

SPECIAL MISSION TO SURINAME (1992-2000)

OAS: PEACE, DEMOCRACY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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GOOD MORNING! IT'S REALLY A PLEASURE TO BE BACK TO THE OAS, WHERE I'VE WORKED FOR SO MANY YEARS, AND TO SEE OLD FRIENDS AND MAKE NEW ONES. I SINCERELY PRAISE THE ORGANIZERS OF THIS CONFERENCE FOR SUCH INITIATIVE AND I THANK FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK ABOUT A COUNTRY AND A TIME THAT WILL FOREVER HAVE A VERY SPECIAL PLACE IN MY MEMORY. IT IS ABOUT TIME THE OAS MAKE KNOWN ITS INVOLVEMENT IN THE RESOLUTION OF CONFLICTS AND PEACE EFFORTS IN THE HEMISPHERE; MANY OF ITS ACCOMPLISHMENTS JUST PASSED UNNOTICED OR WERE SIMPLY FORGOTTEN. BUT TODAY THOSE JOINING US HERE CAN FINALLY HAVE AN IDEA OF WHAT THE OAS HAS DONE ALL THESE YEARS AND HOW IT HELPED TO CHANGE LIFE IN SO MANY MEMBER COUNTRIES.

MY NAME IS ANTONIO EDGARDO REIS, AND I HEADED THE SPECIAL MISSION TO SURINAME FROM 1992 TO 2000.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE OAS IN SURINAME STARTED DURING THE OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN PARAGUAY, IN 1990, WHEN THEN SECRETARY GENERAL, JOÃO CLEMENTE BAENA SOARES, MET WITH SURINAME'S PRESIDENT, RAMZEWAK SHANKAR. MR. SHANKAR REQUESTED THE OAS ASSISTANCE FOR HIS GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO REACH A PEACE AGREEMENT WITH THE ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS ACTIVE IN THE INTERIOR OF THE COUNTRY. A FACT-FINDING MISSION OF THE OAS GENERAL SECRETARIAT VISITED THE COUNTRY IN OCTOBER OF THAT YEAR BUT ITS WORK WAS INTERRUPTED TWO MONTHS LATER WITH THE REMOVAL FROM POWER OF PRESIDENT SHANKAR.

IN 1986, A CONFLICT HAD BROKEN OUT IN EASTERN SURINAME, WHICH SPREAD IN THE SUBSEQUENT YEARS TO CENTRAL AND WESTERN SURINAME. THE CONFLICT INVOLVED THE NATIONAL ARMY AND THE JUNGLE COMMANDO, AN INSURGENT GROUP CONSISTING MAINLY OF MAROONS. AT THE END OF 1986

AND DURING THE FIRST HALF OF 1987, INTENSE FIGHTING TOOK PLACE IN AND AROUND MAROON VILLAGES IN THE EASTERN REGION OF SURINAME. SOME 10,000 INHABITANTS SOUGHT REFUGE IN NEIGHBORING FRENCH GUIANA, AND ANOTHER 13,000 PEOPLE FROM THE INTERIOR FLED TO PARAMARIBO. LUMBERING, BAUXITE, AND GOLD MINING, AND THE PALM OIL INDUSTRY SUFFERED MAJOR SETBACKS OR CLOSED DOWN TEMPORARILY OR FOR EXTENDED PERIODS IN THE AREAS OF CONFLICT. IN 1989, OTHER ILLEGALLY ARMED GROUPS ENTERED INTO THE INTERNAL CONFLICT: THE TUCAJANA AMAZONES (AMERINDIAN GROUP), MANDELA, ANGULA, AND KOFFIEMAKA (OTHER MAROON GROUPS).

IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE CONFLICT BROKE OUT PRECISELY AT THE TIME THE COUNTRY WAS PREPARING FOR THE COMPLEX AND DELICATE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY, WHEN STAKES FOR BOTH THE MILITARY AND CIVILIANS WERE VERY HIGH. ALTHOUGH THE CONFLICT HAD BEEN CALLED AN "INTERNAL" CONFLICT, AND IT WAS FOUGHT OUT OVER SERIOUS INTERNAL ISSUES, THERE WAS EXTERNAL INVOLVEMENT OF PARTISAN COUNTRIES WHOSE POSITION WAS THAT THE ARMED FORCES COMMANDER, MR. DESIRE "DESI" D. BOUTERSE, AND HIS MILITARY SUPPORTERS HAD TO BE PRESSURED TO ASSURE THE RETURN OF THE TRADITIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES. THE ACTIONS OF THE NETHERLANDS, THE UNITED STATES, AND FRANCE APPEARED TO HAVE BEEN IMPORTANT SOURCES OF RELIEF AND SUPPORT FOR THE INSURGENTS.

IT IS FURTHER IMPORTANT TO STRESS THAT FOREIGN SUPPORT DWINDLED AFTER THE ELECTION OF THE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT IN 1987, AND THE INSURGENCY DECLINED SHARPLY IN ITS ABILITY TO FIGHT. THE INSURGENCY NEVER COMPLETELY GAVE UP ARMS DURING THE LATE 1980'S. ON THE ONE HAND, THE MILITARY WERE UNWILLING TO ENDORSE A PEACE TREATY WITH THOSE THEY CALLED REBELS. EQUALLY, THE JUNGLE COMMANDO WAS UNWILLING TO GIVE UP ARMS WITH A POWERFUL MILITARY STILL IN PLACE. THE SITUATION WOULD REMAIN SO UNTIL 1992.

DURING THE LATE 1980'S, TENSION MOUNTED BETWEEN THE ELECTED GOVERNMENT OF PRESIDENT RAMZEWAK SHANKAR AND COMMANDER DESI BOUTERSE. IN JULY 1989, THE GOVERNMENT SIGNED THE KOUROU ACCORD, WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF THE MILITARY, WITH THE INTENT TO BRING A HALT TO THE INTERIOR CONFLICT. THE STRESSES AND THE STRAINS CULMINATED IN

THE FAMOUS “TELEPHONE” COUP OF DECEMBER 1990, SENDIND THE ELECTED GOVERNMENT HOME. DURING THE WEEKS THEREAFTER THE TAKEOVER WAS SANCTIONED BY PARLIAMENT, AND NEW ELECTIONS WERE CALLED WITHIN SIX MONTHS.

THE MILITARY COUP INSTALLED JOHANNES P. KRAAG AS THE NEW PRESIDENT. THE OAS WAS INVITED TO SEND A MISSION TO OBSERVE THE ELECTORAL PROCESS THAT CULMINATED WITH A TOTALLY RENEWED NATIONAL ASEMBLY, WHICH IN TURN ELECTED RUNALD R. VENETIAAN AS THE NEW PRESIDENT. THE ELECTIONS, HOWEVER, DID NOT SOLVE THE CONFLICT IN THE INTERIOR, BY THEN ALMOST FIVE YEARS OLD, AND HAD NOT ERASED THE POSSIBILITY OF FUTURE POLITICAL ADVENTURES BY THE MILITARY; DEMOCRACY AND PEACE WERE STILL FAR FROM BEING REACHED AND CONSOLIDATED.

THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THE NEW GOVERNMENT TRANSLATED INTO TWO MAIN PRIORITIES: FIRST, TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY AND PROMOTE DRASTIC CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION, WHICH BY THEN GAVE THE MILITARY CERTAIN LATITUDE TO ACT IN POLITICS AS THE “MILITARY VANGUARD OF THE PEOPLE” AND PROTECTORS OF “THE SUPREME RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES OF LAND AND PEOPLE”; AND SECOND, TO ENGAGE IN TALKS WITH THE ILLEGALLY ARMED GROUPS IN ORDER TO BRING PEACE TO THE COUNTRY.

THE OAS WOULD PLAY A ROLE IN BOTH.

THE EFFORTS BY THE GOVERNMENT OF PRESIDENT VENETIAAN, THROUGH HIS AMBASSADOR TO THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE OAS, WIM A. UDENHOUT, AND OF SECRETARY GENERAL BAENA SOARES, SOON WOULD MATERIALIZE WHEN, IN JULY 1992, THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SURINAME AND THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE OAS SIGNED AN AGREEMENT ESTABLISHING THE SPECIAL MISSION TO SURINAME. ITS MANDATE: TO ASSISTE THE GOVERNMENT IN FORMALIZING AND SAFEGUARDING A DURABLE PEACE, AND IN STRENGTHENING NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC ORDER. IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF ANOTHER SUCCESS STORY FOR THE OAS, WHICH BY THEN WAS ALREADY INVOLVED IN SIMILAR MISSIONS IN OTHER COUNTRIES OF THE HEMISPHERE.

THE SPECIAL MISSION WAS MORE THAN A SIMPLE TOOL TO DESIGN AND EXECUTE PROJECTS IN THE AREAS OF PROMOTING PEACE AND DEMOCRACY. IT WAS DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE NEGOTIATIONS THAT BROUGHT PEACE TO THE COUNTRY, AND OFFERED LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO AMNESTY EFFORTS. IT WAS THE OAS SPECIAL MISSION WHOM THE ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS TRUSTED TO HAND IN THEIR WEAPONS TO; IT WAS THE MISSION THAT COORDINATED AND ASSISTED IN DEMINING OPERATIONS AND IN THE IDENTIFICATION AND REINSERTION OF FORMER COMBATANTS INTO SOCIETY.

MOREOVER, IT WAS ITS PURPOSE AS WELL TO ESTABLISH AN INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE IN THE COUNTRY AND SERVE AS A DETERRENT TO THOSE WHO MIGHT ATTEMPT AGAIN TO DISRUPT DEMOCRACY. THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WOULD PAY CONTINUOUS CLOSE ATTENTION TO POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SURINAME. IF, IN THE PAST, POLITICAL ADVENTURES IN THE COUNTRY WERE HARDLY NOTICED AND SIMPLY TAKEN NOTE OF, IN THE FUTURE, THEY WOULD CERTAINLY FACE A STRONG REACTION BY THE HEMISPHERIC COMMUNITY. THE SPECIAL MISSION EXPERIENCED EXTREMELY DELICATE SITUATIONS – CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY, MILITARY DISOBEDIENCE TO CIVILIAN AUTHORITY, AND POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UNREST – DURING ITS EIGHT-YEAR PRESENCE IN SURINAME.

ALL ACTIVITIES OF THE MISSION WERE FINANCED BY DIRECT GRANTS FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF THE NETHERLANDS, RESOURCES FROM THE DUTCH DEVELOPMENT AID, THROUGH THE SURINAME GOVERNMENT, AND BY THE OAS. THE DEMINING OPERATIONS HAD ALSO THE SUPPORT OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF BRAZIL AND GUYANA.

THE SPECIAL EFFORT TO MAINTAIN PEACE WAS INITIATED IN 1992 AFTER A DESTRUCTIVE SIX-YEAR CONFLICT IN THE INTERIOR. ACHIEVING PEACE REQUIRED A PROLONGED AND INTENSE EFFORT; THE ISSUES WERE MANY AND COMPLEX. AVOIDING A NEW OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE WAS ALL THE MORE IMPORTANT SINCE GETTING THE PARTIES TO THE TABLE FOR A SECOND TIME WOULD BE EVEN MORE DIFFICULT. THE COST OF PREVENTION WAS FAR LESS THAN THAT OF REPAIRING THE DAMAGE CAUSED BY CONFLICT, AND SOME LOSSES COULD NOT

BE REPLACED AT ALL. IN ADDRESSING THE CONFLICT, THE FIRST STEP HAD TO BE TO FIND THE REASONS WHY IT CAME ABOUT.

ONE OF THE ESSENTIAL TASKS OF THE MISSION, THEREFORE, WAS TO ASSIST THE GOVERNMENT IN IDENTIFYING AND CREATING AN AWARENESS OF THE CAUSES OF THE PROBLEMS THAT LED TO THE CONFLICT. SUCH AWARENESS WAS THE ESSENTIAL FIRST STEP IN THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT PREVENTION. AS LONG AS DECISION MAKERS IN THE GOVERNMENT, PRIVATE SECTOR, AND AT THE LOCAL LEVEL REMAINED UNAWARE OF THESE UNDERLYING CAUSES, NO ACTION WOULD BE TAKEN TO INCORPORATE PEACE MAKING IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS.

CREATING THIS KIND OF AWARENESS WAS NOT SIMPLE. SEVERAL INDIVIDUALS IN LEADING POSITIONS SEEMED TO BELIEVE THAT THE CONDITIONS THAT LED TO THE INTERIOR CONFLICT WERE NO LONGER PRESENT, OR THAT THE STRESSES AND STRAINS ASSOCIATED WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTERIOR WOULD SIMPLY RESOLVE THEMSELVES IN TIME. MANY HAD DIFFICULTY CONCEPTUALIZING THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEMS IN THE INTERIOR, THUS THE INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE MISSION DID MUCH TO IMPROVE AWARENESS OF THE PROBLEMS INHERENTLY ASSOCIATED WITH DEVELOPMENT.

WITH THE BENEFIT OF THIS CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION, THE NEXT CONSIDERATION WAS WHAT COULD BE DONE TO CHANGE THESE PRECONDITIONS. THE ANSWER BRINGS US TO THE SECOND MANDATE OF THE MISSION: STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY.

AS A POSTCOLONIAL DEVELOPING COUNTRY, SURINAME WAS EXPERIENCING SHIFTS AND CHANGES IN BOTH POWER RELATIONS AND RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION. THESE CHANGES INEVITABLY LED TO COMPETITION AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST. IT WAS ESSENTIAL, THEREFORE, THAT NEW DEMOCRATIC INSTRUMENTS WERE CREATED, OR THAT EXISTING ONES WERE STRENGTHENED, TO ACCOMMODATE THESE SHIFTS IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REALTIONS. IF THESE PROBLEMS WERE NOT ACKNOWLEDGED, DISCUSSED AND DEBATED, AND NO ACTION WAS TAKEN, THE RISK OF A RETURN TO UNDEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT INCREASED CONSIDERABLY.

THE NEED TO STRENGTHEN THE CAPACITY OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS, TO SUPPORT AND ADVANCE GOOD GOVERNANCE, TO FOSTER A DEMOCRATIC CULTURE, AND ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION ACROSS CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC

DIVIDES IS PART AND PARCEL OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS. THUS, THE SECOND TASK OF THE SPECIAL MISSION BECAME TO ASSIST THE GOVERNMENT IN CREATING AND STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS. CONSEQUENTLY, THE MISSION SUPPORTED PROGRAMS WITH THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, ASSISTED IN THE PREPARATIONS OF TWO GENERAL ELECTIONS AND WITNESSED THE PEACEFUL AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSFER OF POWER. IT ALSO HELPED IN STRUCTURING AND ORGANIZING ELECTION PROCESSES AMONG THE PEOPLE OF THE INTERIOR, AND DEVELOPED AND IMPLEMENTED SEVERAL OTHER PROJECTS IN THE AREA OF PROMOTION OF DEMOCRACY.

THE MANDATE FURTHER INCLUDED THE TASK TO ASSIST THE GOVERNMENT IN DRAWING UP PLANS OF ACTION AND CREATING DEMOCRATIC INSTRUMENTS THAT WOULD EMPHASIZE INCLUSION AND REPRESENTATION, AIMING TOWARDS THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN THE PROCESS OF NATION BUILDING. IF, IN A MULTIETHNIC NATION LIKE SURINAME, THE CITIZENS DO NOT FEEL THEY ARE ADEQUATELY REPRESENTED, AND THEIR INTERESTS ARE NOT ADEQUATELY ATTENDED TO, THE POSSIBILITY OF ACTIONS TAKEN OUTSIDE OF THE FRAMEWORK OF DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES RISES SIGNIFICANTLY.

AFTER THE EIGHT-YEAR PRESENCE IN SURINAME PEACE WAS IN PLACE, AND DEMOCRACY, IF NOT CONSOLIDATED, AT LEAST HAD SHOWN STRENGTH AND MATURITY WHEN PUT TO TEST AS INDICATED BY POLITICAL EVENTS DURING THE IMMEDIATE YEARS AFTER THE SIGNING OF THE PEACE ACCORD WHICH, IN OTHER TIMES, CERTAINLY WOULD HAVE LED TO DIFFERENT OUTCOMES.

SURINAME, SEEN IN TIME AND SPACE, WAS A PLANTATION SOCIETY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COLONIAL CONQUEST OF THE AMERICAS AND ITS EVOLUTION POINTED OUT SURINAME'S DIFFERENCES. IN ADDITION TO SURINAME'S MULTIETHNICITY, THERE ARE IN EFFECT, TWO SURINAMES. ONE IS COASTAL SURINAME, WITH ITS DIVERSE, COSMOPOLITAN POPULATION LIVING IN A MODERN MARKET-ORIENTED CITY, PARAMARIBO, AND SMALLER TOWNS AND VILLAGES ALONG THE COASTAL REGION. THE OTHER SURINAME IS RAIN FOREST OCCUPYING 80 PERCENT OF THE COUNTRY'S LAND SURFACE AND HOME TO GROUPS OF MAROONS (REBEL AFRICANS WHO ESCAPED THE PLANTATION SYSTEM) AND AMERINDIANS. THEY ARE "KIN-ORDERED" SOCIETIES AND

FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT IN ORGANIZATION FROM THE COASTAL MARKET ECONOMY. KIN-ORDERED SOCIETIES ALSO HAVE SPECIAL NEEDS THAT, IF NOT ATTENDED TO, CAN RESULT IN MISUNDERSTANDINGS AT BEST, OR CONFLICT AT WORST.

ACHIEVING AND MAINTAINING PEACE WAS THE MAIN TASK THE OAS SPECIAL MISSION FACED TO THE ONSET OF ITS MANDATE. A VAST AMOUNT OF TIME AND ENERGY, UNDER RIGOROUS CONDITIONS, WAS INVESTED IN ASSISTING THE COMBATANT PARTIES TO COME TO PEACEFUL TERMS WITH ONE ANOTHER. ONCE PEACE WAS ACHIEVED, FURTHER PROGRAMS WERE DEVELOPED TO CONSOLIDATE AND MAINTAIN PEACE AND STABILITY, ALL ESSENTIAL TO DEMOCRACY AND CITIZEN WELL-BEING.

THE SPECIAL MISSION ALSO HAD A LARGE ROLE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS, DEVELOPING A DEMOBILIZATION PLAN AND STUDYING THE CONCEPT OF AMNESTY. ON AUGUST 8, 1992, THE GOVERNMENT AND ALL FIVE ILLEGALLY ARMED GROUPS SIGNED THE AGREEMENT FOR NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND DEVELOPMENT, WHICH ENDED THE HOSTILITIES. THE INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT OF THE LATE 1980S AND EARLY 1990S BROUGHT TO THE FOREFRONT THE DEEP GULF BETWEEN THE NEEDS, PERCEPTIONS, AND ASPIRATIONS OF THE INTERIOR AND THOSE OF THE COASTAL AREA.

THE PROBLEM OF TWO SURINAMES RESULTED IN A CIVIL WAR POWERFULLY DRIVEN BY MANY INTERCONNECTED PROBLEMS, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL IN NATURE. AT ROOT, THE JUNGLE COMMANDO (JC) AND ITS FIGHTERS HAD AS THEIR IMMEDIATE GOAL THE REMOVAL OF THE COMMANDER OF THE MILITARY, MR. BOUTERSE, AND MILITARY-BACKED GOVERNMENT. THESE CONDITIONS PRESENTED A FERTILE ENVIRONMENT FOR THE EMERGENCE OF RONNIE BRUNSWIJK AND HIS JC MEN. THE IMMEDIATE OPPRESSIVE CONDITIONS PRECEDING HOSTILITIES, COUPLED WITH THE INTERVENTION OF EXTERNAL ACTORS SUPPORTING THE INSURGENCY, WERE BUT THE IMMEDIATE INSTIGATORS IN BRINGING TOGETHER THE LONG-SIMMERING GRIEVANCES TO THE FORE.

THE FRONT GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTED PEACE EFFORTS IN THE LATE 1980S. HOWEVER, THE CIVILIAN-BASED EFFORTS WERE NOT SUPPORTED BY THE MILITARY, WHICH ITSELF RECRUITED A SHADOW ARMY OF AMERINDIANS, THE

TUCAJANA AMAZONES (TA), TO FIGHT A COUNTERINSURGENCY ALONG WITH THE REGULAR ARMY. NOR WAS THE JUNGLE COMMANDO WILLING TO STRIKE PEACE AND END HOSTILITIES WHILE A STILL FORMIDABLE MILITARY DOMINATED THE ELECTED CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. UNDER THESE CONDITIONS, THERE WAS NO CHANCE OR SERIOUS POSSIBILITY TO TALK OF STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AND STABILIZING THE COUNTRY UNTIL A CEASE-FIRE WAS STRUCK AND A PEACE TREATY AGREED TO IN 1992.

THERE WERE FOUR PERIODS OF MILITARY RULE DURING THE 1980S AND DURING THESE REGIMES THE MILITARY-DOMINATED GOVERNMENT NEVER WAS ABLE TO MOBILIZE THE SUPPORT OR PARTICIPATION OF A BROAD-BASED SEGMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY, A BASIC REQUIREMENT OF DEMOCRACY. THE ROAD TO REFORM THEN REQUIRED STRENGTHENING EXISTING INSTITUTIONS IN SOCIETY AND CREATING NEW AVENUES OF COMMUNICATIONS IN ORDER TO ENABLE SURINAME'S BUREAUCRACY TO RE-FLOURISH AND STABILIZE.

THE ISSUE OF TWO SURINAMES ONCE AGAIN EMERGED AS THE INTERIOR POPULATIONS RAVAGED BY THE CIVIL WAR, HAD TO BE INCORPORATED EQUITABLY BACK INTO THE STATE. POLITICAL REPRESENTATION WAS KEY, AND A MAJOR DEBATE OPENED OVER THE QUESTION OF LAND RIGHTS AND THE RECOGNITION OF TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES (TRIBAL CHIEFS, SENIOR LEADERSHIP, AND VILLAGE LEADERS) IN KIN-ORDERED SOCIETIES. THUS, SUCCESSION OF INDIGENOUS LEADERS BY DEMOCRATIC VOTE ALSO BECAME AN OBJECTIVE OF THE OAS SPECIAL MISSION.

EFFORTS IN THE INTERIOR WERE MATCHED WITH EFFORTS IN THE "OTHER" SURINAME OF THE COAST, WHERE ELECTORAL ASSISTANCE WAS PROVIDED TO THE SECRETARIAT FOR ELECTIONS AND THE CENTRAL MAIN POLLING AUTHORITY. PROJECTS INCLUDED UPDATING THE VOTER REGISTRATION LISTS (PARTICULARLY IN THE INTERIOR), PROVIDING OFFICE EQUIPMENT FOR THE POLLING STATIONS, AND EXPANDING AND UPDATING COMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES, PARTICULARLY THROUGH USE OF AND TRAINING IN COMPUTERS. A RESOURCE CENTER WAS ESTABLISHED AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, AND TRAINING COURSES WERE PROVIDED FOR ITS MEMBERS AND STAFF.

ON THE DIMENSIONS OF PEACE AND DEMOCRACY, THE SPECIAL MISSION SUMMARIZED THE VALUABLE LESSONS LEARNED AND OFFERED THEM AS

OPTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED FOR FURTHERANCE OF DEMOCRACY IN SURINAME. WE WILL TALK ABOUT THESE LESSONS LATER ON.

AFTER OVER EIGHT YEARS OF INTENSE WORK IN BOTH THE INTERIOR AND COASTAL ZONE, THE SPECIAL MISSION WAS CONFIDENT THAT ITS WORK IN ASSISTING THE GOVERNMENT AND OTHER COLLABORATING INSTITUTIONS IN ACHIEVING PEACE AND IN DEFENDING, PROMOTING, AND CONSOLIDATING DEMOCRACY COULD SERVE AS A STARTING POINT TO ORIENT FUTURE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF PROGRAMS.

SURINAME IS A MUCH DIFFERENT COUNTRY TODAY FROM WHEN FIRST CONTACTS WERE MADE WITH THE OAS. POST-CONFLICT AND ONGOING DEVELOPMENTS HAVE SHOWN THAT THE COUNTRY HAS REACHED THE DEMOCRATIC MATURITY TO FACE ITS PROBLEMS WITHIN A CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND INTERNATIONALLY AGREED UPON DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES. WHAT WAS BEFORE SOLVED BY FORCE IS NOW DEBATED DEMOCRATICALLY. THERE IS NO LONGER ANY ROOM FOR POLITICAL ADVENTURISM AND CONFLICT. HOWEVER, SURINAME STILL FACES OBSTACLES AND MUCH REMAINS TO BE DONE WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE AREAS OF INVOLVEMENT OF THE OAS.

MANY LESSONS MAY BE DRAWN FROM THE INVOLVEMENT AND FROM THE EFFORTS TO REACH THE TWO OBJECTIVES OF PEACE AND DEMOCRACY:

WHEN SURINAME BECAME INDEPENDENT IN 1975 THE NEW NATION FACED SEVERAL CHALLENGES INHERITED FROM ITS PRE-COLONIAL AND COLONIAL PAST. AS POINTED OUT, IN THE DISCUSSION ABOUT HOW TO STRUCTURE THE SURINAMESE GOVERNMENT AFTER INDEPENDENCE, IN ORDER TO ENSURE ADEQUATE REPRESENTATION OF THE DIFFERENT GROUPS OR SOCIAL CATEGORIES, THE FOCUS WAS ON THE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH ETHNIC PLURALISM AND/OR THE WIDENING GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR. THERE WAS ANOTHER FACTOR, HOWEVER, WHICH SHOULD BE GIVEN MORE ATTENTION: THE CULTURAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL GAP BETWEEN THE COASTAL AREA AND THE INTERIOR. THE CHALLENGE ON INCORPORATING KIN-ORDERED SOCIETIES INTO THE NATION-STATE WAS NO LESS DAUNTING THAN BALANCING ETHNIC IDENTITY AND OVERCOMING POVERTY.

THE CLEAR SUCCESS OF THE OAS SPECIAL MISSION IN ACHIEVING THE OBJECTIVES OF ITS MANDATE WAS IN GREAT PART DUE TO THE DECISION FROM THE ONSET TO OPT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TWO BROAD AREAS OF PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES FOCUSING ON PEACE AND DEMOCRACY, INSTEAD OF RIGID PROJECTS DESIGNED AND DEVELOPED YEARS IN ADVANCE AND DRAWN ON GUESS WORK, WHICH WOULD NOT HAVE BROUGHT PROMPT RESPONSES TO CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS AS THEY AROSE. THE BROAD-BASED PROGRAMS CHOSEN, ON THE OTHER HAND, ALLOWED THE OAS SPECIAL MISSION A GREATER "FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT" IN WHICH TO RESPOND TO THE SITUATIONS AS THEY DEVELOPED.

PROJECT COORDINATORS, WHEREVER THEY MAY BE CONDUCTING THEIR EFFORTS, WERE ADVISED TO LOWER THEIR EXPECTATIONS WHEN DEALING WITH OR NEGOTIATING PROJECTS. SOMETIMES OUR COUNTERPARTS DID NOT HAVE THE RESOURCES OR MEANS TO PRESENT A PROJECT, DESPITE THE ENTHUSIASM OR NEED FOR THAT SPECIFIC ACTIVITY. SUCH LIMITATIONS MAY BE AT FIRST INTERPRETED AS DISINTEREST OR EMBARRASSMENT IN RECOGNIZING A SITUATION AND ITS CAUSE. HELP IN THE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF PROJECTS CAN BE ACCEPTED IF OFFERED IN A NON-PATRONIZING WAY, AND EFFECTIVE, COOPERATIVE, AND MUTUALLY SATISFYING SOLUTIONS CAN BE ACHIEVED.

CONFLICT-RESOLUTION SITUATIONS PRESUPPOSE THAT ALL THE ACTORS INVOLVED IN A DISCUSSION SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, THAT THEY USE A VOCABULARY UNDERSTOOD BY ALL. FAILURES IN ATTEMPTS AT PEACE NEGOTIATIONS OCCUR WHEN IT IS ASSUMED THAT ALL PARTICIPANTS HAVE THE SAME CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK. EVEN WHEN ALL SIDES HAVE LEGAL REPRESENTATION, THE LACK OF UNDERSTANDING BY MEMBERS OF ONE OF THE GROUPS MAY HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE RESULTS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS. REPRESENTATIVES WITH LOWER EDUCATIONAL LEVELS OR DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS MAY TEND NOT TO AGREE WITH PROPOSALS BECAUSE SUCH PROPOSALS MAY BE FRAMED IN TERMS TOTALLY STRANGE AND INAPPROPRIATE TO THEM AND THEIR CULTURAL CONCEPTS.

VERTICAL EFFORTS BY INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGO'S) AND GOVERNMENT TO CONTINUE THE WORK OF PROMOTING AND CONSOLIDATING PEACE AND DEMOCRACY WOULD DEPEND IN THE LONG RUN ON THE "OWNERSHIP" OF THE PROCESS BY THE SURINAME

PEOPLE. IT IS FUNDAMENTAL TO REINFORCE INITIATIVES ALREADY TAKEN AND TO STRENGTHEN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN ORDER TO PROJECT TO ALL CITIZENS IN THE CITY AND IN THE INTERIOR, THE FEELING OF BEING INVESTED IN A DEMOCRACY, THAT THEIR VOTE AND VOICE HAVE POWER. THE ELEMENT OF NATIONAL STEWARDSHIP IS CRITICAL, AND ALL PARTICIPANTS MUST PERCEIVE GAIN FOR THE COMMON GOOD.

SURINAMESE ARE PROUD OF THEIR COUNTRY AND, ALTHOUGH THEY ALWAYS WELCOME VISITORS, THEY CERTAINLY PREFER A DIRECT EXCHANGE AMONG THEMSELVES RATHER THAN BEING TOLD WHAT TO DO BY FOREIGNERS. IN THIS CONTEXT, IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT SKILLS WAS SHARED WITH LOCAL INSTITUTIONS, WHICH, IN TURN, COULD PASS ON SUCH INFORMATION TO OTHER ASSOCIATIONS, SUCH AS TRADE UNIONS, WOMEN'S GROUPS, TEACHER'S ASSOCIATIONS, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, SENIOR CITIZENS, AND YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS. THE BEST FORM TO CONVEY DEMOCRATIC AND PEACE VALUES TO THE INTERIOR POPULATION WAS, AND IS, TO REACH OUT THEIR MEMBERS THROUGH THOSE ASSOCIATIONS DIRECTLY LINKED WITH THE EDUCATIONAL AND COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMUNITIES.

WOMEN HAVE A CLEAR, DIRECT, AND INFLUENTIAL PARTICIPATION IN SURINAME'S PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS, MAINLY IN POLITICAL AND EDUCATIONAL LIFE. PROGRAMS IN THE AREAS OF PROMOTION OF PEACE AND DEMOCRACY SHOULD INVOLVE A REPRESENTATIVE NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN AT ALL LEVELS, FROM THE NATIONAL TO THE COMMUNITY FROM THE COAST TO THE VILLAGES IN THE INTERIOR.

AS WAS THE SITUATION THEN AND IT'S STILL NOW, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY CAN BE DEVELOPED IN ORDER TO USE THE INTERNET AS A CIVIC LEARNING TOOL. THE INTERNET CAN MULTIPLY SCARCE HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES EXPENDED TO GATHER AND DISSEMINATE INFORMATION. IT CAN ALSO ENCOURAGE, AS THE MISSION PROJECT WITH THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEMONSTRATED, OTHER GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES TO SHARE COMPUTER HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE AND INTERNET RESOURCES, AND EFFECTIVELY BRING TOGETHER AND PROMOTE COMMUNICATIONS AMONG PARTIES WITH LITTLE OR NO CONTACT AT ALL. WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A RESOURCES CENTER AND TRAINING AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, ALBEIT A SMALL ONE, THE MISSION HELPED ENABLE TO COMPONENT OF GOVERNMENT TO PURSUE ITS

MISSION MORE EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY. THE STRENGTHENING OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN THE COUNTRY THROUGH INFORMATION EXCHANGE OBVIOUSLY DEMANDED MORE EFFORTS, ESPECIALLY WHEN DEALING WITH THE INTERIOR AND ITS WIDELY DISPERSED POPULATIONS.

IN A MULTIETHNIC, HIGHLY COMPLEX SOCIETY SUCH AS SURINAME, GREAT CARE AND ENERGY HAD TO BE DEVOTED TO THE CREATION OF A FORUM WITH CONDITIONS FOR OPEN AND PEACEFUL COMMUNICATION AND DIALOGUE. AND, EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN, SUCH A FORUM COULD MOST SUCCESSFULLY BE CONSTRUCTED THROUGH NEUTRAL AND GOOD OFFICES SUCH AS THE OAS SPECIAL MISSION, A BODY THAT WAS TRUSTED BY ALL PARTIES AND WIDELY PERCEIVED AS BEING NONPARTISAN. THE MISSION HELPED TO EXPEDITE DIALOGUE BY IDENTIFYING COMMON GOALS, ASSURING THE EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS (THUS ASSURING "SHARED OWNERSHIP" OF THE PROCESS), AND ACTING AS A NEUTRAL AND HONEST BROKER.

THE ROLE OF THE NGO COMMUNITY WAS CRITICAL AS IT SERVED AS ANOTHER ARM OF SOCIETY AND PLATFORM FOR DIALOGUE. ALTHOUGH THE NGO AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSO) COMMUNITIES IN SURINAME WERE NOT DESIGNED WITH PEACE NEGOTIATIONS IN MIND, THEIR CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT MADE THEM "NATURAL" PARTNERS IN THE CONSTITUENCY FOR PEACE AND DEMOCRACY. TWO GROUPS STOOD OUT IN PARTICULAR IN THIS EFFORTS: THE HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP MOI WANA, AND THE SURINAME COUNCIL OF CHURCHES.

PEACE AND DEMOCRACY FLOURISH UNDER THE RULE OF LAW, AND THE EFFORTS OF THE SPECIAL MISSION WERE APPLIED MORE SUCCESSFULLY AFTER A PARTIAL RULE OF LAW WAS REESTABLISHED IN SURINAME FOLLOWING THE ELECTIONS OF 1991. WITHOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO AT LEAST THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF LAW, NO REAL FURTHER EFFORTS COULD HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFULLY MADE TOWARDS THE RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY AND THE FURTHER STRENGTHENING OF THE RULE OF LAW. THE LEGAL COMMUNITY SHOULD TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEGAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN A COUNTRY, AND THEREBY CREATE BOTH THE OPPORTUNITIES AND OBLIGATIONS FOR ALL PARTIES TO BE INVOLVED IN THE PEACE AND DEMOCRACY PROCESSES. THIS SIMPLY MEANS THAT THE EFFORTS OF THE OAS WERE SUPPORTED, PROMOTED, AND FUNCTIONED IN THE LARGER

CONTEXT OF A SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT THAT WERE COMMITTED TO A RETURN TO PEACE AND DEMOCRACY. WITHOUT SUCH COMMITMENT, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ARE FACED WITH WHAT ARE PERHAPS INSURMOUNTABLE ODDS. THIS WAS NOT THE CASE IN SURINAME.

THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM OF SURINAME INDIRECTLY SUPPORTED THE OAS EFFORTS TO REESTABLISH PEACE AND DEMOCRACY BY ASSURING THAT CITIZENS IN THE URBAN AREAS, ALONG THE RURAL COAST, AND IN THE INTERIOR, HAD THE MEANS TO PARTICIPATE DIRECTLY IN THE ELECTIONS OF OFFICIALS TO REPRESENT THEM AND TO HAVE THEIR VOICES HEARD IN GOVERNANCE. SURINAME IS DIVIDED INTO ELECTORAL DISTRICTS, WITH EACH DISTRICT VOTING FOR AND ELECTING ITS OWN REPRESENTATIVES. FOR EXAMPLE, THE VAST AND THINLY POPULATED DISTRICT OF SIPALIWINI WAS ALLOTTED FOUR PARLIAMENTARIANS. THIS DISTRIBUTION OR DECENTRALIZATION OF POWER RESULTS IN WIDESPREAD PARTICIPATION OF SURINAMESE, PARTICULARLY IN THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH OF GOVERNANCE. CONSEQUENTLY, MEMBERS OF INTERIOR GROUPS THAT WERE ONCE IN CONFLICT HAD THE CONSTITUTIONAL MEANS FOR SELF-REPRESENTATION IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, THE HIGHEST POLITICAL FORUM OF THE LAND. WITHOUT THIS OPPORTUNITY, CONTINUED DEBATE AND DIALOGUE COULD NOT BE EFFECTIVELY PROMOTED, DESPITE THE EFFORTS OF THE OAS SPECIAL MISSION.

FINALLY, AND PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANTLY, LET US RETURN TO WHAT IS PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT MESSAGE OF THE CHALLENGES AND OPTIONS OF DEMOCRACY. WHEN THERE IS WIDESPREAD PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE BY CIVIL SOCIETY, COUPLED WITH A SERIOUS COMMITMENT TO THE PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOR, THEN THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM FUNCTIONS WITH EQUITY AND FAIR PLAY. HOWEVER, WHEN GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS ARE DELIBERATELY EXCLUDED FROM PARTICIPATION IN THEIR GOVERNANCE, THEN THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM IS WEAKENED AND WOUNDED, AND PERHAPS CRUMBLES ALTOGETHER.

A FINAL NOTE: THE FORMER MILITARY DICTATOR, MR. DESI BOUTERSI, IS NOW THE DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED PRESIDENT OF SURINAME; AND MR. RONNIE BRUNSWIJK A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

THANK YOU

