
SPECIAL SECTION ON THE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA

INTRODUCTION

*President Jimmy Carter**

I am convinced that the most serious and universal problem facing the world today is the growing chasm between the richest and poorest people on earth. Over 1.3 billion of the world's population try to survive on less than one dollar per day, while nearly one billion are illiterate, and over half the world's people have little or no health care. In 2000, the countries of the world met at the UN Millennium Summit and pledged commitment to a series of time-bound development goals, including reducing by half the proportion of humanity living on a dollar a day. Tragically, we are not on course to meet these commitments. Though our future security hangs on our efforts to confront this problem, our efforts will come up short without a deeper understanding of the interconnected nature of our world by people in rich countries.

I am therefore pleased that the *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law* of the University of Georgia School of Law has devoted this issue to the legal challenges of Guyana. I have long believed that U.S. universities have a major role to play in alleviating human suffering. They are deep wells of knowledge, idealism, and energy that can be brought to bear to confront the global challenge of poverty. Unfortunately, all too often our universities send their faculty and students to Paris, Berlin, and London rather than Georgetown, Bamako, and Dhaka. The *Journal* has brought together an impressive range of Guyanese and American legal practitioners. My challenge to you is to translate your critical inquiry into action.

I hope you will consider what you can do to make the law a force for the alleviation of human suffering in countries like Guyana. Poverty is an element

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in the systematic denial of basic human rights. It is more than material deprivation. It is the pervasive feeling of fear, shame and insecurity of those less fortunate in society who are vulnerable under a weak legal system where the law is arbitrarily enforced. Inequality in society begets inequality before the law unless politicians and the legal community take action to ensure a fair and accessible system.

The Carter Center has worked in more than sixty-five countries around the world, but the Guyanese people hold a special place in my heart. The people of this diverse, English-speaking nation in South America enjoy one of the richest and most beautiful landscapes on the planet. Guyanese energy and creativity combined with the country's abundant resources and strategic location make it a potentially wealthy country and a gateway to trade between North and South America.

In 1992, The Carter Center proudly participated in Guyana's emergence into a new and hopeful era of democracy, and subsequently I have made Guyana a special focus country for The Carter Center.

We helped to convene a donor conference in 1994 and later assisted the country to produce a comprehensive, long-term National Development Strategy with the participation and input of hundreds of Guyanese experts and representatives of business, labor, women's organizations, Amerindian communities, environmental groups, and professional associations. Additionally, we have just completed a four-year program to assist the country in implementing the recommendations of this strategy in the area of judicial reform and helped to train and empower nongovernmental organizations working on behalf of women, youth, and indigenous peoples to be more effective advocates in the democratic political process.

But many challenges still remain. Deep political divisions exist that exacerbate and play upon ethnic prejudice and insecurity. While the constitution has been reformed, implementation of many of its provisions is incomplete and suffers from a lack of resources. Guyana's political leaders still struggle to find a formula of governance that respects basic human rights and principles of democracy, while ensuring that all voices are respected and everyone has faith that the powerful and powerless alike are accountable before the law.

I have hope that those who read this *Journal* will understand and accept their generation's great challenge to reduce the deepening divide between the rich and poor that threatens our security and is an affront to our humanity.