the PNCR to National Assembly will solve our problems. The more intelligent approach for this Congress is to determine the reason for this state of affairs and prescribe the way in which these serious issues may be addressed. The ultimate question for us as a nation is whether we are willing and ready to face the challenges that the prescription may suggest.

THE REALITY OF OUR PRESENT DILEMMA

During the preparation of my Congress Address I had cause to review the proceedings of our last Biennial Congress, held in August 2002, and reread the Congress address of our late Leader. It is axiomatic that his analysis of the previous two years seems to be so similar to mine today. If I had substituted what he wrote then you might have concluded that he was writing for the period 2002-2004 and that he had clairvoyant powers. The truth is that the patient, Guyana, continues to suffer from the same ailment and the symptoms and effects are the same. A review of the history of Guyana will also reveal that the disease is not a result of a recent infection, but it has afflicted the patient for such a long time that the disease has become chronic.

After 12 years of the heralded slogans, “ Time for a Change” and “Return to democracy”, all Guyana and the world recognize that we have indeed changed but, unfortunately, not for the better. The evaluation of the state of our nation is ample proof.

Unlike countries like Malaysia and Singapore, which have transformed themselves into booming economies and modern states, Guyana has retrogressed and survives only because of the largesse of friendly countries and support from the Multi-Lateral Financial Institutions.

While we are grateful for all the help that we have received from the international community, we need to determine whether Guyana will continue to be dependent upon the largesse of others, or we will use our ingenuity and our vast resources to build a modern economy according to a model that is relevant to our own circumstances.

After 51 years of Universal Adult Suffrage, 52 years of mass party politics and 40 years of political independence, we are still unable to get our act together. Guyana remains politically polarized with continuous political conflict and ethnic divisions, and, with large sections of our population feeling alienated from the mainstream of economic and social activity.

My dear Comrades, Let us reflect for a moment:

Our villages exemplify the resilience of our ancestors who, despite the brutal system of slavery, rose above their adversity and, within days of their emancipation, purchased villages and sustained themselves outside of the economic framework of the colonial economic structure. This was achieved in spite of the sabotage unleashed by the plantocracy;

Our Indian ancestors, despite the exploitative nature of indentureship, ventured out, within days of the end of their indentureship, to build an agricultural foundation outside the colonial economy;

Our indigenous Amerindian ancestors demonstrated that, despite being driven further inland, they could maintain their self-reliance; cassava too was never a preferred crop of the colonizers.

What is the present situation in Guyana?

Travel along the Coast and you will observe the abandoned lands behind the traditional African villages while hundreds of our youth wallow in unemployment in these depressed and marginalized communities. We are also bound to observe the poverty which abounds in many traditional Indian villages where the absence of, or, the decline in infrastructure makes it difficult to support their agricultural activities. Travel to the hinterland and you will also observe the lack of productivity and growing dependency syndrome in many Amerindian villages;

As we experience the periodic/cyclical conflict, particularly during the election season, no one, irrespective of political persuasion or ethnicity, can escape the conclusion that, as a nation, we have a fundamental problem which if not addressed could lead to our total self destruction.

AVAILABLE OPTIONS:

There is, therefore, something significantly critical in the timing of this Congress. It is taking place at a time when the nation is in deep crisis and when Guyana moves closer, day by day, to the brink. As we meet at this Congress to deliberate on the way forward for Guyana, there are two options available to all of us.

The first is to do nothing: to sit back and witness the steady deterioration of the patient and await the inevitable demise.

The other option is to accept the responsibility to keep the patient alive; to determine the surgery that may be required; to enlist all the professional support that would be needed and have all committed to post surgery care; to see the patient recover, gain strength and once again provide for the family and take a rightful place, respected among the nations of the region and the world. Those are our options, and those who choose the first have no place at this Congress, or, for that matter, in Guyana. It would be better for those to join the long list of others who have made that choice and have already left for distant shores. Indeed, for those who remain in Guyana there is no other option than the latter.

The question is whether we have the vision and the will to find permanent solutions, instead of band-aid solutions, to cover the wounds. We have to cleanse the entire body. It is a task that must of necessity involve all Guyanese. Not the PNCR alone or the PPP/C to the exclusion of all others, not the WPA or GAP or JAP or ROAR acting on their own; not the religious organizations whether Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, mystical or Rastafarian, acting separately as religious organizations; not ACDA, P A C, GIHA TAMOG acting alone as cultural or ethnic organizations; not the private sector through the GMA, AARC, PSC or Georgetown Chamber of Commerce, acting separately as business organizations or in collaboration with the GTUC and GBA as Civil Society. Unless we work together to deal with our common problem we are unlikely to succeed. Our national poet Martin carter puts it appropriately in one of his well known poems,, “ all are involved, all are consumed”.

It is out of that recognition that we invited representatives of political parties and other stakeholders of Guyana to this opening session of our Congress. These invitations are not mere formalities. We have taken this action to express and demonstrate our willingness and preparedness to enter national dialogue with the involvement of all to arrive at appropriate solutions.

It is not by accident that we identified as the theme for our Congress, “Building a platform for Peace, National Cohesion and Reconstruction”.

BUILDING THE PLATFORM

A platform is a plan for political action which defines the principles and outlines the programmes that guide the leaders and people at a particular time. There is, however, a deeper meaning to the word platform which applies to the situation in Guyana and the principles which we in the PNCR advocate at this time. In the world of computer technology, a platform is the underlying hardware or software of a computer system. A Platform, in this context, defines the standards around which a system must develop. When a computer maker sells it to us with a platform, we must conform to that platform to get the use of our machine. In our context, therefore, when we define a platform, it is not a mere list of promises but a solemn commitment and a set of standards and goals to which we commit ourselves as a Party and upon which we are ready, willing and anxious to stand with others for the good of Guyana.

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

We are convinced that Guyana has nowhere to go and has no realistic chance of revitalization without peace and reconciliation. A peace that is based on justice and the recognition that the rights and aspirations of all Guyanese, whatever their ethnic or racial origins and whatever their social backgrounds and religious beliefs. These rights and aspirations must be respected, protected and enforced since they are the foundations of a stable society.

The late Martin Luther King once said that “True peace is not merely the absence of tension, but the presence of justice.” It is no longer good enough to pay lip service to peace and, at the same time, practice and encourage injustice. If as a people we are serious about the preservation of lasting peace we must have the courage to address all issues of injustice. Peace must be viewed in the context of every field of human endeavor. Justice must be applied in the manner in which contracts are awarded; in the manner in which people are employed in the public and private sectors; in the manner in which social services are provided; in the distribution of welfare for the needy; in the provision of grants and school uniforms for disadvantaged children; in the criteria for allocating public resources; in the manner in which house lots are distributed; and, in the manner in which communities are identified for developmental works.

Why must the Sophia housing area remain for years without roads, water, electricity, and other social services, wait until an election is around the corner before promises are made to provide these basic facilities?

Why have other housing areas, like the new Diamond which started only a few months ago, have all basic facilities even before any building has been erected or any family housed?

Why do the Marshals of the Courts who have families to feed, have to wait for years to obtain payment despite orders from the very Courts that are responsible for dispensing justice?

Why is the Judicial system unable to dispense justice to Mark Benschop who still languishes in prison?

What is the reason for the growing fear among our citizens that their Government is engaged in state-sponsored murder?

In order to answer these questions and achieve lasting peace, we must guarantee the security of our citizens. All of our many peoples deserve the right to conduct their lives in peace without the threat of bandits and gangsters violating their families, their wives, their daughters, their homes and their businesses.

For a start, all citizens must do everything possible to stop the cancerous growth of racial violence. The targeting of innocent human beings, particularly our Indo-Guyanese brothers and sisters, for despicable acts of rape and violence is destroying the very fabric of our individual and collective humanity. These obscenities must be brought to an end. All citizens must renew their beliefs that, for a safe and secure future, we must all again become our brothers' keepers.

We must find new ways to discuss how we can strengthen our efforts and work together to speak about and act to remove every instance of injustice in our villages and communities. We are prepared to sit down and discuss the concerns of all our many peoples. This is the only way for us to begin construction of a country of which we can all be proud.

It is only by respecting each other, speaking with each other and acting together that we can succeed in our efforts to remove all instances of social, political and economic injustice. We, in the PNCR, are committed to these processes. Their success is the only way of guaranteeing our individual and collective survival. There is no other way of building **ONE GUYANA**

NATIONAL COHESION

As we confront the task of reconstructing our nation's economy and society it is now obvious that a major obstacle in our path is the lack of cohesion in our society; the lack of cohesion of spirit, of will, of purpose, and of effort. The net effect over the decades has been that our human

resources are underutilized and working at cross purposes. No country today can hope to prosper under these circumstances. It is only by tapping to the fullest, the physical, intellectual and creative skills of all our citizens in a shared vision that we can hope to realize our vast potential. There is simply no other route to development. We must discuss why national cohesion has eluded us. One reason is that our political system and culture have conditioned too many to exploit the differences and distinctions among us for partisan political gain. However, it is questionable whether there have been any real gains, either to individual political parties or to the Nation.

TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

*For example, the PNCR was in government for 28 years, but today there are claims that our Party was discriminatory against Guyanese of Indian descent and that nothing was achieved in those years. **But is this really true? And even if it were true, how can that help us to cope with today's challenges?** Many are too young to know the state of Guyana when the PNC came to office in 1964 in partnership with the United Force. The current distortions of history are sure to confuse our youth. So even in the interpretation of History we have problems with cohesion.*

The facts are that in 1964 this country was on the verge of total racial war and it was Forbes Burnham who walked the length and breadth of Guyana preaching peace and reconciliation. The PNC included in our administration competent persons of all ethnic groups. We had John Carter and Sonny Ramphall, we had Shabuddeen and Hubert Jack, We had Ranji Chandisingh and Vincent Teekah as well as Philip Duncan, Winifred Gaskin and Viola Burnham. But did that change the perception? The institution of religious holidays for all major religions; equal access to educational opportunities through free education and liberal scholarship programmes and massive housing programmes were all made possible by the PNC. Massive infrastructure programmes such as the MMA and the Black Bush Polder Irrigation scheme, the Canje Bridge and the Demerara Harbour Bridge, the National Cultural Centre and the National School of Dance are only a few of the projects of our period in office.

Surely, there would have been many mistakes, and many were indeed made, but does this mean that nothing was achieved? Ironically, the PPP, throughout this period, engaged in sabotage, especially when we had the opportunity to earn the highest prices for sugar on the world market.

The PPP/C has already been in office for twelve years and on their record, they can't be there for much longer. What will be reported on their performance when they depart?

Will we spend another twelve years after they have departed reminding the new generation of their massive abuse of human rights, of the death squads, of the numerous scandals and of their gross mismanagement of the Economy?

Surely that could not be the future. Despite all the claims by the various political Parties on each other's performance, what is the peoples' perception of these Parties? A report on the results of a recent survey published in yesterday's news papers make interesting reading. What can we learn from this?

HONOUR ALL AND CLOSE CHAPTER ON THE PAST

I have given this illustration to suggest that if Guyana is to move forward there must be a paradigm shift. We cannot continue in this vicious cycle. For cohesion to be achieved we have to close the Chapter of the Past. The young people of Guyana are concerned about the future and it is that which responsible Leaders must now address. I, therefore, propose that we close the chapter on the past. Give recognition where it is due. No single person in history has only good deeds. Let us honour our past Leaders: Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, Cheddie Bharrat Jagan, Ptolemy Alexander Reid, Boysie Ramkarran and others. Concentrating on their faults could only open old wounds. What we need is genuine reconciliation, and if persons still feel deeply aggrieved, then let us have a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. But, for the sake of our Youth and the future of Guyana the only way forward is to close the pages of the past and work resolutely for a bright and glorious future to bequeath a rich legacy to our future generations.

It is to the enormous credit of ordinary Guyanese that the resentment and frustration that such a situation must generate, and has generated, have not caused civil strife of any large or sustained magnitude. That fact, I believe, demonstrates the strong will of the Guyanese people to live together. However, if half of Guyana, any half, is made to feel excluded; is made to feel like second class citizens in their own country, we will remain stagnated and one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere.

ACHIEVING COHESION

How then can we achieve National Cohesion? The presence of justice and peace is essential, but that is not the only requirement. National Cohesion cannot be the superficial blending of people of various ethnic or interest groups. It has to go beyond that. Consequently, even as we seek to give meaning to the concept of inclusivity within our own Party it has to be more than just having people of various ethnic groups occupying positions in the hierarchy.

National Cohesion has to include taking seriously on board and addressing the concerns of every ethnic or interest group and we must be prepared to discuss these issues frankly with each other. We must be willing and prepared to address the areas of concern of Guyanese of African origin equally as we must be prepared to discuss the concerns of Guyanese of Indian origin, or the concerns of the Amerindians, and Guyanese of Chinese or Portuguese origin. Consequently, we must purposely address the Amerindian land issue just as we should address the African issue of Reparations and claims for Ancestral Lands. We must also take on board issues raised by the Indian community and their security concerns.

RECONSTRUCTION

Our platform also calls for emphasis on reconstruction. We need to reconstruct our shattered infrastructure, our shattered security forces, our shattered public services and our shattered confidence in our capacity to compete for the provision of the new global services and our shattered confidence in our capacity to compete in the new global economic environment.

We need to diversify our economy, to develop new sectors, to form strategic alliances with investors with resources and modern technologies.

We should make use of our bountiful natural resources and the energy and ingenuity of our people.

We should be out in the global economic landscape negotiating strategic investment and technological partnerships. Guyana's economy must be reorganized to emphasize a mode of development and an investment programme that gives us a chance to compete and hence survive in the modern world.

This involves a deliberate and conscious change of direction from the current emphasis on production of primary commodities for export, to encouraging dynamic private sector investment by local and external entrepreneurs and investment in new and technologically advanced sectors.

Most importantly, we must regain confidence in our capacity to compete in the new age. Consequently, a psychological transformation is necessary.

NO PRECONDITIONS

Our desire to change the system of Governance demands that we do not adopt a dogmatic position that we have all the answers and the most comprehensive development programme for Guyana. We must of necessity be prepared to meet with all stakeholders around the table and fashion a mutually agreeable national programme that addresses the concerns of all. It is true that we have already made public our program for development and modernization of Guyana in our, Agenda For Development, and the Guyana 21 Plan Published since 2001. These programmes must of necessity be updated as the world environment is not static. But there will be others with equally good ideas and we must be prepared to listen and discuss how we can put together programmes of transformation? What is required to transform Guyana into a 21st century modern state? And, how we develop the economic model that will provide for a shared economic pie that would benefit all Guyanese?

I suggest that, at this Congress, we authorize our Party to make an unconditional offer to all Guyanese and Guyanese organizations of like mind to work for that common understanding. A working understanding with any political party, any political organization, any social organization, and any non governmental organization; any members or groups, even from within the Peoples Progressive Party, who are willing to negotiate, in good faith, the details of our platform for the transformation of the country. We should make this offer without precondition. The future of Guyana is too important and the political crisis is too dire for petty politics. We should offer to negotiate such an undertaking immediately and before the forthcoming General Election and we should ensure that no one, no group, no party with something to contribute to the platform is excluded.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POLICIES OF THE PLATFORM

It follows from what I have already outlined that the methodology for arriving at our social and economic policies demands intense consultation.

A PNCR led coalition should undertake to negotiate and implement, with all the economic stakeholders in our country, the basis of a consensual Economic Policy Framework that is based on the maximum participation and support of all stakeholder groups and which addresses the overall developmental and growth prospects in a holistic and realistic way.

I am not, however, suggesting that it would be easy to arrive at a consensus on the economic and social policy of the platform, but I submit that there are general principles which have been accepted by all. Where then is the starting point?

For the first time in recent history, one hundred and eighty nine Guyanese from all walks of life; from all geographic regions; from our villages, towns and hinterland communities; from all racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds and across political persuasions came together, discussed together and worked together: The result is the document we now know today as the NDS.

While it is not a development plan it represents a good starting point for the software of the platform. That document outlines the objectives of the strategy as follows:

*“(i) to attain the highest rates of economic growth that are possible;
to eliminate poverty in Guyana;
to achieve geographical unity;
to attain an equitable geographical distribution of economic activity; and,
to diversify the economy.”*

I do not think that these objectives can be faulted. Once there is agreement then we should utilize the vast human resources of Guyana to take it from here. There is no doubt that we have the people, once we are prepared to have them involved.

How could a country, which has provided the brains and the hands that have built industries in other countries, which have served international institutions professionally, not have the manpower to take us forward? What we need to do is to re-instil in the Guyanese at home and abroad the feeling of hope. We must all believe that it is possible to arrest the descent into the abyss; that it is possible to revive the patient. But I submit, that recovery is only possible if everyone is on board.

GOVERNANCE PROPOSALS

At this Congress, the PNCR must set out, in clear and unmistakable terms, a realistic Platform which defines how we will reform the way Guyana is governed to make our political landscape more inclusive, and more responsive to the needs of all sections and groupings of Guyanese. This is a time for radical and imaginative solutions. To sustain change, the structures of the nation itself should be modified including strategic plans, policies and procedures. For Guyana to change- it must have a government that is visionary, persuasive and consistent. Guyana desperately needs a government that can translate vision into a realistic platform and the energy and competence to carry out that plan. It must have a government that is as broad based as possible and that is flexible enough to bring on board its platform, for the reform of governance, all ideas, all realistic proposals, all patriotic elements and all who are willing to work with us for a better Guyana.

The PNCR must make it clear to the nation that we stand ready and committed to a platform of Shared Governance and Inclusivity. We must make it clear that we are willing to share Executive Authority and to explore and negotiate imaginative forms of governance and reform of our national, regional and local governments to ensure that the goal of full inclusivity is realized. We must make it clear to the nation that we will stand ready to discuss, without precondition, the basis of our development strategy in an all inclusive arrangement in which every relevant stakeholder will participate. We are not isolated nor are we original on this matter.

Assuming that the National Development strategy is accepted as a starting point we cannot escape the compelling recommendations in Chapter 3, Governance. Indeed the proposals suggest that a prerequisite for success in a change in the system of Governance.

SHARED GOVERNANCE: THE ONLY WAY

It is, therefore, quite obvious that Shared/Inclusive Governance is not an invention of the PNCR, according to some propagandists, "to get into Government through the back door". Indeed it took some time and lengthy and intense discussion and debate within the Party for us to accept that position and it was not until our last Congress in August 2002 that we formally approved the proposals for Shared Governance. This is perhaps as it ought to be because shared governance cannot be imposed, it has to be accepted. During the past year the PNCR's shared Governance Committee, with the approval of the central Executive Committee, engaged in wide consultations with civil society. They met business, professional, religious and youth organizations to share the vision of the PNCR. It would be accurate to say that these proposals have gained widespread acceptance from those organizations and groups that were consulted.

It must never be forgotten that the initiative for Shared Governance came from a civil society initiative that invited all stakeholders to submit proposals. The PNCR responded positively and our proposals for Shared Governance have been posted on our web site for nearly two years for all to read. I will not attempt to outline our proposals at this time. Two important points need, however, to be stated.

First, it is imperative that we have a President who acts like, and is seen by the people as, President for the whole country and all its peoples. Our paper does not therefore insist that there should be a PNCR President when we win an Election. The President must be acceptable to all, or at least the overwhelming majority. That is why one of our proposals is to change the nature of our Presidency into a non-Executive type. The duty of managing the country would rest with the Prime Minister. In such an arrangement, the President would be a non partisan office as he or she seeks to co-ordinate the shared Governance arrangements.

Secondly, Shared Governance appears to be the only way for Guyana if Peace, National Cohesion and Reconstruction are to be achieved. It is for this reason that we propose that Shared/Inclusive Governance MUST be discussed and implemented BEFORE the next elections. Unless of course we are opting for a model of partition in this Dear Land of ours, or self destruction.

Lets face it Comrades, the Westminster System has not worked and indications are that it will never work in this country. In view of the reluctance of the PPP to engage on this matter we propose that all stake holders in Guyana who are of like mind begin that discussion now. We do not have to wait on the PPP to start. I believe that once they recognize that most of Guyana is behind this model they will fall in line, or, as stated by Mr. Hoyte, their unwillingness to change will make them dinosaurs.

It is my duty to inform the Congress that, over the past months, I have been in consultation with leaders representing a wide range of religious, economic, political and social organizations and encompassing the entire spectrum of Guyanese society. These discussions are ongoing and I would not like to elaborate, but I can report that in these consultations, there was a recurring theme and a consistent message to us, the belief that the system of governance in Guyana needs radical reform if Guyana is to go forward. This view accords with the result of our own analysis of the situation and I hope this Congress will authorize the continuation of those consultations.

Finally, we ought to emphasize that our shared Governance model does not abolish elections. Consequently any criticism that the PNCR is using Shared Governance to get into Government through the back door because it cannot win an election is wholly unfounded and mischievous.

GENERAL REGIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS **ELECTORAL REFORM**

Our Party has always embraced democracy and has always placed a premium on the holding of elections both within its ranks and at the Local, Regional and national levels throughout its years of existence. This principle is enshrined in our Party Constitution and we have always been involved in electoral reform to ensure that the peoples' right to elect their representatives is enhanced. It was this objective which motivated the Party, in the late sixties, to struggle for a change in our National Electoral System from First Past the Post to Proportional Representation. The deficiencies of the old system, particularly as it related to the boundaries of the constituencies, resulted in our representation in the National Assembly not being reflective of the popular will. We succeeded in our quest and, in 1964, the system of Proportional Representation was introduced and has been maintained, with some recent modifications, until today. While the new system enabled our representation in the National Assembly to be more reflective of the popular will, a number of deficiencies and or weaknesses in the system soon emerged. One such deficiency was the Closed List System which enabled parliamentarians and local government councillors to be elected on the basis of a Party List but with no direct formal responsibility to a particular constituency. The Party made its own internal arrangements and identified such candidates to be responsible for specified constituencies. The electors in those constituencies, however, never had a direct say in determining who those representatives were and some of the persons identified did not consider their party assignment an essential obligation. The result was that, in many cases, the people who voted for the Party List could not hold any one Councilor or Parliamentarian accountable to them. The disadvantages of this arrangement is apparent and has led to some disenchantment and dissatisfaction in areas where the Councilor or Parliamentarian failed to perform. The absence of an effective Recall System also made the Party impotent in dealing with delinquent representatives who, after being elected, considered their Office more than their responsibility, to the detriment of the electors. This was one of the reasons which influenced the Party not to participate directly in the last local Government Elections but support Community groups comprised of representatives identified by the electors in their Community.

A SYSTEM OF RECALL AND PRIMARIES

I would like to suggest that this Congress considers a system of Recall for persons who fail to perform after being elected to serve. Any such system must uphold the principles of natural justice and should not be left to the whims and caprices of any small group, individual or even the Party Leader. Adequate rules must be established, agreed and be well known. I suggest too that the Party considers introducing a System of Primaries to determine the selection of candidates to represent the Party and people at all levels. Such a system would, I submit, result in greater accountability of elected representatives and enable their bosses, the people, to adequately determine their suitability for representation.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

In keeping with our objective of ensuring that the people in these areas should, as far as practicable, identify their representatives, the Party supported Electoral and Local Government Reform. At the Local Government level, therefore, we have been active in supporting the proposed Local Government Reform through our involvement in the Joint Task Force. The new system we support will provide an opportunity to enable the widest possible constituency representation while maintaining proportionality in the overall results. We hope that the system will soon be agreed so that Local Government Elections, which are long overdue, can be held under a system of greater accountability. The Party still has to consider whether we will

participate directly, as a Party, in those elections or support groups and individuals identified by the communities. Perhaps the Congress may wish to give some directions on this matter.

CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW OF THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM OF 2001

At the national level we have also advocated changes to enable a similar type of constituency representation. Consequently, geographic constituencies were introduced at the last elections. The limited time available for implementing the system meant that, as a compromise, the boundaries of the existing Regional Democratic Councils were used as the constituency boundaries. The agreement before those elections was that there would have been constitutional review immediately after those elections to review and, if necessary, complete the electoral reform to give meaning to the objective of greater direct representation. Regrettably, three years have passed and we have been unable to persuade the Government to honour this commitment. It is hoped that recent statements by the President would be manifested in this review being completed expeditiously by the Constitutional Review Committee of the Parliament which has powers to include in the process members of the wider society. The PNCR will advocate the reorganisation of the fixed regional boundaries to reflect the demographic and other geographic realities. The need for citizens to have a greater say in identifying their representatives is a paramount consideration of the Party. The Congress may also wish to give directions on this matter.

GECOM AND THE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF ELECTIONS

The reform of the electoral system alone will not satisfy our objective. Consequently the need for improvement in the system of management of the electoral process is of great concern to the Party. This is one of the serious weaknesses which has contributed to the continuous post-election problems. Citizens will never accept an election management system that fails to ensure that their right to vote and to have accurate results are not inadequately or incompetently or fraudulently done. It is for this reason that we have engaged GECOM more than a year ago with our concerns about the Data Base at the Election Commission and the systems in place that would guarantee free and fair elections. On this matter, there will be no compromise and we have made our position very clear to GECOM, the Government and the Donor Community. We will not participate in an election until we are satisfied that GECOM has put its house in order and addressed our concerns satisfactorily.

PNCR CAN AND WILL WIN ELECTIONS

Finally, I want to say a few words about winning an election. Let me make it pellucid that the PNCR has no doubt that it can and will win the next General Elections. There has been an ongoing psychological campaign to imprint on the mind of Guyanese that, because of the ethnic voting patterns, the PNCR cannot win an election. This argument is not supported by the historical reality and most of the analyses I have seen on this matter are seriously flawed.

Any objective evaluation of previous Elections Statistics will reveal that having regard to the ethnic composition of the Guyana electorate it would have not been possible for the PNCR to achieve the results it was awarded without a significant vote from the non Afro-Guyanese Community. To suggest that the PNCR can never win an election is seriously flawed and part of a campaign to demoralize the PNCR and its traditional and non-traditional supporters and dissuade new converts from having faith in the future of the PNCR as a Government. We must not succumb to this psychological warfare. I am convinced that the PNCR has the capacity to win any elections. If I was not convinced about this I would not have accepted your nomination as Leader of this Party. Let us throw off those shackle and work to win. We can, we must and we will, win the next elections. Winning elections are not inconsistent with our goal of Shared Governance. Our support of shared Governance is directly related to our policy of putting

Guyana first. Consequently, it is not enough for the PNCR to win an election alone. We are concerned about making Guyana a modern 21st century state. To achieve this we need all Guyanese, irrespective of race colour, social origin, religion or other peculiarities on board. That is why we support Shared Governance. Not for the PNCR to win but for all Guyana to win, in collaboration with the PNCR. Let us resolve at this Congress to work for an inevitable victory at the next elections under a system of Shared Governance.

SECURITY

The present state of our country demands that this Congress consider matters of security, national and community and personal. There is no doubt in my mind that a major preoccupation of most Guyanese is security, at this time. We cannot build the Platform, discussed earlier, without ensuring the security of all Guyanese. The escalating crime situation is a matter of concern to the Party.

We must condemn criminal activity equally as we condemn violence by any person against another. More particularly we have to condemn all racially inspired violence in this country. We cannot promote cohesion if various ethnic groups live in constant fear that they can, at anytime, be the victims of violence perpetrated by persons of another race. We must not only condemn, but must develop programmes that can genuinely promote mutual respect and tolerance between persons of different races.

A major task of any Alliance or Coalition, of which the PNCR is willing to become a part, is reducing and possibly eliminating the levels of insecurity in Guyana. This requires action on several fronts. We have already received the Report of the DFC and its Recommendations make a good starting point for the reform of the relevant systems in the Police Force and elsewhere. However, we believe that the reform and retooling of the GPF must be comprehensive. Rebuilding the morale of the members of the GPF is also an immediate priority. At the same time, all Death Squads must be eliminated and murderers against whom there is evidence should be prosecuted in open court. Officials who connived with Death Squads must be dealt with in accordance with the law.

Finally we must raise our voices against the burgeoning drug trade. This cancer is destroying our society both economically and socially. Our youth are the most vulnerable and we must institute programmes to educate and rehabilitate those who have fallen victim to this scourge.

We must also support the work of the Churches and other NGO's in their programmes which deal not only with drugs but the spiraling HIV AIDS pandemic.

THE ROLE OF THE PARTY IN BUILDING THE PLATFORM

It is self evident that our Party has to be prepared to play the leading role in the construction of the Platform for Peace, National Cohesion and Reconstruction. Consequently, we must re-examine our organization, structure and programmes to ensure that the Party successfully completes its mission. Fortunately, we had the vision to discuss all these issues at the Strategic Leadership Retreat last year and the Party Leadership redefined the Party's vision;

In redefining our vision we determined that:

The PNCR, as a Party, must become the major driving force in realising the vision for Guyana. A Party that has been re-structured and re-organised to fulfill this goal and is comprised of a well-informed, committed and motivated membership.

A Party that remains open and inclusive, appealing to all groups, classes, ethnicities and persons and practices what it preaches within its ranks and in its dealings.

A Party that develops a culture of inquiry, debate, and discussion and supports its own democratic decisions.

An independent and financially strong Party.

A Party with effective communication between leadership and its grass-roots.

Strongly networked with sister political organisation nationally, regionally and internationally.

Members who are sufficiently educated to be aware of the Party's policies and practices – especially policies at their level.

Party groups that are training ground for leaders and which provide for individual and collective development; and,

A PNCR which becomes a viable economic entity with this being reflected downwards to the Group level.

To realize this vision we determined that we needed a Party Secretariat that is dual functional: Organised to do work at the national level with parliamentary groups, that speak to various groups at governmental level, and to give advice and support to low-level Party Organs (groups).

The Retreat determined that the Leadership Structure should be organized along the lines of a Corporate organisation with a Directorate patterning a modern business organization with Directors appointed from within and outside the Central Executive Committee with specific areas of responsibility.

Following that Retreat, we commenced that reorganization and members were assigned responsibilities. Albeit the Party Constitution did not adequately provide for the new proposed structure. We did, however, put in place a Constitutional Review Committee which, after consultation with you, made recommendations for changes to our Constitution to facilitate the new structure. During the next two days the proposals for amendments to our Constitution will be presented to Congress for consideration and approval.

There is much to be accomplished during this week end and I expect that we would approach our tasks with the seriousness it deserves to ensure that our Agenda is completed.

OUR YOUTH

As we undertake the tasks of this Congress, I hope that we will constantly bear in mind the major beneficiaries of our work. This country belongs to them and they must be totally involved now, not tomorrow. In the period ahead we must have a deliberate policy to ensure that they are

fully involved. They must be given responsibility now. I am sure that they will make mistakes but we need not be afraid. This is the time for them to make mistakes to ensure that they avoid making them when they have greater responsibility. It is refreshing that they are here in such large numbers and we should encourage them. MEMBERS OF THE GYSM! I SALUTE YOU. MAY YOU BE PREPARED TO ACCEPT THE CHALLENGES WHICH ARE BEFORE YOU.

THE VISION FOR THE FUTURE

My dear Comrades, This is my first Biennial Congress since you passed the baton of Leadership to me. I wish to thank you for the confidence reposed in me and I hope that I have fulfilled your expectations. The last nineteen months have not been easy but your words of encouragement have been a source of strength. May we continue to work together for the development of our Party and the upliftment of Guyana.

I am not a dreamer but I do have a Vision for our beautiful Guyana. A Vision that I am sure is shared by the entire Leadership of our Party;

I have a vision that in the very near future we will have in Guyana:

A participatory Government, freely and fairly elected, working in a Shared Governance model with all other freely and fairly elected parties to the National Assembly of our country, and representing the interests of all classes, groups and persons who have a stake in the society and who share widely in decision-making.

A Guyana that enjoys fraternal relations with all its neighbours and share in the goal of fostering closer Caribbean unity.

A society where there is Inclusive Governance, through Shared Governance, that is enshrined in a Constitution that guarantees transparency, social justice, law and order, workers' rights and the promotion of greater women's rights.

A modern country that is built around ONE GUYANA that is at peace with itself.

CONCLUSION

To this Vision I commit myself today.

Comrades, I have not a lingering doubt that we could achieve this Vision. Our Party has faced challenges before and overcame them with courage and pride. We have a rich Legacy. This is the Party that restored peace to this troubled land in 1964. This is the Party that took this country to Independence and to Republican status. This is the Party of Jane Phillips Gay and Winifred Gaskin; it is the Party of J P Latchmarsingh and Eugene Correia; this is the Party of Ptolemy Reid and Viola Burnham and this is the Party founded by the late great LFSB.

We have succeeded in the past and I am confident that we will do so again. With your help and active support we can bequeath a mighty Legacy of ONE GUYANA to future generations.

LONG LIVE THE PNC!

www.guyanapnc.org/index2.htm