



Office of the President
Shiv Chanderpaul Drive & South Road,
Bourda, Georgetown,
Co-operative Republic of Guyana

12th December, 2023

Dr the Honourable Ralph Gonsalves
Prime Minister of St Vincent and the Grenadines
Office of the Prime Minister
Kingstown
St Vincent and the Grenadines

Dear Ralph,

I look forward to attending the “high-level dialogue” on 14th December in St. Vincent and the Grenadines to which President Maduro of Venezuela and I have been invited. This letter is further to my letter to you of 10th December in which I communicated that I will be attending this meeting.

In my prior letter, I indicated my understanding that the meeting is to be conducted in consonance with the framework elaborated for such a meeting in the Communique of CARICOM Heads of Government of 8th December 2023.

In that Communique, CARICOM:

- ‘firmly supports Guyana in pursuance of the resolution of its border controversy with Venezuela through the process of the of the International Court of Justice’;
- ‘urges Venezuela to respect the conservatory measures determined by the ICJ in its recent ruling until a final resolution’, and
- ‘reiterates CARICOM’s commitment to the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace and the maintenance of international law.’

2.

In their urging of an engagement between Guyana and Venezuela, the CARICOM Heads of Government further called for “a de-escalation of the conflict through an appropriate dialogue between the leaders of Venezuela and Guyana to ensure peaceful co-existence, the application and respect for international law and the avoidance of the use or threats of force.”

It is this framework for the meeting to which I have consented and to which I remain committed.

That being said, it is incumbent upon me to respond to certain inaccuracies in President Maduro’s letter to you of December 11, 2023. Particularly his statement that: the ‘high-level dialogue’ to which you have invited us, is “in order to directly to address the territorial dispute between Venezuela and Guyana”.

In their urging of an engagement between Guyana and Venezuela at the meeting of CARICOM Heads of Government referred to above, the Heads called for “*a de-escalation of the conflict through an appropriate dialogue between the leaders of Venezuela and Guyana to ensure peaceful co-existence, the application and respect for international law and the avoidance of the use or threats of force.*”

As was clearly established in that meeting and conveyed in the outcome statement, there is full support by CARICOM for Guyana in pursuance of the resolution of its border controversy with Venezuela through the process of the International Court of Justice.

I, too, have a mandate from the National Assembly of Guyana which is unanimous in its resolve that the land boundary is not a matter for bilateral discussions and the settlement of the matter is properly in the International Court of Justice where it must remain until the Court gives its final ruling on the merits of the case which, Guyana has always said, and I repeat, will be fully respected by Guyana.

On 17 February 1966, the Geneva Agreement was signed between the UK/British Guiana and Venezuela. Guyana became a party upon attaining independence. The Agreement provided several mechanisms for Guyana and Venezuela to resolve Venezuela’s contention of nullity and invalidity of the Award by talks; failing which, the Agreement mandates the United Nations Secretary General to select a final means of settlement of the controversy. That is the process that was scrupulously followed.

To recap that process: during the entire period of the existence of the Geneva Agreement, there have been several tools utilized. These include four (4) years (1966 -1970) of meetings through a Mixed Commission involving bilateral talks between Guyana and Venezuela, a twelve (12) year moratorium followed by twenty-eight (28) years

3.

(1989 – 2017) of the Good Offices Process under the aegis of the United Nations Secretary General. That Process facilitated dialogue between the two sides on a resolution of the controversy in the presence of the Secretary General’s personal representative.

It should be noted that Venezuela has never offered any credible support or evidence for its contention of nullity and invalidity of the 1899 Arbitral Award which settled the boundary between then British Guiana and Venezuela. Nor has it offered evidence to contradict the validity of the 1905 Agreement, signed by both parties, fixing the boundary along the line established in the 1899 Arbitral Award. To the contrary, between 1899 and 1962 Venezuela accepted and recognised that boundary as the international boundary between the two States, as reflected in all official Venezuela maps published during this 60+ year period. Indeed, it applauded the award, claiming as a great victory the attribution of the mouth of the Orinoco River – which was understood by both parties as the most important territory in dispute – to Venezuela.

The Geneva Agreement of 1966 provides assurances of a final settlement by vesting in the Secretary-General of the United Nations the authority to choose the International Court of Justice as the means of settling the controversy in accordance with international law. That is what he did in 2018. The parties are bound by the Geneva Agreement to accept the ICJ as the means of settlement, and to accept the Judgement of the Court as the final settlement of the controversy.

I am obliged to point to other inaccurate assertions in President Maduro’s letter. He refers to oil concessions “in a maritime area yet to be delimited”. I point out that, contrary to that misleading assertion, all of the oil blocks are located well within Guyanese waters under international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which guarantees coastal States the exclusive rights to the resources in the sea and seabed within 200 nautical miles of their coasts. The oil blocks are all located adjacent to Guyana’s coast and within 200 nautical miles of it.

To underscore the misleading nature of President Maduro’s statement, it is important to note that in 2015, a significant oil discovery was made by Esso Exploration & Production Guyana Limited in the Stabroek Block approximately 120 miles offshore of Guyana.

Production has since commenced and been carried on without interference from Venezuela. The 14 oil blocks included in the 2022 Licensing Bid Round are farther east of the boundary with Venezuela – and farther from the Venezuelan coast – than the Stabroek Block.

4.

As for the further inaccurate allegation that there is “meddling of the United States Southern Command, which has begun operations in the disputed territory”, the Government of Guyana maintains its sovereign right to engage in any form of cooperation with its bilateral partners and does not support intervention in the internal affairs of any other State a principle that is honoured by responsible states in the international community. Any allegation that a military operation aimed at Venezuela exists in any part of Guyanese territory is false, misleading and provocative.

Let me assure you dear Colleague that I am prepared to speak with President Maduro **on any other aspect** that may contribute to improving and strengthening amicable relations between our two countries.

I appreciate the efforts that you and my other CARICOM Colleagues are making to facilitate such a dialogue, as well as Brazil and other countries of CELAC, and wish to restate Guyana’s commitment to the peace and security of our region.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mohamed Irfaan Ali', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mohamed Irfaan Ali
President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana

Copy: His Excellency Nicolas Maduro
President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

His Excellency Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva
President of the Federative Republic of Brazil

Honourable Roosevelt Skerritt
Prime Minister of Dominica

Dr Carla Barnett, Secretary General of CARICOM