

Remarks by H.E. Desiré D. Bouterse, President of the Republic of Suriname at the World Peace Forum -- 27 June 2013, Beijing, China

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here, and a great honor indeed to address this global forum and share with you the views of Suriname, a South American country, on the most important issue of international peace and security in our rapidly changing world.

I applaud our host, Tsinghua University in the great nation of the People's Republic of China, with the organization of this Second World Peace Forum, where China clearly demonstrates its commitment and determination to promote a constructive dialogue and enhance collaboration on all levels, based on mutual trust and respect, social inclusion and a collective responsibility for global challenges.

Mr. Chairman,

Twenty years after the end of the Cold War, the peace and security that was to ensue, has not materialized for hundreds of millions of people in many countries and regions in the world. Granted, when we look at the past seventy years, we can acknowledge that mankind has made certain progress as far as world wars are concerned. We have often used multi-lateral instruments, and regional- and other peace oriented institutions to prevent global wars.

The incidence of dialogue and diplomacy, instead of the immediate need to use force, has increased and should no longer be conceived as a sign of weakness, but as a sign of wisdom.

The globalization of the world economy and the unprecedented use of information and

communication technology, have also contributed to the kind of interdependence that has decreased the use of force as a means of solving international conflicts.

However, we also have to acknowledge that new threats to international peace and security have presented themselves. Alongside traditional violent conflicts, new elements of growing international insecurities have emerged and threaten the living conditions of many.

We must acknowledge the fact that the number of emerging economies, able to create a better life for their respective citizens, is increasing.

However, the expansion of economies in Asia, Eastern Europe, South America and the Pacific carries along, the faster growing needs of its populations, and higher ambitions and spending of their middle class.

Although this is a very positive development, it has brought with it a scarcity of essential commodities.

Growing populations, and in particular larger middle classes, imply a greater need for fossil fuel. The need for food both in quality and variety grows at a tremendous pace. The need for potable water bears heavily on the availability of water resources. The increasing need for minerals used in modern technological gadgets, has indeed become a source of conflict and strife.

This is only exacerbated by the environmental impact of economic activity – for example the massive pollution of rivers and groundwater.

Considering also peoples in the so-called developed world, and noting in particular an insufficient availability of elementary goods and services for ever-growing sections of those societies, we are confronted with a complete new challenge.

We may, then, say that fulfilling the growing demands for goods and services of the middle class, combined with the manifested needs of the poorest sectors in society, constitute a potential threat to international peace and security.

We find that international security is further affected by new phenomena in our international relations.

Terrorism is one of the most controversial issues of modern time, which is affecting everyday life in a very substantial manner. The trends of cultural and ethnic conflicts, resulting from religious believe, have become a growing threat to international peace and security and as financial crisis and scarcity severely affected developed countries, there is a tendency towards ethnic animosity and conflict, that presents a serious danger to the necessary peaceful co-existence of cultural and ethnic groups.

Inadequate functioning of various international institutions, often resulting in the endorsement of violent intervention and interference in the domestic affairs of states, is counterproductive and has become a threat to the maintenance of international peace and security.

These are some of the factors that have manifested themselves as new challenges.

Mr. Chairman,

We have developed some new ideas on a way forward.

First of all, we believe that it is important that ever more people on our planet become aware of the fact that, as a matter of birthright, we should all share what this planet has to offer. This basic concept will help us understand and respect the environment in which we survive as human beings.

The concept of sharing entails the constant need for dialogue and understanding between and within nations. It is a tremendous challenge, which will require more developed countries to realize that cooperation is needed in creating necessary framework for equality of power and decision-making. The same applies to the transfer of science and technology to lesser developed nations, bringing about financial security to all.

Increasing awareness, starting with our youth through the educational system, and broadening our campaign to all sectors in society, would surely become a very useful instrument in promoting the concept of sharing.

Mr. Chairman,

This concept brings me to the very essence of the point I want to make today. We believe that it is vital that we respect three basic principles in our efforts to achieve security and sustainable development.

Firstly, it can only be achieved if we accept the principle of equality of all human beings on this planet. Hence, an integrated approach is needed towards achieving a more balanced, and symmetric relationship of power and wealth between world communities.

Secondly, we must accept the principle of interdependence of societies at the regional and international level.

Thirdly, we must also accept the principle of inclusion, meaning that all nations, large and small alike, are able to develop, whilst promoting peace through dialogue and cooperation, avoiding division of any kind or origin, preventing conflict and civil wars, enabling all the opportunity to contribute to a peaceful world.

Mr. Chairman,

The challenge we are facing when considering the issue of peace and security could be found in answering the question: how do we reach equality of opportunity without creating rivalry among sections of our society?

Let me now take advantage of this opportunity to bring to your attention the experience of my country.

Suriname, as you should know, is a direct result of colonial politics that started back in the 17th century. After violently removing the indigenous people from the coastal areas to the interior rainforest, because they refused to be enslaved, Africans were brought against their will to work as slaves on the colonial plantations.

A substantive number of these victimized human beings fled to the interior of Suriname where they survived in five tribes.

The abolition of slavery in 1863, one hundred and fifty years ago, and the unwillingness of the plantation owners to employ the former slaves as workers with a salary, made way for the introduction of indentured laborers. These workers originated from the South of India and from the Indonesian Island of Java, became a source of cheap labor for the colonizer.

Mr. Chairman,

The descendants of these ethnic groups now form the majority of the socio political reality of Suriname. In 1845, a number of Dutch farmers became part of the Surinamese population. Starting from 1853, Chinese citizens, originally from Macao, Protégées of the Island of Madeira, became also part of the Surinamese society. Lebanese started immigrating as traders at the turn of the last century. More recently, the gold fever brought numerous Brazilians to our shores, while Guyanese and Haitians have become a valuable addition, mainly to our agricultural labor force.

Mr. Chairman,

I mention this not so much as an interesting demographic and socio-cultural fact. I mention this variety of ethnic entities in Suriname, originating from the America's, Africa, Asia, Middle East, Europe and from the Caribbean, as a phenomenon that emphasizes the fact that multi - ethnic cultures, can co- exist in peace, even in a very small society.

I do not mean to suggest that we have never known conflicts of an ethnic nature.

Suriname *has* known some incidents of violence in the far past; all originated from outside our borders.

What we are trying to say is that in Suriname we have learned to cherish dialogue, mutual respect and tolerance as a basis for our very survival.

Suriname has learned its lessons, and the present political leadership is thoroughly convinced that the dynamics of the Surinamese society will never again be determined by outside influences, but solely by its own interests.

Suriname will do so in friendship and cooperation with other nations and international organizations, on the basis of recognition of our sovereignty and territorial integrity, and on the basis of mutual respect and mutual benefit.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me summarize the lessons Suriname has learned dealing with ethnic controversies.

Firstly, we have managed to ensure that all ethnic groups and individuals have the opportunity to express political decision-making, both at the local and national level.

Secondly, we practice what we preach. We have enshrined in our Constitution that all Surinamese have equal rights, and that discrimination of any kind is prohibited.

When one drives through our capital Paramaribo, or elsewhere in the country, this constitutional concept becomes manifest in the peaceful co-existence of Hindu Temples, Muslim Mosques, Roman Catholic Churches, and churches of other Christian denominations and places of worship with African roots.

Paramaribo has become famous for the location of a Jewish Synagogue next to a Muslim Mosque, peacefully existing next to one another.

Thirdly, Suriname, although a secular state, has an Inter Religious Council as a forum where Muslims, Christians and Hindus join hands to discuss relevant matters of a social, economic and political nature and bring forward their thoughts to the attention of the government and the nation.

Fourthly, the Surinamese Government promotes programs of unity and integration, because we do believe in a bouquet of flowers, enhancing the beauty of our variety.

Last but not least, we want to emphasize that at a political level we do promote the emergence of multi-ethnic parties, in order to join hands in developing the country for all and to avoid animosity and distrust amongst our ethnic communities.

Mr. Chairman,

In closing, I want to repeat the basic principles I have mentioned above, with the emphasis on accepting the intrinsic value, that all human beings are equal, notwithstanding their race, ethnic orientation, religion, gender, social class, education, language or group size.

We do believe that the acceptance of interdependence at all levels of society and at the level of regional and international relations, is vital for achieving the objective of diminishing sources of conflict and of promoting dialogue and cooperation.

The changing constellation within the G-20, the increasing impact of BRICS countries and other alliances, such as the ACP, AU, UNASUR, CELAC, ALBA, ASEAN etc, all contribute to redefine the nature, positions and functioning of vested institutions like the United Nations, the World Bank, the IMF, WTO and NATO. All these institutions should be focused on creating and supporting a new peace and security paradigm.

Finally, we firmly believe that accepting and applying the principles of equality and interdependence in international relations, will contribute to the global search to realize security for every world citizen and development of all nations.

I thank you.