

**Address by
H.E. Drs Runaldo Ronald Venetiaan
President of the Republic of Suriname
and Head of Government with lead responsibility for
Culture, Gender, Youth and Sport in the CARICOM Quasi-Cabinet**

**CARIFESTA X Opening Ceremony
New Providence Stadium, Guyana
(22 August 2008)**

It is a great pleasure for me to be part of the exciting experience of this mega arts festival CARIFESTA X. I am very happy, as Head of Government with lead responsibility for Culture, Gender, Youth and Sport in the Quasi-Cabinet of CARICOM to congratulate His Excellency President Bharrat Jagdeo and the People of the Republic of Guyana for bringing the Caribbean Festival of Arts (CARIFESTA) back to the place where it originated thirty-six years ago.

Guyana has for many years fulfilled a key role in the process of regional integration and took the bold step in 1972 to initiate the Caribbean Festival of Arts as a regional forum for our artists and cultural workers and as a vehicle for fostering the development of the arts and cultural industries in the Region.

I wish to take this opportunity to commend Guyana for its display of great commitment in hosting CARIFESTA X given the limited time frame for the preparation of an event of such magnitude.

I also wish to especially mention all our Caribbean artists, administrators and sponsors, in the government as well as in the private sector and all those who have worked so tirelessly over the past months to ensure that tonight we embark on a true Caribbean celebration that expresses to ourselves and to the world our spirit of togetherness. This is so appropriately captured in the theme of the festival: ***One Caribbean, One Purpose - Our Culture, Our Life.***

CARIFESTA X will feature additional elements of the New CARIFESTA model, which is intended to make the Festival more economically viable while maintaining indigenous elements and timeless cultural traditions that make the Caribbean so unique and special.

I am pleased that such a prominent role has been given to our young people in the region in designing, planning and participating in CARIFESTA. Children and youth, the future of our Caribbean, will indeed be exposed to the richness of our multi-cultural community. This will no doubt nurture and provide them with a sense of identity so essential in preparing the future leaders of this great Caribbean Community.

As we witness this exciting and dynamic opening ceremony, let us pledge this evening to enshrine culture in all its various attributes and infuse it in our education, our communities and our youth movements. We are inspired by the spectacular performances of the track and field teams at the 29th Olympiad and especially the magnificent and captivating feats of our men and women that led to the Caribbean winning an unprecedented number of gold, silver and bronze medals and cemented the prestige of Jamaica and the Caribbean in the annals of history.

Some of our cultural icons, among whom distinguished members of the Order of the Caribbean Community, will honour us with their presence during CARIFESTA X. Together with many others they have kept the cultural flame of the Caribbean shining brightly.

Let us honour this noble tradition over the next 10 days and beyond. Let us also draw inspiration from thirty-six years of experience by elevating this festival to a CARIFESTA, which, for the duration of the festival, places the centre of the world here in the Caribbean, here in our Caribbean Community.

I wish you a great and wonderful experience at CARIFESTA X in celebrating our heritage, our civilization and our creativity.
