

SURINAME

Mr. President

First of all we wish to express our gratitude with the initiative taken by the Federal Republic of Brasil to confer about the themes mentioned on the agenda of this Conference.

In order to put this gratitude into perspective it is relevant to inform the conference about some cultural facts concerning Suriname.

During the period of Dutch colonisation large masses of slaves were brought to Suriname. After the abolition of Slavery the Dutch brought indentured labourers from India, Indonesia and Chinese from Makao. The ancestors of the aboriginal amerindians, slaves and indentured labourers who have conserved and in a way cultivated their respective cultural heritages and languages are nowadays typified as the "flowers" Suriname is composed of.

From the start on the Surinamese Government recognised the rights and duties its people have to determine independently its own cultural identity, based on its historical antecedents, its individual values and aspirations, and its sovereign will.

To overcome difficulties in flowering the garden, the Surinamese government had to set cultural policies which could satisfy the needs of the different ethnic groups, while working on policies concerning more common national and nationalistic goals.

To illustrate this I shall paraphrase some aspects of the cultural policy set forth by the government in charge.

One of the basic characteristics of Suriname is its cultural pluriformity. Therefore our cultural policy is based on the principle of a so-called cultural democracy. The main characteristic of this principle is that one has to recognize the fact that all cultures are equal and that one has to accept and honour the way each ethnic group expresses itself, so that all individuals without exception are free to take part in cultural life. The philosophy behind this is the idea that cultural authenticity is based on recognition of the components of cultural identity, whatever their geographic origin and despite their being intermingled.

Furthermore the government has stated that the cultural development of Suriname, based on all cultural resources in all its diversity, aims at strengthening our cultural identity, creativity and patriotism

When we take a close look at the themes of this conference we recognise largely themes Suriname is already dealing with on a national level. This is due to our cultural diversity and our multi-cultural community.

When put in a more continental perspective, we must conclude that the cultural diversity of Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole, is more or less based on the same cultural, social and ethnic contributions from aboriginals and others brought to this region by European colonizers or by means of immigration.

I think that it is this communality that gives grounds for all

efforts made throughout South America -and this conference can not be seen otherwise- to achieve integration which must result in a common destiny for Latin America and the Caribbean. To achieve this, culture and cultural development, which in my opinion are closely linked to communication, education, science and technology, should be used as the main instrument for integration in our region.

The Surinamese Government (delegation) therefore recommends that the discussions based on the themes of this conference, should focus on and urge for the establishment of a Latin American and Caribbean body or institute for Culture. This in order to ensure and safeguard the sovereignty, interest and cultural identity of the Latin American and Caribbean people. The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean should therefore strengthen and expand their cultural ties at both the national and the regional levels, and thus contribute to the establishment of a cultural development that is just and more consonant with the aspirations of the people of our continent.

The institute to be formed should create a network of contacts with all cultural centres on a national and regional level.

The field of work for this institute can be defined as follows:

This institute should give advice to governments or on behalf of governments it should also undertake actions related to the

- a. support, development and strengthening of cultural and socio-cultural ties of and between Latin American and Caribbean countries
- b. development of and cooperation between Latin American and Caribbean countries in the field of Culture and, Socio-Cultural activities.
- c. exchange of expertise and materials concerning the development on national and international level of projects in the field of Culture and Socio-Cultural Work.
- d. support and (technical) assistance concerning the organisation and administration of units in the field of social and cultural planning on national levels.
- e. initiation and establishment of a permanent system of coordination among international, regional and subregional organizations.
- f. support and subsidising training centres and/ or activities in the field of research on and preservation of cultural property.

As I issued the necessity for the establishment of an institute for cultural integration and regional development, this in order to maintain and promote mutual knowledge of and respect for the Latin American and Caribbean cultures it becomes opportune to formulate some proposals that could be considered as a concretisation of afore mentioned objectives. Therefore the themes of the conference can be used as points of reference. Due to speech limitation I shall briefly focus on the topics concerning cultural heritage, free circulation of cultural goods, audio visual means as instrument for integration and the spreading of official languages.

Cultural heritage as defined by the UNESCO is the entire corpus of material signs -either artistic or symbolic- handed on by the past to each culture and, therefore, to the whole of

humankind. As a constituent part of the affirmation and enrichment of cultural identities, as a legacy belonging to all humankind, the cultural heritage gives each particular place, its recognizable features and is the storehouse of human activities. As such preservation and presentation of cultural, non-physical cultural and natural heritage should be the cornerstone of any cultural policy.

In order to protect this heritage, cooperation in museology, museography, architectural and archival science with a view to improving the organizational and technical level of institutes and personnel in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean should be improved.

Within this framework Suriname is now working on the development of a programme that aims at preservation and safeguarding architectural complexes, buildings and monuments. The safeguarding of several archeological sites is also part of this programme. The main problems we have to tackle in effectuating this programme are due to shortages in public finances and lack of technicians who are theoretically and practically skilled in modern safeguarding techniques and methods.

Another plan of action in this field is the building of a museum that will stimulate and encourage public awareness of the social and economic importance of culture and intellectual creation. In order to achieve this goal, this museum annex exhibition hall must enable us to accomodate all our cultural artefacts that are sheltered in the "Tropisch Museum" in Amsterdam. It should also create facilities to accomodate local exhibitions and exhibitions from abroad, festivals, etc.. In this sense museums must be multi-functional so they can not be seen as pure social investments anymore. Its consequent economic value rests on their impact on economic activities and tourism.

Through the establishment of a multi-functional museum network access to cultural goods and services of other nations must be made possible. In order to put into effect a free pooling of cultural goods and services becomes evident. This form of communication which enables one to recognize the peculiarity of each society's forms of expression and cultural value not only strenghtens understanding and solidarity for each other's cultures, but it also fosters a sense of belonging to a single universal culture.

As such policies about the function and the functioning of museums on a national level has to be changed -if not already changed- in order to become an integral part of national and regional cultural policies, such as one to be set forth by this conference.

The institute to be established, or this conference at least, should therefore recommend participating countries for an increased participation among various museums in the Latin American and Caribbean region. Cooperation in this sense enhances the need for knowledge and training in the field of conservation and presentation of collections, and training courses in the field of museum education, public relations and

socio-cultural information.

The modern communication media and related cultural industries are now fulfilling a basic role in spreading cultural norms and values. The problem we developing countries are facing in this is that these media industries disregard the traditional values of our societies and kindle hopes and aspirations which are not consonant with the actual needs of its development. Furthermore, the absence of national cultural industries may, particularly in developing countries, constitute a source of cultural dependence and give rise to alienation. Regional integration by means of communication media should therefore facilitate objective information on cultural trends in the various Latin American and Caribbean countries, without detriment to the sovereignty and freedom of creativity and cultural identity of nations. An example could be the Caribbean Broadcasting Union with programmes as Caribscope.

In creating a Latin American and Caribbean common market for media products one must simultaneously encourage the establishment of such industries, or at least units that can strengthen its national media capacities in order that they may produce and distribute cultural goods and thus participate actively and more adequately in this common market.

Suriname in being a multi cultural society in every sense of the word is in a somewhat unique position. Part of our cultural reality is that several languages are spoken daily. Languages such as Sranan Tongo, Creole language and lingua franca, Sarnami Hindi, Javanese, Chinese, Dutch the official language, and several bush negro and amerindian languages. In recent years the Surinamese government has established official spellings for these languages by decreeing official orthographies for Sranan Tongo, Sarnami Hindi and Javanese. Some other languages have to follow yet. Within this project the Department of Culture started recording folk stories and myths etc. of the different groups. By translating them into the official language they are being made available to all Surinamese.

Suriname is also the only Dutch speaking country on the mainland of South America. After independence in 1975 political leaders have more than ever expressed their views on regional integration. As a result of these discussions Spanish, besides English, became one of the languages taught at secondary school level. In our opinion the corridor for effective cultural, socio-cultural and economic interchange and integration is the ability to at least basically understand one another. The three main languages of our continent namely English, Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese should therefore be imbedded in the curricula of our educational systems. The experience and expertise the Surinamese government has gained in researching and dealing with languages could be made available through the recommended Institute for Latin American and Caribbean Culture.

I would like to conclude my speech by strongly recommending the establishment of a Latin American and Caribbean Institute for

Culture. An institute that within the framework of cultural integration can give incentives to and implement strategies set forth by a council of ministers of cultural affairs.

Thank you