REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON
THE STRENGTHENING OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Letter dated 2 November 1981 from the Permanent Representative of
Guyana to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to request that you arrange to have the enclosed memorandum
prepared by the Government of Guyana with respect to Venezuela’s claim to territory
in Guyana circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda
item 58.

(Signed) Noel G. SINCLAIR
Permanent Representative
MEMORANDUM
ON THE
GUYANA/ VENEZUELA
BOUNDARY

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
GUYANA

INTRODUCTION

Guyana is under militant threat of a claim by the neighbouring republic of Venezuela to no less than five eighths of her territory. Guyana is a small developing country which achieved independence just fifteen years ago. Venezuela is a rich and comparatively powerful country with a land area four times that of Guyana and a population twenty times that of Guyana. Her claim is being advanced through an intensive campaign of mounting hostility to Guyana. The claim moreover is one which completely disregards the fact that the existing boundary was defined by the unanimous judgment of an international arbitral tribunal given in Paris in 1899, that it was thereafter laid down on the ground by a Venezuelan/British Mixed Boundary Commission, and that, as so laid down, it was fully respected and observed by both sides and by the international community for upwards of sixty years.
Brief Historical Background

The origins of the problem lie in the European scramble for empire in the "New World" which took place during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, the major colonising powers being Spain, Portugal, Holland and Britain. It was against a background of unsettled and competing claims amongst these powers that the liberation struggles within Latin America were carried on in the early years of the 19th century. The consequence was that many countries emerged out of that process into independence without defined boundaries. These were left to be determined by the new states themselves through negotiation, arbitration, and, regrettably in some cases, armed conflict. One of these states was the Republic of Venezuela, which proclaimed its independence from Spain in 1811.

The Republic of Guyana consisted originally of the three separate Dutch colonies of Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice. These were conquered by Britain in 1803 and were ceded to it by the Dutch in 1814. In 1831 the three colonies were united to form the Colony of British Guiana. British Guiana achieved independence in 1966 under the name of Guyana.

The Venezuela/British Guiana Boundary Dispute

Arising out of the historical circumstances alluded to above, for the greater part of the 19th century the boundary between British Guiana and Venezuela was the subject of dispute between Venezuela and Great Britain, the territory claimed by Venezuela being the entirety of what was the original Dutch colony of Essequibo, while the territory claimed by Great Britain reached far into what are now the eastern and north eastern regions of Venezuela.

Venezuela sought the support of the United States which gave the support sought in supposed vindication of the principles of the Monroe Doctrine. Under what history records as a definite threat of war by the United States, Great Britain agreed with Venezuela to submit the dispute to international arbitration.

The Treaty of Washington, 1897

With that object in view on February 2, 1897, Britain and Venezuela signed a treaty in Washington under which they agreed
to establish an international arbitral tribunal for the purpose of determining the "boundary line between the Colony of British Guiana and the United States of Venezuela". After spelling out the terms and conditions under which the Arbitral Tribunal was to function, the treaty concluded with a solemn undertaking by the two Contracting Parties "to consider the result of the proceedings of the Tribunal of Arbitration as a full, perfect and final settlement of all the questions referred to the Arbitrators".

The Arbitral Tribunal consisted of five members. Two of these were appointed on behalf of Britain. They were the Lord Chief Justice of England and an English Justice of Appeal. Two members were appointed on behalf of Venezuela. They were the Chief Justice and another member of the Supreme Court of the United States. The fifth member was a distinguished Russian jurist unanimously chosen by the other four members.

The Case before the Arbitral Tribunal

In the course of the procedures leading up to the arbitration, several volumes of historical evidence and arguments were exchanged between the two sides. The hearing before the Arbitral Tribunal, which was held in Paris in 1899, occupied no less than 54 sessions of oral argument.

In the case as presented by her, Venezuela elected to found her claim on rights based on Spanish discovery of the "New World". Such evidence of occupation as she advanced was secondary, tenuous and perfunctory. By contrast, the British rested their case on concrete acts of extensive occupation, possession and development carried on both by themselves and by their Dutch predecessors.

The Arbitral Award, 1899

On October 3, 1899, the Arbitral Tribunal gave its decision. The decision was unanimous. It laid down a line corresponding to the existing boundary.

The Award of the Tribunal coincided substantially with the British case, but not entirely, because certain areas claimed by the British, including the strategic mouths and lower reaches of the Amakura and Barima rivers and the upper reaches of the Cuyuni river, were awarded to Venezuela.
Acceptance of the Award

The Award was the subject of appreciative comments from responsible quarters both in the United States and in Venezuela. During the years 1901-1905 the boundary as defined by the Award was laid down on the ground by a Venezuela/British Mixed Boundary Commission. On January 10, 1905, the Boundary Commissioners unanimously signed a Joint Report of the boundary as demarcated by them and as set out in a map of the entire boundary which was also signed by them. Their report, with the boundary map, was in due course presented to and accepted by both governments.

For over six decades successive generations of British, Guyanese and Venezuelans and, indeed, the rest of the international community accepted as settled and final the boundary as laid down by the Arbitral Tribunal and as demarcated by the Venezuela/British Mixed Boundary Commission. The boundary as so laid down was later reproduced in official Venezuelan maps, including maps published in Caracas in 1911 and 1917. On July 24, 1932, the Bulletin of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Venezuela published the text of an Act of Inauguration by the Venezuelan Legislature of certain border marks which had been agreed by Guyana, Venezuela and Brazil as determining the tri-junction point of the boundaries of the three countries where they meet at Mount Roraima. Indeed, as late as December 13, 1965, the Legislative Assembly of the Venezuelan State of Bolivar, which is adjacent to Guyana, enacted a law which formally incorporated and promulgated the definition of the boundary as laid down by the 1899 Arbitral Award. It is to be remarked that that law was passed some three years after Venezuela first repudiated the Arbitral Award of 1899 upon pretensions to be now noticed.

A Posthumous Allegation

In keeping with her solicitation of American sponsorship of her cause, Venezuela had elected in 1899 to have her case presented to the Arbitral Tribunal by four American lawyers, namely, ex-United States President General Benjamin Harrison, ex-United States Secretary of War General Benjamin Tracy, Mr. Severo Mallet-Prevost and Mr. James Russell Soley. Mr. Mallet-Prevost was a junior lawyer in the team. In January 1944 he was decorated by the Venezuelan Government with the Order of the Liberator. On
the 8th day of the following month and after all the other actors in the drama had passed away, he dictated a memorandum which he directed should be published only after his death. In this document, which was published posthumously in 1949, Mr. Mallet-Prevost asserted that the 1899 Arbitral Award was null and void on the alleged ground that it was the result of a political deal between Great Britain and Czarist Russia.

The Allegation is without Merit

Serious research has long since questioned the accuracy of the faded recollections on which Mr. Mallet-Prevost's posthumous allegations were sought to be based. Even writers known to be otherwise sympathetic to Venezuela have agreed that his allegation that the Award was the result of a political deal between Britain and Czarist Russia is without foundation. Yet it is chiefly on the strength of this wholly unsubstantiated calumny of the distinguished members of the Arbitral Tribunal of 1899 that Venezuela is now seeking to impugn the validity of the Award.

Recognising the utter weakness of the Mallet-Prevost allegation of a political deal, Venezuela has sought to rest her case on alternative grounds including, for example, matters relating to the negotiation of the Treaty of Washington 1897 and the fact that no reasons were given by the Arbitral Tribunal for its decision. But the material on which challenge is sought to be brought on these alleged grounds was always within the full knowledge of Venezuela which nevertheless positively affirmed the validity of the boundary for six decades. For this and other reasons, which cannot be conveniently dealt with here, these other alleged grounds of challenge are considered to be without merit.

Venezuela Objects To Guyana's Independence

Meanwhile, in Guyana the struggle against colonialism was gaining momentum. By 1962 it was clear that the demand of the Guyanese people for independence could not much longer be put off. In 1962, during a sensitive and vulnerable phase in Guyana's movement for independence, Venezuela raised the question of the boundary in the United Nations, when she formally repudiated the validity of the 1899 Arbitral Award and objected to independence being granted to Guyana until and unless the question so raised had been settled. Concomitantly, Venezuela launched an international campaign against Guyana the effect of which, had it been
successful, would have been to delay the granting of independence to Guyana and to prolong her colonial status.

Examination of Documents

Notwithstanding the certain failure of Venezuela’s attempts to delay Guyana’s independence, as the time for granting independence approached the Government of the United Kingdom, in consultation with the Government of the then Colony of British Guiana, agreed as a gesture of goodwill to afford to the Venezuelan Government an opportunity of having its contention of nullity examined. Accordingly, on November 12, 1962, Mr. Colin Crowe, the United Kingdom representative at the United Nations, made an offer to Venezuela in the United Nations Special Committee to the effect that the relevant documentary material on the 1899 Award be examined by experts from the United Kingdom, British Guiana and Venezuela. In doing so he was, however, careful to state —

In making this offer, I must make it very clear that it is in no sense an offer to engage in substantive talks about revision of the frontier. That we cannot do; for we consider that there is no justification for it.

Venezuela having accepted this offer, the documents were then duly examined by experts from each of the three countries between 1963 and 1965. In the opinion of the governments of the United Kingdom and British Guiana the work of the experts disclosed that there was not a scintilla of evidence to support Venezuela’s contention of nullity.

The Geneva Agreement — February 17, 1966

However, in view of continued Venezuelan agitation, which became particularly marked during the period immediately preceding Guyana’s independence, just four months before independence the Government of the United Kingdom, in consultation with the Government of Guyana, agreed with the Government of Venezuela to establish a Mixed Commission of Guyanese and Venezuelan representatives charged with “the task of seeking satisfactory solutions for the practical settlement of the controversy between Venezuela and the United Kingdom which has arisen as the result of the Venezuelan contention that the
Arbitral Award of 1899 about the frontier between British Guiana and Venezuela is null and void" The arrangement to this effect was set out in the Geneva Agreement which was signed by the United Kingdom, Guyana and Venezuela at Geneva on February 17, 1966. The life of the Mixed Commission so established was stipulated to be four years. During that period the Geneva Agreement explicitly prohibited either party from pursuing the issue in any form or manner except within the Mixed Commission.

Venezuela’s Refusal to Prove her Case

The Mixed Commission held several meetings during the four years of its existence. At the very first meeting, Guyana invited Venezuela to produce evidence and arguments in support of her basic contention that the 1899 Arbitral Award was null and void. Surprisingly, Venezuela’s reaction was that the issue of nullity, which she had raised, was not an issue with which the Mixed Commission should concern itself, and that the only issue before the Commission was how much land Guyana was prepared to make over to Venezuela. Guyana not unnaturally declined to proceed in that way. Venezuela then sought to circumvent argument about her contention of nullity by putting forward proposals for the “joint development” of the area claimed by her under arrangements which would effectively have transferred to her substantial elements of sovereignty over the area. These “joint development” proposals were consequently unacceptable to Guyana.

Venezuela’s Breaches of the Geneva Agreement

The work of the Mixed Commission was regrettably hampered by pressure and hostility exerted by Venezuela throughout the life of the Commission. The fact that these acts represented distinct breaches of the Geneva Agreement and accepted norms of international behaviour seemed in no way to trouble Venezuela. Guyana’s protests, both within the Mixed Commission and directly to the Government of Venezuela, were contumaciously ignored. Some of these breaches were as follows:—

(i) Venezuela’s Violation of Guyana’s Territorial Integrity – Ankoko Island

In accordance with the general map of the boundary, as
demarcated and authenticated in 1905 by the Venezuela/British Mixed Boundary Commission, the eastern portion of the island of Ankoko in the Guyuni River belongs to Guyana. As mentioned earlier, that fact was distinctly recognised as recently as December 13, 1965, in a decree concerning the boundary which was published in the Official Gazette of the Venezuelan State of Bolivar which abuts Guyana in the area of Ankoko Island. Yet a mere ten months after the publication of that decree the armed forces of Venezuela proceeded to invade the Guyana portion of the island, which ever since has been in the illegal occupation of Venezuela notwithstanding repeated protests from Guyana.

(ii) Venezuela’s Attempt to Appropriate Guyana’s Off-shore Waters

On July 9, 1968, President Leoni of Venezuela signed a Decree purporting to annex as part of the territorial waters and contiguous zone of Venezuela a belt of sea lying along the coast of Guyana between the mouth of the Essequibo River and Waini Point, and purporting further to require the armed forces of Venezuela to impose the dominion of Venezuela over the said belt of sea. This Presidential Decree, apart from being in open breach of the Geneva Agreement, also contravened international maritime law since it violated the Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone and the Convention on the Continental Shelf of 1958, both of which clearly visualise that such off-shore waters pertain only to the relevant coastal state.

(iii) Economic Blackmail and Aggression

On May 15, 1968, there was published in “The Times” of London a paid advertisement entitled “Communique from the Venezuela Ministry of Foreign Affairs” dated May 14, 1968, in which the Government of Venezuela publicly and categorically stated “that they do not recognise any type of such supposed concessions, either granted or to be granted by the Guyana Government over the territory stretching to the West of the Essequibo River from its source to its mouth...” The Venezuelan Government was reacting to information that, with the help of the United Nations and the United States of America, the Government
of Guyana was seeking to develop the mineral sector of the
country's economy in the Essequibo region. This is but one
example of pressure consistently applied by Venezuela with a view
to strangling Guyana's economic development.

(iv) Venezuela's Intervention in Guyana's Internal Affairs

Between 1966 and 1968 agents of the Government of
Venezuela organised clandestine meetings with citizens of Guyana,
aimed at the promotion of her claim through subversion. These
efforts were unsuccessful. Indeed, in the early years of her
independence the Government of Guyana was obliged to expel a
Venezuelan diplomat for the part he played in these acts of
interference in the internal affairs of Guyana.

Between December 24, 1968, and January 2, 1969, the
Venezuelan Government however instigated and conspired with a
number of ranchers in the Rupununi District of Guyana, which is
in the area claimed by Venezuela, to seize certain administrative
posts in the area. The aim was to establish a separate state in
secession from the rest of Guyana. Venezuela had an active role in
training, arming and supplying these ranchers. The attempted act
of secession failed and with it Venezuela's efforts at promoting her
claim by such means.

Guyana has naturally reserved her position on all of these
breaches by Venezuela of the Geneva Agreement and of inter-
national law.

The Protocol of Port-of-Spain, June 18, 1970

Against this background it is not surprising that the Guyana/
Venezuela Mixed Commission ended its four-year term of office
without reaching agreement for the settlement of the controversy.
In keeping with article IV of the Geneva Agreement the govern-
ments of Guyana and Venezuela were thereupon required to
choose one of the means of peaceful settlement specified in article
33 of the United Nations Charter, namely, negotiation, enquiry,
mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to
regional agencies or arrangements, or other means of peaceful
settlement chosen by the parties.

The requirement to resort to these settlement procedures was
suspended in 1970 by a new Agreement which in effect froze the

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problem for a twelve-year period. This period expires on June 17, 1982, but is automatically renewable unless either party gives six months' notice of termination. The Agreement, which was signed at Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, operates as a Protocol to the Geneva Agreement 1966. So long as the Protocol is in force it imposes upon Guyana and Venezuela the duty to explore all possibilities of better understanding between them and their peoples and for the constructive improvement of their relations. Correspondingly, it continued the prohibition imposed by the Geneva Agreement against any activation of the controversy raised by the Venezuelan contention that the Arbitral Award was null and void.

The Operation of the Protocol of Port-of-Spain

At the beginning, the Protocol of Port-of-Spain served to induce a period of calm and a measure of responsible behaviour from Venezuela following the hostilities and various forms of aggression and intimidation against Guyana which were features of previous years. Thus, on Guyana's initiative, Dr. Haydee Castillo de Lopez Acosta, Minister of Development, became in 1971 the first Venezuelan Minister ever to make an official visit to Guyana. Later that year Cde. P.A. Reid, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture, returned the visit. In the years which followed discussions took place at several levels. These discussions, from a Guyana point of view, were aimed at improving cooperation between the two countries in many areas. The spirit generated by the Protocol of Port-of-Spain provided the climate for exploratory conversations of substance which took place in 1978 between the then President of Venezuela, Sr. Carlos Andres Perez, and Guyana's then Prime Minister, Cde. Forbes Burnham. These conversations examined in considerable depth the state of relations between Guyana and Venezuela and were regarded as helpful in advancing the objectives of the Protocol and in opening the way for a more ordered search for a settlement of the controversy which stemmed from the Venezuelan contention that the Award of 1899 was a nullity.

Unfortunately, the later years of the Protocol saw a recrudescence of Venezuelan hostility towards Guyana. Notwithstanding that, however, with the advent of a new Venezuelan administration early in 1979, the Government of Guyana renewed its efforts towards meaningful discussion and co-operation with Venezuela.
Visit of the President of Guyana to Venezuela — April 2-3, 1981

Indeed, it was in furtherance of these objectives that the President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana paid a visit to Venezuela on April 2-3, 1981, in response to an invitation by his counterpart. The visit, which at the official level was cordial, unfortunately took place amidst an orchestrated Venezuelan campaign of hostility towards Guyana, including strident calls for military occupation of the region claimed and the institution of a naval blockade of Guyana.

Statement by the President of Venezuela — 4th April, 1981

Less than twenty-four hours after the President of Guyana returned home, the President of Venezuela saw fit to issue from Miraflores Palace the following statement:

As a result of the recent visit to Venezuela of the President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, Mr. Linden Forbes Burnham, and the meetings he held with President Luis Herrera Campins, the Venezuelan Government announced that:

1. Both Chiefs of State held cordial and frank talks on relevant issues and on matters of current international interest.

2. President Herrera Campins firmly ratifies Venezuela's claims to the Essequibo territory. An illegal arbitration award of 1899, which was never valid, despoiled Venezuela of that territory.

3. President Herrera Campins thus reiterates Venezuela's rejection of any compromise incompatible with Venezuela's claim and stresses the nation's desire that the grave injustice committed against it by the voracity of the colonial empires should be righted.

For the same reason President Herrera reiterates Venezuela's rejection of the Hydroelectric Project of the Upper Mazaruni.

4. President Herrera also reiterates that Venezuela and Guyana are committed to seek practical and satisfactory
solutions to the pending controversy, and ratifies Venezuela's determination to continue exploring every means to achieve that end.

Therefore, for the record, he states that at this moment, Venezuela is not willing to extend the Port-of-Spain Protocol.

Thus, even while the moratorium so thoughtfully provided by the Protocol of Port-of-Spain was still in force, Venezuela at the highest level represented by her President chose to go on record as breaching the moratorium by actively reviving the issue and seeking to thwart the economic development of Guyana. This latter aspect of Venezuela's current attitude is particularly surprising, regard being had to Venezuela's professions of concern for the economically disadvantaged and her championship of the cause of economic co-operation among developing countries.

If the belligerency of Venezuela's current campaign of hostility towards Guyana is any guide, it is a fair if unsettling conclusion that the statement by the Venezuelan President of Venezuela's intention to terminate the Protocol of Port-of-Spain portends for Guyana an ominous return to the unhappy earlier period during which both Guyana and the Caribbean region faced constant threat to their peace and security as a result of the Venezuelan claim and the methods whereby it was asserted and advanced.

Venezuela — the New Conquistador

The Venezuelan claim, being based on supposed rights of Spanish discovery, rests essentially on the long since discarded notion that it was the manifest destiny of European peoples to hold dominion over non-white peoples and their lands. Technological superiority was thought sufficient to override the claims of others. Examples abound. Today, however, the principle of self-determination is a mandatory and fully crystallised norm of international law and relations.

The persistence of the Venezuelan claim to five-eighths of Guyana's territory notwithstanding that the entire population in the area claimed is Guyanese in every respect is a strange-atavistic throwback to the presumption of European superiority which inspired the Spanish conquistadors of an earlier time. It is sad that
Venezuela should be so insensitive to the incongruity of the role which she would assume of a 20th century prosecutor of an obsolete 16th century European colonialism over non-white peoples. For even if by any stretch of imagination the land claimed were technically Venezuelan territory, it is clear that that circumstance could not justify her in recolonising the very substantial population of the territory which since 1966 has exercised its right of self-determination by freely joining in the formation of the independent sovereign State of Guyana.

Guyana Stands Firm

In the light of the statement issued by the President of Venezuela on April 4, 1981, President Burnham considered it desirable to clarify Guyana’s stand. This he did in a statement made by him to the Press in Guyana on April 8, 1981, when, restating his views as publicly declared during his recent visit to Venezuela, he defined the position of the Government of Guyana to be as follows:

(a) The 1899 Arbitral Award was entirely valid.

(b) Even if the Award was invalid, the boundary laid down pursuant to the Award has acquired full validity as a result of Venezuelan recognition, acquiescence and other conduct relating thereto.

(c) Even if both the Award and the boundary laid down pursuant thereto are invalid, the land claimed by Venezuela does not automatically go to her.

(d) In such a situation, whatever settlement procedure is adopted, account will have to be taken of all the claims of both sides, including in particular –

(i) claims by Guyana to the Amakura, Barima and Cuyuni areas, which we lost to Venezuela as a result of the Award; and

(ii) claims by Guyana based upon her possession and occupation right up to comparatively recent times when Venezuela first formally rejected the validity of the 1899 Award.
(e) Meanwhile, the Essequibo Region is an integral part of Guyana and has been so for the entire history of the country.

(f) There is nothing whatsoever in the Geneva Agreement or the Protocol of Port-of-Spain which precludes Guyana from developing any part of her territory, including the area claimed by Venezuela. Nor will Guyana ever consent to any arrangement having any such effect. On the contrary, Guyana has a moral duty to make optimum use of her resources for the benefit of her population and for the promotion of the integrated development of the Region and the Hemisphere of which she is a part.

(g) This applies very specifically to the Upper Mazaruni Hydro-Electric Project. Besides being crucial to the development of the nation, the project offers opportunities for regional co-operation of a kind visualised under OLADE, which Venezuela vigorously espouses, and the Treaty of Amazonian Co-operation to which both Guyana and Venezuela stand committed. Guyana therefore intends to intensify her efforts to bring this project to fruition.

President Burnham ended by saying –

It is entirely a matter for Venezuela to decide whether she will terminate the Protocol of Port-of-Spain. But this Government does have some say over the course to be pursued when the Protocol comes to an end. We would hope that the exploration of the problem will continue to develop, as it has been developing under the Protocol, in a climate of friendship, understanding and co-operation. To those honourable ends I pledge this Government. I would sincerely like to think that the same applied to the Government of Venezuela.

Continuing Venezuelan Hostility

Since the issuing of President Burnham’s press statement evidence has come to light through the Venezuelan media of other developments giving cause for more concern. No less than a

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Minister of the Government of Venezuela has publicly boasted of the fact that he has recently led a substantial body of Venezuelans across the border for the purpose of establishing acts of occupation by Venezuela in the territory of Guyana. The Minister has also publicly declared his intention to conduct other similar exercises. In addition, the Venezuelan Government has openly announced that it has given instructions to its various representatives abroad to implement a concerted strategy of opposing efforts by Guyana to obtain financial support for the implementation of projects vital to her economic development. By way of general accompaniment, the Venezuelan media is at all levels continuing its campaign of hostility.

The Nature of the Venezuelan Negotiating Process

It is difficult to negotiate in good faith with Venezuela. The Treaty of Washington 1897 was entered into by Britain with Venezuela as a result of pressure applied on Britain by the United States on behalf of Venezuela. In appreciation of American support, George Washington's statue in Caracas was covered with wreaths by jubilant Venezuelans. Yet Venezuela was later to say that she had been coerced by America into signing the Treaty. Under the Treaty, as mentioned earlier, Venezuela and Britain undertook to "consider the result of the proceedings of the Tribunal of Arbitration as a full, perfect and final settlement of all questions referred to the Arbitrators". Venezuela, having for so long duly respected the decision of the tribunal, has now totally rejected it.

And then there is the Protocol of Port-of-Spain itself. It was signed in 1970 by the Foreign Minister of Guyana and the Foreign Minister of Venezuela at a ceremony presided over by the late distinguished Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, the Right Honourable Dr. Eric Williams. The United Kingdom was also a signatory. Yet in later years, when it suited her, Venezuela was to take the position that the Protocol was not valid for the alleged reason that it had never been formally ratified by the Venezuelan Congress.

Guyana's experience has been shared by others. In 1901 Venezuela rejected an arrangement which she had previously come to with Colombia over the frontier between them. In 1980 Venezuela similarly rejected an agreement reached by a Venezuela/Colombia Mixed Boundary Commission which had demarcated the
boundary between the two states in the Gulf of Venezuela. It is known that leading elements within Venezuela are opposed to any form of settlement with Colombia which does not result in the entirety of the Gulf being awarded to Venezuela, and this despite the fact that Colombia has a substantial coast line along the western side of the Gulf. According to the Venezuelan members of the Mixed Commission, they had acted with the approval and support of the Venezuelan President himself. Not surprisingly they resigned in protest.

Negotiations with Venezuela are never easy – particularly where smaller states are concerned.

Venezuelan Revanchism

In her own eyes, Venezuela must be the most "despoiled" country in South America. She has territorial claims against Colombia. Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago have not yet settled the demarcation of their boundaries in all their aspects. Grenada and Venezuela need to settle the limits of their respective maritime jurisdictions. Venezuela has established her suzerainty over Bird Island in the Caribbean, and she is yet to conclude discussions regarding demarcations in the sea between Bird Island and the French territory of Martinique. And Venezuela claims five-eighths of Guyana. Of all states in this region it is, perhaps significantly, only against the Federative Republic of Brazil that Venezuela has no territorial claim.

The Past and the Future

In 1968 Cde. L.F.S. Burnham, then Prime Minister of Guyana, in a speech to Parliament had cause to lament one of Venezuela's several breaches of international law. It was a breach of the Geneva Agreement, occasioned by the Venezuelan Decree of 1968 purporting to annex a belt of sea off Guyana's coast. Cde. Burnham spoke in terms which had a prophetic ring. His words, with which this memorandum might conveniently end, were these –

I cannot tell with any certainty where this ill-advised course of action on which the Government of Venezuela has embarked will lead us. We must be prepared, however, for further and even more aggressive demonstrations of international lawlessness from the Government of Venezuela.
We will need all our courage and strength to withstand these efforts to break our will and despoil our land. Venezuela has now made clear her intention to seek relentlessly to re-impose the yoke of colonialism on a small nation that has succeeded in freeing itself from the tutelage of another imperial power. We have no quarrel with the Venezuelan people but we shall not lack courage or resolve in resisting aggressive demands of a Venezuelan Government that is prepared to defile the traditions of Bolivar and to flout the precepts of hemispheric and world order and security.

In our stand for survival we shall call upon the conscience of all peace-loving people to speak out in our cause and we shall need all our unity as a people so that our voice may be heard in all corners of the world and in all the councils of the world's institutions for peace.