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Guyana opposition says it opted not to participate in St. Vincent meeting

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Guyana's Opposition Leader, Aubrey Norton.

The Guyana parliamentary opposition, led by Aubrey Norton, decided not to attend the meeting in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines between Presidents Irfaan Ali of Guyana and Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela, which was brokered by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). While the meeting was widely reported as an attempt to de-escalate the conflict, Norton cited concerns about inadequate consultation and unclear objectives.

In a statement, the Leader of the Opposition, Aubrey Norton, expressed reservations about the meeting's agenda and the role of the opposition in it. Norton stated, "If the opposition had access to all the information, if the opposition was involved in a proper consultative process, if the opposition was aware what is the agenda of the meeting, then I might have considered it."

While he admitted to being invited to send a representative, by a government official, Norton said the opposition ultimately decided there was no point.

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Norton emphasized the importance of knowing the agenda of the meeting before considering involvement, especially when the talks involve heads of state. He said, “One has to know what are the objectives of the meeting, what is the agenda of the meeting, and then what role would the opposition leader play?”

Further, the opposition’s statement on the day of the meeting outlined several steps it would have taken had they been in government, including insisting on a clear agenda, demanding de-escalation measures from Venezuela, and engaging in extensive consultation with the opposition and other experts.

Guyana’s Vice President, Bharrat Jagdeo, responded to the opposition’s stance, arguing that the purpose of the meeting had been explicitly set out in previous statements by CARICOM leaders and the Guyana government. Dr. Jagdeo said, “To claim now that you didn’t know the purpose of the meeting, implied that you didn’t know the purpose of the meeting, the purpose of the meeting was explicitly set out in the statement from CARICOM leaders when they issued that.”

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President Ali had also held live streams in the lead-up to the meeting, to quell public concerns that Guyana would falter on its position on how to resolve the controversy and its principled defence of the territory.

Jagdeo detailed Guyana’s positions, reiterating that the country’s land boundary, currently a subject before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), would not be up for discussion at the meeting. He also emphasized Guyana’s commitment to continuing defense cooperation with its partners and advancing its development agenda without compromise.

On Thursday evening, President Ali related that the talks were progressing and that he stood his ground in defense of Guyana’s sovereignty, including its right to have its resources developed. Notably, he said too that CARICOM reaffirmed its support for Guyana.