Address by H.E. Ambassador Bayney Karran to the Washington D.C. Midtown Lions Club on the occasion of its Annual Charter Ball

Saturday, October 24\textsuperscript{th}, 2015

Mr. President, Executive Members of the Washington Midtown Lions Club, Fellow Guyanese, Ladies and Gentlemen:

First of all, I would like to thank Midtown Lions for the distinction of nominating me to be your Club's Guest Speaker at this evening's Annual Charter Ball. I must confess that the invitation was received with some trepidation.

I assume that you were having a hard job getting the slot filled because no one else wanted to be standing here airing out their mouth at a room full of Lions who came out to party and who are right now in their Marvin Gaye mode: "Let's Get It On!"

Besides, it can sometimes be pure torture to have to sit through an after dinner speech. Being here, in this lions' den, reminds me of the story about the gladiator in the Roman arena who was being fed to a lion, a real lion. However, just as the beast rushed him, the gladiator calmly whispered a few words in its ear. To the disappointment of the crowd, the lion turned around and slowly walked back to his cage. This infuriated the Emperor so he summoned the gladiator and demanded an explanation. In his defense the gladiator pleaded, "Your Majesty, I simply told the lion that after dinner there will be speeches."

Mr. President, in according me the honour to be Guest Speaker, your Club might have been thinking that, firstly, I might not be around here for much longer and, secondly, that it would be good to add a touch of diplomacy to the evening's proceedings.
So I would like to reflect, very briefly, on some of the similarities between a lion and a diplomat. And in doing so, one comes to a renewed appreciation of the work of Lions Clubs International.

It is quite clear that there are many areas in which Lionism and Diplomacy intersect. It is also obvious that a Lion's work can have a more tangible effect than that of a diplomat in impacting the lives of the people that we serve.

For instance, when Natural Disasters occur, a group of diplomats might sit around to consider how their governments should mobilize. Whereas a group of Lions would themselves go in to the devastated areas to rescue and rebuild.

When it comes to combatting disabilities and the loss of faculties such as sight and hearing, a Lion will not be found engaging in mundane negotiations about international cooperation. No, he or she will be executing the programmes that bring life changing solutions directly to those affected.

So given the importance of your service I wish to congratulate your Club on the contributions you have made since your last Charter Ball in bringing relief to the sick and the needy.

Moreover, the fact that Midtown is a Lions Club which is primarily Guyanese, should be both a source of pride, as well as an example, to other service-oriented organizations in the Guyanese diaspora.

I would like to particularly commend the members of your Club who participated in the picketing outside the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington on October 3rd. It was the anniversary of the 1899 Award which settled the boundary between Guyana and Venezuela and your members were there bracing the cold and the rain to condemn Venezuela's aggression against Guyana.
Mr. President, your Organization has a record of integral involvement in international diplomacy at its highest levels. As a Non-Governmental Organization, Lions Clubs International participated in the negotiations for the drafting of the Charter of the United Nations and Lions has been a steadfast supporter of the work of the UN since its inception in 1945.

You might have seen the news that the UN Secretary General himself, Mr. Ban Ki Moon, paid a visit to Guyana earlier this month where he met with Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Carl B. Greenidge.

The Secretary General's visit occurred while Guyana remains a perpetual victim of illegitimate and aggressive territorial designs by two of our neighbors. In the case of our Western neighbor there has been significant hostility.

There is not sufficient time to regurgitate all of Venezuela's recent actions. Suffice it to say that within four months of our discovery of oil, 120 miles off the coast of Demerara, not Essequibo, mind you, but Demerara, Venezuela has annexed our maritime zone according to its domestic law, they have mandated that their navy must defend that area, they despatched armed gunboats into the Cuyuni River and they mobilized anti-aircraft missiles against a friendly country whose army has no aircraft.

I hope that everyone here has had the opportunity to digest the address which was given to Parliament last Thursday by His Excellency President David Granger, and that you have been keeping up with other statements by the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. We have to make it clear to all concerned, that the land on which our forefathers worked, struggled and died is the land that we will bequeath to our children. Every last square inch of it.
If Venezuela thinks that by threatening us and threatening investors we will surrender our children's birthright, they will have another think coming.

And whosoever expects Guyana to consult with them before we conduct business within our national territory will have to accept, sooner rather than later, that that is simply not going to happen.

Compatriots, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Less than six months ago, a new captain and crew took the helm of Guyana's ship of state. That ship hoisted new sails and set its compass in a different direction. This vessel has a mandate to deliver better living standards, to guarantee security, uplift ethics and morality, and to combat corruption, waste and inefficiency; while improving and strengthening democracy, good governance, human rights and the rule of law.

The aspirations of our people rest on these vital initiatives but all of this can come to naught in the face of the external challenges that Guyana now faces. We have confronted such threats before and we have withstood them, but we have done so at our peril and at the price of our people's development.

As much as we have previously stared down these very challenges, this time they have returned with a renewed intensity and unpredictability. And so, this time, we are saying, "No mas! (No more!)"

This time it is crucial and vital that all of Guyana's citizens speak with one voice and one conviction.

Guyana is under threat today and if we don't do something about it, no one is going to do it for us.
This time Guyana must mobilize all of the support that is available to it. It stands to reason that for so long as Venezuela continues to underestimate our resolve their aggression will remain unchecked.

Here in the diaspora we have our own role to play. We have a duty to actively demonstrate that all Guyanese stand 100 per cent behind our Government in this matter. We cannot afford to be like the lion in the Roman arena who turned and walked away. At this time all of us must be gladiators for Guyana.

Instead, let us heed of the example of those Midtown Lions who braved the rain and the cold, holding placards aloft outside the Venezuelan Embassy on October 3rd. Sign your petitions, call your Congressmen. Do whatever you can to lift your voice on Guyana's behalf.

We are a peaceful country and we strictly adhere to international law. All we ask of others is that they do the same.

Let us say to Venezuela loudly and clearly, "Stop the coercion now. Let us take the case to the International Court of Justice."

My friends,

Guyana cannot be developed without inputs from our diaspora communities. Already much has been done in a short period of time to reach out and involve the diaspora in our national development. Undoubtedly there will be greater opportunities for your involvement as further initiatives are promulgated.

Meanwhile, there is another upcoming event that requires the input of diaspora organizations. I am referring to the 50th anniversary of our Independence next May. The occasion calls for celebrations befitting this important milestone in the history of our nation.
I will shortly be convening a meeting to initiate appropriate plans for the occasion. I hope that your organization and all others in the area will come together to show what Guyana's sons and daughters can do.

I wish to close by joining in the well-deserved congratulations which have been extended to your former President, our Dear Janice Vieira.

Someone once said that there are two categories of people: those who do the work and those who take the credit; and that one should try to be in the first group because there is less competition there.

Well everyone here is aware of Janice's qualities of service, dedication, humanitarianism and we are certainly aware of which of those two groups she falls into. Congratulations Janice! My friends, like Janice, I too am honoured.

I thank you for the honour of being your Guest Speaker as well as for being in the company of so many friends and compatriots from our dear homeland.

I thank you.

Washington DC
October 24, 2015