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STATEMENT

BY

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AT THE

OPENING OF THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

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Mme. Chairman, Mr. Secretary General, other distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen:

Let me first thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the invitation to address this 17th Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. I would also like to commend the many outstanding professionals, scholars, scientists and other experts who work within and alongside the United Nations and its sister organisations to advance global efforts to safeguard our planet's future. They have performed a vital service in helping the world to wake up to the realities of climate change, food insecurity, water scarcity, bio-diversity loss and the many other environmental problems which threaten global well-being and security.

But awareness-raising, though vital, is not enough to achieve sustainable development. As an international community, we need to turn this awareness into solutions that make the difference we urgently require. We won't succeed through rhetorical declarations or aspirational action plans, and we won't succeed through unreformed multilateral institutions that were designed for a radically different era. Instead we need to embrace a global responsibility to forge a new international policy environment whose effectiveness is commensurate with the challenges we face. This year presents us with two significant opportunities to do this.

First, as a consequence of the global crisis which has engulfed the world's economies, the international community is moving to create a new global institutional and regulatory framework. As this framework is formed, we must ensure that it creates the platform to meaningfully integrate sustainable development into global decision-making.

And second, in December the nations of the world will meet in Copenhagen to forge a new global climate agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol. It is vital that we are bold in ambition at Copenhagen – climate change is a far greater threat than the collapse of any bank, so the world needs to act with the same urgency it displayed when wrestling with the worst of the last year's financial collapses.

Future generations will not forgive us and many of the important policies emanating from the Johannesburg, Barbados, Mauritius, and other major UN Conferences will remain unrealized if we fail to grasp these two opportunities. And in both cases, true multilateralism and international partnership are not just desirable out of a sense of solidarity or fairness. They are essential because without them, we won't solve the global problems we face, and we will all – rich and poor alike – suffer the consequences as Cheddi Jagan so eloquently pointed out in his proposal on the need for a NGHO. Carbon emitted in one part of the world causes as much harm as carbon emitted anywhere else. Short-sighted agricultural shifts in one continent lead to economic imbalances and hunger and deprivation in others and financial instability in a single country can trigger a global recession because of the integrated nature of global markets.

Therefore, the old paradigm where small groups of countries could decide on behalf of the world, will not work. I welcome the emergence of the G20 grouping which enables a meaningful role for the developing world in global decision-making. I believe that the design of a new global financial architecture will be better because of the experience and insights of the large developing countries. But I also feel that this architecture will be lopsided in favour of the large countries of our world unless the G20 is augmented by the voices of the small countries of the developing world. Perhaps we may wish to advocate that a new Bretton Woods type Conference including all the countries of the world should design that framework. This would give it greater legitimacy and make it more responsive to the needs of all the countries – big and small. This framework can then be more effectively managed by the G-20 plus type of arrangement.

I want to spend a little more time addressing the second opportunity of which I spoke.

The science of climate change is very compelling and when countries meet in Copenhagen, it is essential that the world's historic polluters make meaningful commitments to reduce emissions; if the current global economic crisis is used as an excuse to pull back from making these commitments, it will send a disastrous signal to the developing world that action on climate change can only take place during times of prosperity. However, if the countries of today's developed world accept their responsibilities, I believe that the developing world in general will be willing to play our part.

This is in everyone's interests – even though per capita today, most developing countries emit a fraction of the emissions of the developed countries, as we become more prosperous, the entire world will benefit if we avoid the high pollution path that today's richer countries followed. Put more bluntly, it will be mathematically impossible to avoid catastrophic climate change without the developing world being able to take a more sustainable path to their future development.

Apart from the deep emissions cut, Copenhagen must create financing flows and technology transfer to enable the significant abatement potential of the developing world to become part of the solution. This won't be cheap – latest estimates suggest that the global flows to the developing world will need to be about 60 billion euros per annum by 2020 – but it will be good value for money because the investment will prevent emissions far more cheaply than many of the abatement solutions that are being pursued in the developed world.

If the developed world steps up to its responsibilities, those of us who lead developing countries should be willing to be part of the solution. This becomes particularly evident in rainforest countries like mine – over 80% of Guyana's territory is pristine forest and we want it to stay that way. But we are acutely conscious that preserving our forest comes at an economic cost to our nation