

CARICOM Summit must dispel confusion over Guyana / Venezuela border issue

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It has now become absolutely clear that United States-based anti-Venezuela forces are currently using their agents in the Caribbean to try to subvert the growing friendship between the socialist Government of Venezuela and the nation-states of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) by deliberately misconstruing the Venezuelan government's policy and intentions in relation to that country's one hundred year old border dispute with our sister Caribbean territory of Guyana!

This nefarious conspiracy must not be allowed to succeed, and it is therefore crucial that the Caribbean heads of Government who are meeting in Barbados this week for CARICOM's 36th Heads of Government Summit examine the facts very carefully and issue a strong statement that exposes as a lie the fraudulent and mischievous assertion that is currently being peddled in the Caribbean news media that President Maduro of Venezuela has issued a decree in which he purports to appropriate a portion of Guyana's territorial space.

Ever since 1998— the year in which the late Hugo Chavez established a popularly elected, Democratic-Socialist government in Venezuela dedicated to challenging the USA's neo-colonialist domination of our region— the U S establishment has been attempting to undermine Venezuela by accusing it of being a threat to the peace and security of the region.

Indeed, earlier this year, the US Government even went so far as to have President Obama sign an Executive Order declaring Venezuela to be a threat to the national security of the mighty and domineering USA itself!

Needless-to-say, the vast majority of the Caribbean people saw through this US propaganda for what it was and treated it with the contempt that it deserved!

The Caribbean people are only too well aware that Venezuela (under both Hugo Chavez and Nicolas Maduro) has been an extremely good friend to our Caribbean Community (CARICOM) nations. We are aware, for example, that Venezuela has willingly shared its oil wealth with us through the “Petro Caribe” energy cooperation agreement, and has contributed positively to the health and nutrition of our people through “Operation Milagro” and a variety of regional food production projects.

Furthermore, Venezuela— under both Chavez and Maduro— has never threatened nor attacked any nation in the world, much less in our region! Rather, Venezuela has been a peace-broker, and has led the recently revived call for the Caribbean to be constituted a “zone of peace”.

It is against this background therefore that our Caribbean region was shocked to hear the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the newly elected Government of Guyana allege that on Tuesday 9th June 2015 President Maduro of Venezuela had executed a Presidential Decree that purported to annex “maritime spaces” that belong to Guyana, and that he had done so in a manner that not only breached International Law, but that also constituted a trampling upon the rights of Guyana in a deliberate effort to “obstruct the sovereign right of Guyana to develop its natural resources”.

Those of us who are intimately acquainted with the Government of Venezuela found these charges to be so surprising and so out of character with the proven record of the Bolivarian Government, that we simply had to go and examine the evidence for ourselves!

And when we examined the evidence for ourselves this is what we found:-

(1) When Venezuela fought off Spanish colonial rule and constituted itself as an independent nation between 1810 and 1821, it found itself bordered on the East by an area of colonial territory that the Empire of Great Britain had violently wrested from Holland.

(2) From the very beginning of Venezuela's independence there was some dispute between Venezuela and Great Britain as to the exact location of the boundary between the new nation and the British colony, but the boundary dispute only became truly serious in the 1880's when gold was discovered in the area, and Britain claimed possession over an extensive area west of the Essequibo river.

(3) In the latter half of the 1890's the USA intervened in the matter, and informed Britain that under the USA's so-called "Monroe Doctrine", the USA (as the great power of the hemisphere) had arrogated to itself the right to determine such territorial issues, and that it proposed to set up a 'Boundary Commission' to arbitrate the issue.

(4) Great Britain ultimately agreed to the US orchestrated process of arbitration, and in 1899 the Arbitral Tribunal produced a decision that largely upheld Britain's claim to the disputed territory.

(5) In the years that followed, Venezuela disputed and refused to accept the decision of the Tribunal, and in early 1966— with Guyana's independence from Britain looming— the Government of Britain entered into an agreement with Venezuela whereby it was agreed that the still ongoing boundary dispute between Venezuela and the new nation of Guyana would be negotiated in accordance with the rules of International Law and under the auspices of the United Nations system. This agreement is known as the "Geneva Accord".

(6) The Government of independent Guyana subsequently accepted the "Geneva Accord" process, but to date negotiations under the "Accord" have never been concluded, and as a result the contested territory and the maritime waters adjacent to it remain in dispute.

(7) In 1999, the Guyana government entered into an agreement with Exxon Mobil, the American multi-national petroleum company, to undertake exploration for oil in the disputed maritime waters adjoining the equally disputed territory.

(8) In June 2012, Exxon Mobil and Shell reactivated oil exploration on a block of disputed maritime water granted to them by the government of Guyana.

It is against this background that on the 8th of June 2015 President Maduro's Decree No. 1.787 was published in Venezuela's Official Gazette.

The Decree is actually devoted to outlining a comprehensive organizational model to be employed by Venezuela in organizing its defence of its national territory and maritime waters. However, prior to outlining the structure of the national defence mechanism, the Presidential Decree states as follows:-

"The territory and other geographical spaces of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela are those corresponding to the Captaincy General of Venezuela before the political transformation begun on April 19, 1810, with the modification from treaties, agreements and arbitral awards not vitiated nullity"

"The Venezuelan State recognizes the existence of maritime areas pending for delimitation in accordance with international agreements and treaties signed by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and that require attention by the Venezuelan State until the achievement of final friendly boundary demarcation"

In other words, in the very text of President Maduro's Decree is an acknowledgment that some of the territory and maritime space claimed by Venezuela is still under dispute, and that its

ultimate ownership is dependent on the outcome of the “friendly boundary demarcation” process— obviously a reference to the “Geneva Accord” process.

Furthermore, in order to make the Venezuelan position absolutely clear, the following paragraph appeared in the second publication of the Decree:—

“However, there exists a maritime area pending for delimitation, which will be determined once the pending dispute is resolved between the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, according to the 1966 Geneva Agreement...”

The Venezuela Government has therefore made it extremely clear that it is committed to amicably and lawfully negotiating its boundary dispute with Guyana, and that it has no intention of seeking to use its larger size and greater material power to impose its will on Guyana!

This is the principled, brotherly, constructive and responsible Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela that we have all come to know and respect over the past 17 years!

The David Grainger administration is new to governance, having come to power after a period of some 22 years of PPP rule in Guyana. It is therefore important that this new Guyana Administration quickly come to an appreciation of the contemporary reality of the Caribbean region: and that contemporary reality is that we Caribbean people and our governments have accepted Venezuela as a bona fide sister nation of our Caribbean Civilization!

There is therefore no need for any CARICOM government to approach Venezuela with hostile and bellicose language, nor to adopt the most negative interpretation of the words and actions of the Venezuelan Government. That type of approach will only serve the interests of the international Capitalist forces that wish to dismantle the various instruments of regional development that Venezuela plays such a key role in fostering.

I now hereby call upon our CARICOM heads of Government to issue a clear official statement that properly explains this issue to the Caribbean people. Let us stop the mischief now, before it is given an opportunity to grow and to do real damage to our region!

Source: David Comissiong, President of the Clement Payne Movement (Barbados)

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