

**PARLIAMENTARY REGIONAL SEMINAR:
INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY: THE ROLE OF THE ICC
ORGANISED BY PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR GLOBAL ACTION AND THE
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF SURINAME**

PARAMARIBO, SURINAME JUNE 6-7, 2008

**Opening Speech by Hon. Paul H. Somoharjdo
President of the National Assembly of Suriname
6 June 2008**

**President of the republic of Suriname
Vice-president of the republic of Suriname
Council of ministers
Honourable members of diplomatic corps
Members of the national assembly
Vice president of the International Criminal Court
Assistant secretary general of the oas
Secretary general of the community of caribbean states represented
by mr. La ronde
President of parliamentarians for global action (pga)
Members of pga
Convenor of the international law and human rights programme of pga
Ladies and gentlemen**

**It is with great pleasure that I bid you all a warm welcome today. We are very
honoured with your presence in our beloved country Suriname, to attend the
Paramaribo Regional Parliamentary Seminar on International Justice and Security:
The Role of the International Criminal Court.**

**This seminar, which is a joint initiative of our parliament and your organization,
Parliamentarians for Global Action, is the result of the close cooperation between us
of many years' standing. After 1987, PGA also supported Suriname towards the
full restoration of democracy and the rule of law, by organising the 1995 seminar**

entitled “Strengthening Democracy” in cooperation with us and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In addition to Members of Parliament, various organisations took part in this event.

Through the years, the ties between PGA and our parliament have continued to increase. We currently have an active PGA Working Group consisting of eight members and chaired by Mrs. Drs. Kai lee, who is also a member of the International Council of PGA. Mrs. Ruth Wijdenbosch, L.L.M, is a member of the Executive Committee.

You may rest assured that the National Assembly will continue to support the good work that you do as regards consolidating democracy and the rule of law. We also truly appreciate your fight against injustice in the world. We hereby would like to express our gratitude for the fact that again, together with us, you organized this Seminar, which is very important to the region.

Ladies and gentlemen, human rights violations are as old as humanity. The atrocities committed in the first world war have created deep wounds in the community of nations. The demand to establish a criminal court to prosecute war criminals is therefore getting increasingly louder.

The military tribunals of Nuremberg and Tokyo were only established to try war criminals after grave violations of human rights were committed again during the Second World War. In 1948 the Convention on Genocide was adopted as a warning against committing crimes against humanity on national, ethnic and religious grounds. Although the need to establish a permanent criminal court was still urgent, the choice was made for a compromise.

In 1993 and 1994 the United Nations Security Council established the ad hoc tribunals of Yugoslavia and Rwanda to bring to justice individuals who had committed genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In 1989, the former president of Trinidad and Tobago who is well-known in Suriname, the honourable Mr. H.R. Robinson, ensured that the establishment of a permanent criminal court was again an item on the agenda of the General Assembly of the United Nations. After years of preparations and many discussions, the International Criminal Court started to operate in July 2002.

By the year 2008, this independent, permanent and complementary criminal court has become an indispensable international institute. Countries in our region that have been confronted with human rights violations, welcomed the establishment of this court to deter violations in the future.

During the debates in the National Assembly, the issue of Suriname becoming a member of the ICC has often been a subject of discussion. Various factions emphasized the need for Suriname to accede to the Rome Statute and committed their support to the International Criminal Court. The president of Suriname, Mr. Drs. R.R. Venetiaan has repeatedly declared that the government fully endorses the principles of the International Criminal Court.

Together with our allies we believe that the most horrific violations of human rights, such as genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, may never be committed with impunity. In addition to protecting our citizens by means of our national legal system we are obliged to make accessible to them, the extra guarantee derived from the International Criminal Court.

Ladies and gentlemen, During this seminar you will exchange thoughts on matters pertaining to the ICC. The challenges faced by the states as well as the obstacles the court experiences in exercising its duties, will be brought up as well. *“Success does not come to those who wait – and it does not wait for anyone to come to it.”*

With these words I would like to wish you productive deliberations and success and I hereby declared this Seminar “opened”.

Thank you!