

**Forbes Burnham**



# The Struggle for Human Dignity

President of Guyana's  
Address at the  
International Forum on  
the Liberation of  
Southern Africa



# **The Struggle for Human Dignity**

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**President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, on the occasion of the opening of the International Forum on the Liberation of Southern Africa at the National Cultural Centre**

**Georgetown, 30th April, 1981**

**Published by the Office of the President  
Georgetown. Guyana  
April 1981.**



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**of Guyana**

## THE STRUGGLE FOR HUMAN DIGNITY

Cde. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Comrades,

May I on behalf of the Government and People of Guyana Say an especial welcome to those of you who are visiting our country to attend this International Forum. I offer you all hospitality at our disposal, and though yours will be a serious task during the ensuing four days, I hope that there will still be time enough for you to sample and enjoy such delights as our young lush land can offer. Yours is the freedom not only of the Capital city of Georgetown but also of our entire country.

Some may ask why a Forum on the Liberation of Southern Africa in Guyana, separated as it is from that great continent by thousands of miles of sea and land. The reason is simple. It is not because of historical accident that a significant section of our population traces its ancestry via slavery, it is also because for us in Guyana, freedom and liberty in the world of today are whole and indivisible. 'Each man's joy is joy to us. Each man's grief is our own', We are part of the world, we hope an integral part. The presence in any corner of the universe, of colonialism and exploitation rampant anywhere, diminishes our own freedom and limit our independence.

The liberation of man from oppression by man has been a dominant and ever recurring theme in history. With pride and sympathy we have all noted the incidents of success of peoples battling against fearful odds and their long lists of victories assure us of the inevitability of the triumph of freedom loving peoples over oppressive masters, of justice over injustice.

We reflect upon the signal victories of the liberation movements in the seventies in Southern Africa -Frelimo in Mozambique, M.P.L.A. in Angola. Z.A.N.U. and Z.A.P.U. in Zimbabwe, -which led their peoples in the critical struggle to independence. There now remain to be scaled in the eighties, the last ramparts of oppressive racism, and abhorrent domination, fuelled by inhuman apartheid in Namibia and in South Africa.

The issue of freedom in Southern Africa has always had a significance beyond that region and has been a concern of the international community. The obnoxious system of apartheid which is premised upon the denial of all important rights to millions of Africans, and which only two days ago we saw disenfranchise four-fifths of the population of South Africa, cannot be isolated as a regional problem. Its continued existence must and does have profound implications for international peace and security.

Peace and security are but a chimera and international stability, a vain pursuit, so long as vast and significant numbers of peoples in any continent are bereft of their rights to self-determination - treaties, pacts and summits, notwithstanding. Without any claim to originality, we in Guyana posit that the struggle for freedom and justice is an integral part of the wider contest for an equitable arrangement amongst states which in turn is a pre-requisite of stable international relationships.

We Guyanese, having won political independence, cannot be oblivious of the issues at stake in Southern Africa. A sense of morality as well as the recognition of self-interest compel our involvement. Hence, the liberation of Southern Africa has always been a critical theme in our foreign policy. I dare say this also is true of other states in the Commonwealth Caribbean.

The racist regime in South Africa not only brutalises the Africans in the latter's land of their birth, but also sends its marauding hordes across the frontiers of Mozambique, Zambia, Botswana and Angola, slaughtering innocent souls in these countries and wreaking havoc on their respective economies in most cases. In Angola alone, in the Southern and Central parts of that country it is estimated that approximately US\$7 billion worth of damage has already been done. These countries have won their formal political independence but are being denied the right to economic independence and social emancipation. At the end of the day, their respective governments will be accused of being feckless, incompetent and corrupt and if they remain in office will be asked to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous poverty as they go around the world with begging bowls.

It is incumbent upon us all in the circumstances even at the cost of sacrifice, to render all assistance to our brothers in Namibia and South Africa struggling to be free, for their cause is our cause, their victory will be our victory.

We in Guyana offer no compromise or apology. The independence of Namibia which South Africa holds against the wishes of the people of that country in the teeth of countless resolutions and judgements of the International Court of Justice, the freedom of the countless millions of Africans in South Africa brutalised and discriminated against over the years are, our immediate concern, your immediate concern.

In the circumstances, I congratulate the Guyana Committee for Solidarity and Peace which in association with my Government is hosting this Forum. I welcome the initiative which it has taken and it is my earnest hope that this Forum will underline the imperatives for the immediate independence of Namibia and for the end of the pernicious system of apartheid

In discharging its obligations, the Forum may well be guided by the several resolutions, decisions and declarations adopted by the OAU, the Non-Aligned Movement and the United Nations

Southern Africa IS In need of peace and an atmosphere conducive to growth and development, but it is not alone in this respect. Our Region also -the Caribbean and Latin America needs to devise adequate and appropriate instruments for the securing of peace. Peace, so that we may continue the urgent task of putting the fruits of our resources at the disposal of our people; peace, so that the true genius of our Region may flower and develop; peace, so that the principles which we espouse in common with the international community may become the established norms of international behavior.

May I pause here to pay tribute to the Organisation of African Unity which at its very birth and inception in 1963 so wisely and maturely enshrined in its charter, the principle that existing borders were sacrosanct. And this, despite the imperfections of some of the delimitations which were the terrible legacies of colonialism. The OAU with profound insight appreciated the maelstrom which would be released in any unilateral effort to redraw frontiers.

Is it not instructive and at the same time perhaps ironic that somewhat over a decade later, Europe followed the example of Africa? Wearing by centuries of bloody and destructive attempts to redefine borders, the European Nations were constrained to declare at the Helsinki Conference that existing and recognised frontiers should be considered fixed and final.

The time is now overdue for us in the Caribbean and Latin America to accept these lessons of the past and in the same way as we demand that South Africa admit to Walvis Bay being a part of Namibia, ourselves respect the boundaries which have been internationally delimited and recognised. To attempt to tamper with or alter frontiers unilaterally leaves us exposed to accusations of being greedy inheritors of the very colonialism from which we have emerged and which we have so often condemned. Land grabbing makes us the agents and purveyors of recolonisation in this age of decolonization.

The presence of so many representatives here today is testimony to a pervading interest in, and commitment to, man's right to be free. It also reflects the deep concern for peace. Consequently, my task becomes all the more pleasant as I am encouraged by the idea that the capital of little Guyana can once again contribute to the ongoing deliberations on Southern Africa. I am all the happier as I recognise many a familiar face of those who have made a sterling contribution to the general thrust and struggle for freedom.

May I hasten to assure you that my Government, indeed all the people of Guyana, regard this Forum with the utmost seriousness. With humility but with confidence, I urge that in your deliberations you seek to ensure that there comes out of this Forum, not necessarily new and world shaking proposals, perhaps the subject is too old to permit or originality; but a firm plan of action which effectively complements the manifold activities of the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement and which is calculated to bring about the immediate realisation of the dreams of the people of Namibia and give real hope of fulfillment to the similar aspirations of the oppressed majority of South Africa.

The time is propitious. The moment historic. The strategic balance has been altered irrevocably. The forces of freedom now press against the very frontiers of apartheid. In Southern Africa, there remain only two areas, Namibia and South Africa, where the racists brutally rule but at the same time are keenly conscious that their system is falling apart. The dying lion still has strength, but he knows that he is dying. What we need is the political will and unity to make the final thrust. That great continent pejoratively CALLED THE DARK CONTINENT has produced LIBERATION MOVEMENTS which have freed large parts of the motherland and have been the source of inspiration to many of us beyond its borders.

The Liberation Struggle in Africa is not a mere cold historical fact. My Party, My Government, My fellow Guyanese recognise it as an important aspect of the rhythm of revolution and change which has swept the world in the wake of the second world war. We have been inspired not only by the achievements in Asia but also by those in Africa, and found new strength as we embarked on the task of our own emancipation. Africa has indeed been in the vanguard of the struggle for the dissolution of imperialism and colonialism in recent years.

The results are there to be seen not only in the form of some fifty independent African Nations, but also in the form of the several new states in the Commonwealth Caribbean. We would hopefully be paying but a small part of the debt owed while seeking to consolidate our own independent status, if we were to support and give every assistance to the struggle in Namibia and South Africa.

Together our countries succeeded in 1966 in persuading the United Nations to terminate the South African mandate in Namibia and to establish a Council for Namibia as the legal administering authority.

Guyana finds some reason for pride in the fact that it has served on that Council from its very creation and has filled the presidency on one occasion so far. The Council's importance has grown over the years and so has the general recognition accorded it. This is attested to by the increase in membership which now includes many who were wont to scoff at it.

The major Western powers -the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, and West Germany influenced by their own strategic and economic interests or perhaps impelled by the gains of the Liberation Movements, and world opinion have formulated and sought support for a plan of action aimed at securing independence for Namibia. This plan has been basically accepted by S.W.A.P.O. the only authentic representative of the people of Namibia.

On the other hand, South Africa has in its tradition, prevaricated and vacillated and raised up puppets in an attempt to frustrate the legitimate desires of the people of Namibia. But what is more galling is, that South Africa has been permitted to flout the authority of the United Nations so far and today we are regaled with new ideas for settlement which can only be calculated to offer South Africa another reason for, and season of, delay.

I suggest, that we should stand ready to support any measure or plan which is clearly and unapologetically aimed at bringing independence to Namibia and which finds acceptance with S.W.A.P.O. I am sure that we have all noted that in contrast to the deception and obscurantist attitude of the Pretoria regime, the leadership of S.W.A.P.O. has displayed considerable patience, understanding and statesmanship.

In the tradition of the imperialists, the South African Government compounds intransigence with unabated repression. Perhaps at this stage, it is apposite to remark that the present South African Prime Minister, P.W. Botha, then a young man, along with his predecessors in office, Dr. Malan, Dr. Verwoerd and John Vorster as Nazi sympathisers, were amongst the leaders of the antiwar forces in the second world war when we were giving our pennies and cents to win the war for democracy and freedom.

We must recognise, we must condemn and seek to negate the continuing attempts being made to weaken and split S.W.A.P.O. and to promote those human instruments in Namibia who are susceptible to the overtures and control of the Botha clique.

I declare here and now, and have good reason to believe, that I have your blessing, that my Party and Government give and will continue to give their total and unstinted support to S.W.A.P.O. and the people of Namibia.

How much longer are we prepared to accept this intolerable affront to our dignity and patience? There are options available to us. One of these is the imposition of a regime of sanctions, notwithstanding the sophistry and hypocrisy which we have had to listen to over the past week in the Security Council, against the Pretoria Government as provided in Chapter VII of the United Nations charter as has been proposed by the frontline states. We can do nothing better than support those closest to the struggle. As for Guyana, it pledges and reiterates its unequivocal support for any measure adopted by the United Nations in this context, including mandatory sanctions.

We no doubt have all taken serious note of the attempts of some members of the Security Council to shield South Africa once more from the condign and deserved punishment which should be the concomitant of its repeated infractions of the several decisions of the United Nations. Let us resolve, however, in keeping with the decisions of the African

States to take the appropriate steps to ensure that freedom in Namibia is not compromised or too long delayed.

If the conduct and activities of the Pretoria clique in Namibia are arrogant and disconcerting, they are equally, if not more so, in South Africa itself.

We are not deceived by the superficial and cosmetic attempts at modifications and minor concessions in the apartheid system. These are designed to delude the unwary and naive and to foster illusions of change. They are directed essentially towards providing some comfort to those who mistakenly perceive that even in the final analysis, their economic interests are best protected by currying-favour with Botha and his colleagues.

The inequitable system upon which the South African political, constitutional and social edifices are built, is in turn based upon the denial of the freedom to twenty million Africans. The farcical institution of the Bantustans tragically shows the realities. Apartheid can never have a human face. The Freedom Fighters, the Liberation Movements, A.N.C. and P.A.C in South Africa deserve our continued moral and material support.

The revolutionary process in South Africa has impacted positively upon the domestic system spawned by Pretoria. Inspired and emboldened by the victories of the Liberation. Movements in the neighbouring states, the oppressed people of South Africa have displayed more courage and determination and have evinced a fixed intention of throwing off the yoke. Witness Soweto!

There are new dimensions and instances of dissent within the system. New coalitions based on class interests and on the acceptance of the inevitable have been formed. This positive development taken in conjunction with the assertive activities of the liberation movements during the past two years are welcome barometers of change at the very base of the system of apartheid. The fabric of apartheid is indeed weakening.

Let us not fail to add our voices and protests to those which have been raised and made for the release of the respected African leader, Nelson Mandela, who over two decades ago spearheaded some of the earlier assaults against apartheid. Let South Africa understand that the mind cannot be fettered and that freedom will not be indefinitely stifled.

The internal contradictions, the will of the Africans themselves, and the resolve of freedom loving peoples throughout the world will ensure the eventual liquidation of the dastardly system and ensure the freeing of the oppressed masses.

In the meantime, however, there are grave fears that South Africa is being actively assisted along the dangerous road of nuclear armament for aggressive purposes. The available evidence points at this stage to that country being far advanced in the realisation of this dangerous capacity. We cannot remain silent and inactive. We cannot lamely permit the world to be turned away from the immediate and central issue of Southern African Liberation and be befuddled by strategic and ideological misperceptions which mask the desire of some international circles to exploit the riches of that part of the world, not for the benefit of the indigenous peoples but for the enrichment of a small ruling clique and their outside friends.

There is a great danger that South Africa may seek to use its nuclear capacity in addition to conventional weaponry in a last and desperate attempt to thwart the march of freedom. This trend makes the tasks of this Forum all the more urgent and I leave it to you to formulate plans, tactics and strategies which will impress upon South Africa and her backers, the futility and the unprofitability of such attempts to prop up their ward.

I am convinced that this is not the time for mere rhetoric, protests there must be. Resolutions are part of our mobilisation efforts. The people whom we are representing and for whom we speak, are not without economic weapons. I leave it to this Forum to make the necessary decisions.

In addition, may I suggest that we seek to have the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement set a final date for the independence of Namibia. May I suggest that we make provisions for our respective Governments and institutions to provide training for the cadres that will have to run an independent Namibian Government. With humility, I may mention that at the moment, there are ten students from Namibia being trained in Guyana.

May I also suggest that we organise a conference to pledge financial and other material assistance of significant proportions to those in Namibia and South Africa and in the frontline states who now fight

our battles and those of all decent mankind. My Government in anticipation pledge the sum of \$250,000.

May I emphasise that action and not mere words is now demanded. At this Forum we all must think of the best means by which the Liberation of Southern Africa may be hastened. We must show ourselves bold and serious.

Somewhat over six years ago during a visit of the Council for Namibia to Guyana, we erected a monument to the Liberation fighters. I commend to you here, the inscription on that monument.

**"MOURN NOT FOR US WHO DIED BUT FOR OUR BROTHERS EVERYWHERE WHO LIVE IN BONDAGE AND IN MOURNING TURN AWAY TO ACT."**

It is my greatest pleasure to declare this Forum open.

**Design and Layout by Design & Graphics**

**Printed by Guyana National Printers, Ltd, 18-20 Industrial Site,  
Ruimveldt,  
Greater Georgetown, Guyana**

**Redesigned, edited and reprinted by Guyana Graphic**

**[www.GuyanaGraphic.com](http://www.GuyanaGraphic.com)**

**April 29, 2013**