

**ADDRESS BY
THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SURINAME
HIS EXCELLENCY RUNALDO RONALD VENETIAAN
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF
THE 24TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE CANTO
PARAMARIBO, SURINAME 27 JANUARY 2008**

**MINISTERS, MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY,
MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS
CHAIRMAN AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE CANTO BOARD OF
DIRECTORS
MEMBERS OF THE SUPERVISORY BOARD OF TELESUR, OUR
HOST FOR THIS EVENT
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CANTO
DISTINGUISHED GUESTS
PARTICIPANTS
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN**

FIRST OF ALL I WELCOME ALL OUR GUESTS FROM ABROAD TO THE REPUBLIC OF SURINAME. I AM PLEASED THAT YOU HAVE COME TO SURINAME TO JOIN “THE 24TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE CANTO”, THE CARIBBEAN ASSOCIATION OF NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS ORGANIZATIONS.

I AM HONORED TO ADDRESS THIS MEETING WHERE POLICY MAKERS, TELECOM OPERATORS, MANUFACTURERS, SERVICE PROVIDERS AND REGULATORS OF OUR CARIBBEAN REGION SHOW THEIR COMMITMENT TO JOIN FORCES TO DELIBERATE ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS ISSUES OF MUTUAL CONCERN RELATING TO THIS YEAR'S CANTO THEME: “CARIBBEAN UNITY THROUGH CONNECTIVITY”.

WE APPLAUD TELESUR FOR HOSTING THIS MEETING.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS HAVE BEEN HIGH ON THE AGENDA OF MOST COUNTRIES IN THE PAST YEARS, AND MORE RECENTLY THE FOCUS HAS BEEN BROADENED TO INCLUDE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY, ESPECIALLY AFTER THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY (WSIS) IN GENEVA (2003) AND IN TUNIS (2005).

IN SURINAME THE TELECOMMUNICATION SECTOR WAS OPENED FOR COMPETITION LAST YEAR AND TWO NEW OPERATORS, DIGICEL AND UNIQA JOINED TELESUR IN THE FIELD OF MOBILE TELECOMMUNICATION.

THE GOVERNMENT OF SURINAME HAS IN ADDITION TO THIS NEW APPROACH, ALSO MARKED THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AS A FIELD OF PRIORITY IN ITS MULTI-ANNUAL PLAN.

HOSTING THE THEME OF "CARIBBEAN UNITY THROUGH CONNECTIVITY" IS OF MAYOR IMPORTANCE FOR OUR COUNTRIES. THE CARIBBEAN MARKETS AND ECONOMIES WILL BENEFIT FROM THE INCREASED FOCUS THAT WILL BE PUT ON ICT IN VIEW OF THE EXPANDED POSSIBILITIES. MORE OVER, THE AVAILABILITY OF THIS TECHNOLOGY WILL INCREASE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE CARIBBEAN NATIONS IN ALL ITS ASPECTS.

INDEED WE LIVE IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE CONNECTIVITY IS NOT ONLY PART OF OUR WORK, BUT PART OF OUR WHOLE LIFE.

WE RELY ON SERVICES OFFERED THROUGH COMPLEX COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION NETWORKS SUPPORTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS IN OUR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES.

FOR THAT MATTER IT IS THE DUTY OF OUR GOVERNMENTS TO DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT POLICIES THAT WILL FACILITATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE AND EFFECTIVE ICT NETWORKS, SERVICES AND APPLICATIONS.

I REALIZE THAT THIS IS A MAJOR CHALLENGE FOR MOST DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. I AM CONFIDENT THAT THROUGH COOPERATIVE INITIATIVES WITH LOCAL AND REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS AND ESPECIALLY WITH THE CANTO MEMBERS AND THE CANTO RELATIONS, WE WILL SUCCEED.

IN THIS RESPECT IT IS WITH GREAT PLEASURE THAT I WELCOME THE CANTO'S EFFORTS TO PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN A STRATEGY TO UNITE THE CARIBBEAN THROUGH CONNECTIVITY.

CONNECTIVITY IS NOT ONLY ABOUT TECHNOLOGY. CONNECTIVITY IS ALSO ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS WHICH ARE ENABLED BY MODERN TECHNOLOGY.

THE CANTO MEMBERS EMPOWER THE COMMUNITIES THEY WORK IN, BY PROVIDING VIABLE SOLUTIONS WHICH LEAD TO THE CONVERGENCY OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION AND TO ENTERTAINMENT TRANSPORT, SOLUTIONS WHICH ALSO IMPROVE THE RELATIONS AMONG REGULATORS, OPERATORS, POLICY MAKERS AND ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS CARICOM, CTU, CITEL AND ITU.

THIS INTERTWINING OF TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS WITH THE FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN NEED FOR COMMUNICATION, RESULTS IN BENEFITS FOR WORK, FOR LEISURE AND LIFEAT HOME. IT ALSO RESULTS IN ADVANTAGES FOR NEW BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES AND RELATIONS.

THE CONCEPT OF CONNECTIVITY MUST BE RELATED TO INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION, SPEED, CONTINOUS AVAILABILITY, DELIVERY, IMMEDIACY AND REVENUE ARRANGEMENTS.

IT IS IN THAT SENSE THAT THE SURINAMESE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES THE CREATION OF A GOVERNMENTAL WEBSITE AS AN INFORMATIONAL FOCAL POINT FOR OUR COMMUNITY. THIS DEVELOPMENT WAS INITIATED AND STEERED BY TELESUR.

FURTHERMORE I ALSO ANNOUNCE THAT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL ICT-INSTITUTE IS UNDERWAY, AN INSTITUTE WITH IN ITS MISSION THE CHALLENGE TO ADVANCE THE CLOSING OF THE CONNECTIVITY-GAP BETWEEN THE CAPITAL CITY OF PARAMARIBO AND RURAL AREAS AS WELL AS THE CONNECTIVITY GAP BETWEEN SURINAME AND THE CARIBBEAN AND OTHER NATIONS IN THE WORLD.

YOUR EXCELLENCIES,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,
MEMBERS OF THE CARIBBEAN ASSOCIATION OF NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION ORGANIZATIONS (CANTO)

UNITY THROUGH CONNECTIVITY IS FEASIBLE ONLY IF WE PUT IN PLACE EFFECTIVE TOOLS TO COMMUNICATE AND IF ALL STAKEHOLDERS BRING IN THE RIGHT SPIRIT TO COOPERATE WITH EACH OTHER. LET US JOIN FORCES TO GIVE REAL MEANING TO THE TOPIC OF THIS YEAR'S THEME "CARIBBEAN UNITY THROUGH CONNECTIVITY".

HAVING SAID THIS, I WISH YOU SUCCESSFUL DELIBERATIONS AND HEREBY DECLARE THE 24TH CANTO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OPEN.
