REMARKS DELIVERED BY HIS EXCELLENCY
AMBASSADOR BAYNEY KARRAN AT THE ANNUAL INTERFAITH SERVICE TO
MARK GUYANA'S 41ST REPUBLIC ANNIVERSARY

ST. AGNES AND ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL (ANGLICAN) CHURCH
EAST ORANGE, NEW JERSEY

Honourable Consul General, Mr. Brentnold Evans
Rev. Esar Budhu,
Sis. Adeela Shabazz
Chairperson and Members of the Annual Guyana Interfaith Service Committee
Rev. Ingrid Chance, Minister of the Temple of the Abundant Life
Fellow Guyanese
Members of the Congregation of the St. Agnes
and St. Paul's Episcopal Anglican Church

I was delighted to receive your kind invitation to this Annual Interfaith Service
of Prayer, Reflection and Rededication to mark the 41st Anniversary of
Guyana's Declaration of Republican status on February 23rd, 1970.

I am particularly pleased to be here given that the cities of Orange and East
Orange in New Jersey have the highest percentage of Guyanese-Americans of
all the cities in the United States. Although Brooklyn and Queens have larger
raw numbers, 2.5 percent of East Orange residents identified themselves as
being of Guyanese ancestry in the 2000 census.
My friends, when Guyana attained political independence from Britain in 1966, the Queen of England still remained as our Head of State. It was the declaration of Republican status in 1970 which broke our final link with the colonial era and severed that symbol of foreign rule; and it is the forty-first anniversary of that declaration of Republican status that we are gathered here this afternoon to observe.

As we are all aware, this occasion commemorates the historic slave rebellion in the then colony of Berbice which was led by our national hero, Cuffy. Today, when we speak about the horrors of slavery, it is impossible to fathom the true depths of cruelty, anguish and despair which was suffered by our forefathers - the separation from family, the back-breaking work, the whips and the chains.

Not surprisingly, slave revolts were common throughout the Caribbean but up to that point, none had been successful; and so, in 1763, exactly 100 years before the New Jersey legislature incorporated East Orange as a township, Cuffy and the enslaved men, women and children of Berbice, rebelled against their Dutch slave masters.
The slave battalion seized control of the plantations, overthrew the Government of the colony and routed their oppressors, most of whom escaped to Holland. They organized for production and defence, engaged in complex military maneuvers and established a fully functioning government. At the height of the conflict Cuffy commanded a force of 3000 men and women. The rebellion succeeded in threatening the very presence of Europeans in the Americas. It was a major blow to the system of slavery, and it represented a triumph of the human spirit by those who preceded us as Guyanese. The colony of Berbice would have been an independent nation since 1763, thirteen years before the American colonies declared their Independence in 1776, had the slaves been able to hold out.

But this was not to be. Divisions emerged among the victorious slave leaders Cuffy and Atta. Disunity and infighting between them and their supporters were major factors enabling the Dutch to return with superior forces and to crush the rebellion with unspeakable barbarity.

My friends,
A nation’s teachings are ensconced in its history; and one of the best ways to pay tribute to the memory of those freedom fighters is to learn the lessons of their struggles. The 1763 Slave Rebellion contains powerful lessons for the Guyanese nation of today about the importance of unity. In this regard, I am pleased to endorse the theme which you have chosen for this year's service "United For Progress" - a theme which you have rightly deemed as being appropriate for our nation as we strive for continued growth and development and a theme which you have demonstrated in this inspiring Inter-Faith Service here today.

From 1763 to now, our country’s history has been one of perpetual struggle. Just as our enslaved predecessors rose up against their oppressors, succeeding generations of Guyanese have had to wage bitter and protracted struggles against other forms of oppression. Today, in the forty-first year of the Republic, their descendants stand tall on the shoulders of the many thousands who have sacrificed, the many who have even been martyred, in those struggles down through the ages.
Anniversaries are occasions for reflection and assessment. Today, our country can look back at the enormous challenges both internal and external which we have faced and we have overcome in the last forty one years. It is a journey which all of us are familiar with; and it is a story in which we can all take pride. We are a tough, resilient and industrious people. It is that history that has made us strong as a people. Often when I come across a foreigner they would invariably say “I employ a Guyanese in my business” or “I know a Guyanese at my workplace and he or she ‘is a very capable and a very hardworking person’.” This is our true reputation. That we are a talented and industrious people.

Ladies and Gentlemen, at the commencement of this new decade, President Bharrat Jagdeo appealed for every citizen to commit to the common good by leading exemplary lives as honest, hardworking and law-abiding citizens. He observed that it is the obligation of citizens to help Guyana attain the peace, security and prosperity for which our ancestors and succeeding generations have struggled.
And there is certainly a place for everyone of us in this effort. The motherland requires the support and solidarity of all its patriots, local and overseas, to advance its national priorities and programmes. There is a role for all of us who are far away and yet we feel that sense of belonging. Guyana needs all of its sons and daughters to be Ambassadors for Guyana.

For Guyana is more than 83,000 square miles of land, it is more than its people, its institutions and its landmarks, it is more than the birthplace of our myths and legends. Guyana is where our collective soul resides. She is the embodiment of our collective spirit.

I wish to commend the Committee of this Annual Interfaith Service for doing its part. I wish to congratulate you for donating the contributions this year to two well deserving charities, Food for the Poor and Medical Missions to Guyana. That this year's service is dedicated to the memory of the late Parliamentarian, Winston Murray and other Guyanese citizens who passed on in 2010 would strike a note of empathy with the people of Guyana.
I hope this congregation will inspire others to follow its example. On this 41st anniversary of the Republic, let us rededicate and recommit ourselves to Guyana. Let us help fulfill the President’s vision of a safe, peaceful and prosperous society. Let us be guided by the ideals of our illustrious foreparents. Let us play our part in doing the painstaking work and in fulfilling the historic dreams of Guyanese everywhere.

Happy 41st Republic Anniversary from the Government and People of Guyana.

I thank you.

East Orange, New Jersey
February 27, 2011