



Ethnic Relations Commission

An overview of the work and functions of the ERC September 2003 – April 2010

The Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) of Guyana is a Constitutional body established as an undertaking by the Herdmanston Accord and by Constitution Amendment No. 2 Act No. 11 of 2000 and assented to by His Excellency the President Bharrat Jagdeo on August 11, 2000.



Ethnic Relations Commission

66 Peter Rose & Anira Streets, Queenstown, Georgetown, Guyana

Tel: +592-231-6479, 231-6473, 231-6281, 231-6265

Fax: +592-231-6246

Email: ceo@ethnicrelations.org.gy

Website: www.ethnicrelations.org.gy

AN OVERVIEW OF THE ETHNIC RELATIONS COMMISSION - FROM CONCEPTUALIZATION TO PRESENT

BACKGROUND

The genesis of the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) lies in the Herdmanston Accord which was signed on January 17, 1998 by the then President Mrs. Janet Jagan of the People's Progressive Party/Civic and Mr. Hugh Desmond Hoyte of the People's National Congress. The Accord, brokered by the CARICOM Mission which included Sir Shridath Ramphal, Sir Alistair McIntyre and Sir Henry Forde, sought to provide a peaceful solution to the political impasse that had gripped the country following the December 1997 Regional and General Elections.

The Accord set out a Menu of Measures that provided for, among other things, the establishment of a Constitutional Reform Commission (CRC). Among the matters to be addressed by this Commission were measures and arrangements for improving race relations in Guyana, including the contribution with equal opportunities legislation and concepts drawn from the CARICOM Charter of Civil Society could contribute to the cause of justice, equity and progress in Guyana.

The CRC was composed and its Report to the National Assembly on July 17, 1999 recommended that the Constitution shall establish an adequately-funded and suitably broad-based Ethnic Relations Commission, comprising representatives of religious bodies, the labour movement, the private business sector, youth and women. A draft Bill that provided for the establishment of the Ethnic Relations Commission and its functions was presented to the National Assembly and passed into law on August 11, 2000.

The ERC was established by the Constitution (Amendment) (No.2) Act No. 11 of 2000. The purpose of this Commission is to promote ethnic harmony.

The Commission was mandated to execute twenty-four functions which can be grouped as:

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|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. Investigative | c. Education and Public Awareness |
| b. Conflict Resolution | d. Research |

THE FORMATION OF THE ERC

On March 8, 2002, the Clerk of the National Assembly initiated the process of nomination of the members by those entities to comprise the ERC, determined by the National Assembly. As a result, the under-mentioned persons were duly nominated and appointed as Members of the ERC:

Ser.	Entity	Representative
01	Christian Religion Substitute	Bishop Juan Edghill, Minister of Religion Rev. Roy K. Thakurdial, Minister of Religion
02	Hindu Religion Substitute	Pandit Ramkissoon Maharaj, Attorney-at-Law Mr. Radha K. Sharma, Chief Executive Officer/Banker
03	Muslim Religion Substitute	Mr. Shahabudin McDoom, Attorney-at-Law Mr. Shaffeek Khan, Retired Public Officer

04	Trade Union Substitute	Mr. Andrew Garnett, Principal Asst. Secretary – GTUC Mr. Carvil Duncan, General Secretary, GLU, V.P, GTUC
Ser.	Entity	Representative
05	Private Sector Substitute	Major General (Ret'd) Norman McLean Mr. John Willems, Commissioner, Public Utilities Commission
06	Youth Substitute	Dr. Frank Anthony, National Youth Commission Dr. Rajendra Singh – MD, Government Medical Officer
07	Women Substitute	Ms. Cheryl Sampson, Admin. Manager, Guyana In-Service Distance Education Project Mrs. Leila Austin, Retired Lecturer

An interesting provision of the Act for the membership of the Commission, in addition to those mentioned above, is the inclusion of a member of each of the Rights Commissions, that is the Women and Gender Equality Commission, the Indigenous Peoples Commission, the Rights of the Child Commission and the Human Rights Commission as non-voting members of the ERC, strengthening its capacity to address the task assigned to it.

This Act also provides for the establishment of an Ethnic Relations Commission Tribunal and may make provisions for:

- a. The constitution of the Tribunal
- b. All matters relating to the jurisdiction, powers and duties of the Tribunal
- c. All matters relating to appeals from decisions of the Tribunal including a right of appeal to the Court of Appeal on the points of law
- d. The practice and procedure of the Tribunal.

INAUGURAL MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION

At its first meeting on August 26, 2003, Bishop Juan Edghill was elected Chairman and Major General (Ret'd) Norman McLean, Deputy Chairman of the Commission. Meetings continued thereafter at the Public Buildings and since the Commission was still not fully constituted, the staff of the Committees Division of the Parliament Office provided administrative and technical support. On September 2, 2003, the Chairman proposed a Work Programme which was in keeping with the primary functions of the Commission.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR 2004

By the end of 2004, the Commission had conducted 31 Statutory Meetings. It decided that its priorities for 2004 will focus on the following:

1. Needs Assessment of the ERC Secretariat
2. Strategic Planning
3. Engagement with the International Community
4. Regular Press Briefings
5. Capacity building for Commissioners and Staff
6. Regional Visits
7. Constituency Meetings
8. Conflict Transformation Consultation

9. National Film Festival

The Commission embarked upon an ambitious Work Programme which, despite many constraints, financial and otherwise, and with the assistance of donor agencies, it was almost able to complete (80%). The donor agencies which recognized and lent support to the ERC include: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which established a special programme to focus on conflict transformation, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Community (EU), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and British High Commission.

Consistent with its mandate under Article 212D of the Constitution, the Commission sought to foster a sense of security among all ethnic groups by engaging in several outreach programmes aimed at educating and creating public awareness on the need for tolerance of diversity in all aspects of national life.

SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED BY THE ERC IN 2004

1. WORKSHOPS

The Commission held and participated in the following workshops:

Capacity Building Workshop on Ethnicity and Conflict for ERC Commissioners

This workshop was held on February 1 and 2, 2004, at the Prairie International Hotel, East Bank of Demerara. It was sponsored by the UNDP's Building Social Cohesion Programme (BSCP) and was facilitated by Dr. Andries Odendaal from the Centre for Conflict Resolution, Cape Town, South Africa. It was aimed at training the ERC Commissioners in '**Exploring the Management of Ethnic Conflict and Diversity**'. It also dealt with *inter alia*, the nature and handling of ethnicity and approaches to conflict.

Strategic Planning Workshop for Commissioners of the ERC

This workshop was held on May 21 and 22, 2004 at the Arrowpoint Nature Resort. It was sponsored by the BSCP and was administered and facilitated by the UNDP. It was a follow up to the aforementioned Workshop on Ethnicity and Conflict and was aimed at enabling the members of the Commission to be better able to understand their mandate, and the need for impartiality and objectivity especially within the current political context.

The Cultural Workshop

There were two workshops (Basic and Advance) with the Cultural Groups – the Basic was held on June 3 to 6, 2004 (Mainstay 1) and the Advance on September 6 to 9, 2004 (Mainstay 2), at the Lake Mainstay Resort, Essequibo, Region Two. These were sponsored by the ERC, in collaboration with the BSCP and the UNDP and were facilitated by Mr. Chris Spies of UNDP and Ms. Rolinda Kirton of the Centre for Inner Harmony. They were aimed at building bridges between different cultural groups from diverse communities in order to remove existing barriers and were attended by the undermentioned groups:

1. The African Heritage Foundation
2. The Guyanese Organisation of Indigenous Peoples (GOIP)
3. The Indian Arrival Committee (IAC)
4. The Pan African Movement (Guyana Branch)
5. Guyana Rastafarian Council
6. The Chinese Association and
7. The Amerindian Action Movement of Guyana.

Participants at Mainstay 1 explored the principles of engagement, the meaning of conflict, and approaches and reactions to it. They also participated in various exercises, skits, and case studies dealing with these issues. At Mainstay 2, participants sought to acquire and practice the necessary skills to enable them to take concrete action toward conflict transformation in Guyana and presented their individual and group reports for discussion. In addition to their usual participation in various exercises, they also learnt facilitation and mediation skills.

The Religious Organisation Workshop

There were two workshops (Basic and Advance) with the religious groups. These were held on June 3 to 6, 2004 (Mainstay 1) and September 13 to 16, 2004 (Mainstay 2) at Lake Mainstay Resort, Essequibo, Region Two. Once again sponsorship was done by the ERC in collaboration with the BSCP and UNDP, with facilitation done by Mr. Chris Spies and Ms. Rolinda Kirton. It was aimed at having the various religious groups together to achieve conflict transformation in Guyana and was attended in the first instance by the under mentioned religious groups:

1. Christian Brethren Mission
2. District Centre Church of the Nazarene
3. Guyana Central Arya Samaj
4. Guyana Conference of Seventh Day Adventists
5. Guyana Islamic Forum
6. Guyana Islamic Trust
7. Guyana Maha Kali
8. Guyana Ministers Fellowship
9. Guyana Missionary Baptist Church
10. Guyana Sanatan Dharma Maha Saba
11. Hijatul Ulamaa
12. Inter-Religious Organisation
13. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of Guyana
14. The Salvation Army

At Mainstay 1, participants addressed the major misconceptions of religion and their religion's contribution to the discipline of conflict. Apart from learning about the responses and approaches to conflict, they also participated in skits and exercises.

At Mainstay 2 the groups represented were:

1. Christian Brethren Assembly
2. Guyana Islamic Forum
3. Guyana Islamic Trust
4. Guyana Maha Kali
5. Guyana Central Arya Samaj
6. Guyana Ministers Fellowship
7. Inter-Religious Organisation
8. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of Guyana
9. Guyana Sanatan Dharma Maha Saba

Participants examined the qualities and roles of good peace builders and presented their individual and group reports for discussion. In addition to their usual participation in various exercises, they also learnt facilitation and mediation skills.

2. MEETINGS WITH POLITICAL PARTIES AND CITIZENS ORGANISATIONS

Awareness meetings were held with all the Parliamentary Political Parties and three Non-Parliamentary Political Parties in March 2004. The Non-Parliamentary Political Parties were:

- a. The Guyana Action Party
- b. The Justice For All Party
- c. The Good and Green Guyana Party

On March 26, 2004 a special consultation meeting was also held with representatives of Civil Society in Georgetown. Representatives were drawn from various Government Ministries, The Guyana Society for the Blind, The Central Islamic Organisation, Habitat for Humanity, Probation Family and Welfare Service, The Guyana Bar Association, The National Commission on the Rights of the Child and Guyana Trades Union Congress. They all suggested that there was

need for a reconciliation of the two main races in order to achieve unity and peace in Guyana and that education was the key to achieving a solution to the ethnic problem in Guyana.

3. ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ERC CONSTITUENCIES

In 2004 the Ethnic Relations Commission met with its seven constituencies namely: Muslim, Hindu and Christian Constituencies, along with representatives from the youth, private sector, trade union and women's constituencies.

The Muslim Constituency

This Constituency called for discontinuation of religious programmes (Christian) making derogatory remarks about Muslims. It was felt that Muslim businessmen were targeted for discrimination. Representatives also noted that the practice in some organisations of preventing Muslims from attending Friday prayers during working or school hours should be addressed. Perceived harassment of Muslim women and children with regard to the wearing of the Hijab was also addressed at this forum.

The Christian Constituency

Leaders at the meeting called for greater religious tolerance among religions in Guyana. In addition, this Constituency suggested that the Commission conduct research into the phenomena fueling racism. The issue of perceived discrimination in land allocation, award of contracts and other economic opportunities were also addressed.

The Trade Union Constituency

Representatives at this meeting emphasised the need to relieve race problems in the work place. They also noted that racial discrimination in housing, the budget, power, politics, land distribution and organised labour were having devastating effects on society. It was noted that there appeared to be an alienation of the black group in this society. The prevalence of racism, particularly at election time was of particular concern to this group.

The Private Sector Constituency

The existence of race based politics, particularly during election periods was reiterated by this group. There was enquiry of whether the ERC had a benchmark to determine whether ethnic relations were improving in society. This Constituency felt that an education and awareness programme would play a significant role in changing existing perceptions. The capacity of the ERC to bring about social justice through the courts, or through the intervention of an international jurist in any matter before the Commission was also examined at this meeting.

The Youth Constituency

Young people at this meeting sought clarification on the methodology for dealing with complaints. They were curious about whether the Commission was empowered to discipline and pass sanctions. They examined the possibility of the dispute resolution function of the Commission to solve ethnic dilemmas at the family level through mediation.

The Constituency for Women

This Constituency emphasized the need for public education and awareness programmes in regional communities as well as the need for the Commission to focus on the culture of society by promoting integration through the school system. It was felt that there should be the

establishment of a relationship with the Advisory Committee on Broadcasting and the media to highlight positive ethnic relations issues.

4. PUBLIC EDUCATION AND AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

Regional Visits

Between the months of June to November 2004, visits promoting public awareness of the ERC were made by Commissioners to the ten (10) Administrative Regions. Attendance at these sessions comprised mainly Regional Councillors, members of the Village Neighbourhood Democratic Council and members of civil society within the regions who expressed their views about the possible causes of ethnic conflict within Guyana and offered possible solutions. Some examples cited were administrative acts of omissions that led to the arousal of the perception of ethnic discrimination. Regional Officials recommended that there be regional offices set up to receive complaints. They all agreed that education was an effective method of combating ingrained perceptions.

The National Film Festival - 2004

The National Film Festival began on August 16 2004, with an opening ceremony at the Umana Yana. In attendance was His Excellency, The President of Guyana, members of the Opposition, members of Parliament, members of the Diplomatic Corps and members of civil society. This programme continued in **Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10.** *During these programmes Commissioners took the opportunity to sensitize the participants on the existence of the ERC and create awareness on the need for racial tolerance and understanding.*

5. LEGAL AND INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY

The Commission received a total of eighteen (18) complaints in 2003-2004. Two (2) of these were made in 2003, and sixteen (16) in 2004. Although most of them were unrelated to the Constitutional mandate of the Commission, two (2) related complaints were made in accordance with Article 212D (p) as well as six (6) associated with Article 212D (j).

From the cases reported, it should be noted that some of the issues presented for consideration by the Commission did not fall within its sphere of activity and as a result were referred to the relevant agencies. Of the complaints submitted to the Commission, there were three (3) that were closely followed by members of the public. One of these complaints was the Indian Arrival Committee Complaint against Dr. Kean Gibson's book, '*Cycle of Racial Oppression*'

Public Hearings

The Commission decided, in light of the particular circumstances of the application, to accede to the request of the IAC to undertake a public hearing, with a view of clarifying the substance of the application.

Accordingly, a series of public hearings were held over a period of 12 days between April 14, 2004 and May 17, 2004.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR 2005

Strategic Priorities for 2005/2006

In 2005/2006, the ERC focused its activities on the following substantive priority areas, which have been selected on the basis of broad regional consultations with civil society, regional and governmental authorities:

- a) Ensuring equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination in employment; tendering; scholarships; economic opportunities and access to land ownership.
- b) Prevention and management of ethnically and racially motivated pre-and post-election violence.
- c) Public information and outreach activities to promote ethnic harmony and tolerance.
- d) Training activities for selected target groups in conflict management and transformation.
- e) Strengthening of the ERC's organizational and substantive capacity, including through the establishment of regional offices.
- f) Processing of individual complaints of alleged ethnic or racial discrimination within the ERC's mandate.

1. STATUTORY MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION

Commissioners continued to meet on a regular basis to address policy issues and to guide the ERC's work programme and activities of the Secretariat. Twenty (20) statutory and sixteen (16) special meetings of the Commission were held in 2005.

Engagement with the Guyana Democratic Consolidation and Conflict Resolution (GDCCR) project

In 2005, the ERC, in collaboration with Diplomatic Corp, began planning strategies that could have ensured a peaceful Regional and National elections environment in 2006. The ERC's involvement in the GDCCR project was designed to increase citizens' participation, improve transparency and accountability in governance and reduce vulnerability to ethnic and political conflict.

Training of Commissioners and Staff

The USAID, through its Guyana Democratic Consolidation and Conflict Resolution (GDCCR) Project, provided training to the staff and Commissioners of the ERC. Training for Commissioners centered on the handling of complaints and capacity building in preparation for General Elections

Engagement with the Donor Community

The Commission met with representatives of the USAID to discuss the role of the ERC in the 2006 Regional and General Elections. The Commission also met with the Commonwealth Secretary General Special Envoy to Guyana, Sir Paul Reeves.

2. PUBLIC EDUCATION AND AWARENESS PROGRAMMES

Establishment of the ERC Website

Through Redspider.biz, the ERC established its website in 2005 to effectively support the mission of the Commission and better inform Guyanese both locally and overseas of its work and functions.

Regional Visits

Commissioners and staff visited the ten (10) Administrative Regions during the year 2005. The visits were organized and conducted under the theme, "Promoting Ethnic Harmony and

Security". These outreaches were well attended by civil society and officials from the Regional Administration and the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils. The opportunity was taken to make residents in the regions aware of the mandate of the ERC, and to encourage persons to report to the Commission any form of ethnic or racial discrimination of which they were aware. During the Regional Visit several activities were conducted:

1. Meetings with Regional Executives
2. Round Table Discussions with Private Business Sector
3. Film Festivals
4. Commissioners Walk-about
5. Public Meetings
6. Television Programmes

Region Four Consultations

In Region Four, two public consultations were held. One at the Ocean View Convention Centre, Liliendaal, East Coast Demerara which saw residents and community leaders from Mahaica to Georgetown attending. The second was held at the Prairie International Hotel, East Bank Demerara which drew participants from Moblissa to Agricola. There was also a Public Forum at the Le Meridien, Pegasus in Georgetown.

Film Festivals

The Commission included the Film Festival which started in 2004 as a part of its continuous Public Education and Awareness Programme. The objective of the ERC's Film Festival was to foster a sense of security among the country's ethnic groups by encouraging understanding, acceptance and tolerance of diversity in all aspects of national life.

The 2005 Film Festival programme was executed with the theme "Breaking down walls of partition, building bridges of participation --- Youth, Guyana's hope for racial healing". The Film Festival was taken to 114 secondary and primary schools, eight (8) youth groups and eighteen (18) summer camps. There were also fifteen (15) public viewings. Discussions were encouraged after each showing and viewers made pertinent suggestions.

Many secondary school students asked that the ERC take the programme to their parents as they were the ones who needed it most. They claimed that in school they get along well with students of other ethnic groups, but it was when they got home that they hear ethnic slurs and other derogatory remarks pertaining to race. Several students recommended that the schools' curricula include conflict resolution and orchestrated programmes to facilitate interaction among all races.

The ERC'S Media Encounter

A programme which specially targeted the Media was held at the Demerara Mutual Life Building in Georgetown on November 17 and 18, 2005 and was conducted under the title *Media Encounter*, with the theme "The Media - A Catalyst for Conflict Transformation", Discussions centered on:

- The ethnic dilemma and the role of the media.
- Social ills and ethnic discrimination.
- Encoded language and images that promote/diffuse ethnic tension.
- Helping negotiators maintain their credibility.

The encounter sought to obtain from the media their commitment to promoting ethnic harmony and security. Participants in this historic engagement with the press on the role of the media in fostering social cohesion, included representatives of television stations, the radio and the newspapers, along with talk-show hosts, columnists, public commentators and foreign correspondents.

Religious Roundtable Discussion

The Commission convened its second Religious Round Table Discussion at Le Meridien Pegasus on June 9, 2005 with participation from the Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Rastafarian and Bahai communities. The theme was "Encouraging and Creating Respect for Religious, Cultural and Other Forms of Diversity in a Plural Society".

3. LEGAL AND INVESTIGATIVE UNIT SUMMARY

The Commission received a total of one hundred and sixteen (116) complaints in 2005. Eighty-three (83) of these were received during regional visits between September and November. Thirty-three (33) were received through the mail and by persons visiting the ERC's office in the city.

Fifty-six (56) were outside of the ERC's mandate, and were referred to the relevant agencies. Fifteen (15) complaints were brought to a closure by the Commission. The Commission's inability to bring closure to more complaints was due to the slow pace of information flow from complainants and affected persons.

Of the complaints submitted to the Commission, there were three that were closely followed by members of the public. They were:

- The Freddie Kission Complaint on behalf of Dr. Rishi Thakur
- The Indian Arrival Committee Complaint
- Complaint against the Guyana Lottery Company

4. INVESTIGATION OF EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES, SCHOLARSHIPS AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

During 2005, the ERC visited Government Ministries, Corporations and other places of employment to look at employment practices and to educate the respective agencies as to the functions of the Commission. Businesses operating within the Eccles and Coldingen Industrial Estates were also visited. These visits were in keeping with the ERC's mandate to promote equality of job opportunities among persons of different ethnic groups and harmony and good relations among such persons.

The visits were also meant for the Commission to gather relevant data and to follow up with professional research into employment practices, land distribution, housing, tendering and procurement, and scholarships and training. In addition, the Commission met with senior officers from the Office of the President and the Public Service Ministry including the Permanent Secretaries, to examine the award of scholarships and training opportunities. This was to ensure that available scholarship and training opportunities are awarded without prejudice.

Visits were made to:

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| ➤ Ministry of Agriculture | ➤ Guyana Power and Light |
| ➤ Civil Aviation Department | ➤ Guyana Forestry Commission |
| ➤ Central Housing and Planning Authority | ➤ Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission |
| ➤ Ministry of Local Government | ➤ Guyana Office for Investment |
| ➤ Transport and Harbours Department | ➤ Ministry of Human Services and Social Security |
| ➤ Georgetown Hospital | ➤ Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| ➤ Ministry of Finance | ➤ Office of the President |
| ➤ Public Service Commission | ➤ Ministry of Housing and Water |
| ➤ Guyana Elections Commission | ➤ Ministry of Health |
| ➤ Police Service Commission | ➤ Guyana Energy Authority |

5. THE CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION WORKSHOP

One of the significant programmes undertaken by the ERC, which garnered much success was the 2005 Conflict Transformation Workshop funded by the UNDP through its Social Cohesion Programme. The objective of the workshop was to “explore and exchange ideas from the conflict transformation perspective to help collectively chart a peaceful course for the future.”

Participants at the workshop agreed that there was conflict in Guyana and identified the following processes and challenges for taking Guyana forward:

- Participation through involvement of all stakeholders, inputs from all strata of society, and consensus building.
- Benefits for all (win-win) as might be demonstrated by the goals identified. Equality focuses on improving the quality of life, and increased opportunities via empowerment and capacity building.
- Engender hope through firing the imagination, continuing political engagement, and strategies for ownership.

Participants at the Workshop included senior functionaries of the government, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, the People’s National Congress Reform, the Working People’s Alliance, Rise Organise And Rebuild, The United Force, the Women’s Affairs Bureau, the Private Sector Commission and the Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana. They were so impressed by the process that they asked for it to be taken to stakeholders around the country. They posited that there are many citizens who are not affiliated to any group or organization, and that the voices of these persons should be heard.

The civil society representatives also shared the view that they should not be involved at a particular time in the discussion, but should be represented throughout the process.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR 2006

1. MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION

During 2006, the Commission held a total of twenty-one (21) statutory meetings and twenty-five (25) special meeting to discuss its business, set policy and agree on action to be taken by regarding its work programme.

2. MULTI- STAKEHOLDER FORUM (MSF)

Based on the recommendation from the 2005 Conflict Transformation Workshop, the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted a Nation-wide engagement on issues of national development under the Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF).

The goal of the Multi-Stakeholder Forum was **‘to enhance social cohesion and deepen participatory democracy through dialogue’**. Its specific objective was -

‘To create a safe space for Guyanese to agree on strategies for overcoming ethnic and other differences, and to focus on how best they can contribute to the development of their community and country’

From March to July, 2006 the Commission with support from the UNDP Social Cohesion Programme held 142 MSF Neighbourhood Meetings (including 12 pilot meetings) and 10 Regional Conferences in the Administrative Regions where they had an opportunity to interface with their Regional Executive Officers. At each meeting, facilitators encouraged participatory dialogue which was engendered in the goals of the MSF. Participants discussed several issues concerning law enforcement, health, drainage, infrastructure, youth development, accessible

transportation in riverain areas, education, telecommunication, electrification and NDC management.

While the atmosphere was created for delegates to freely express issues affecting their communities, discussions were channeled not only to highlight the negative, but also the positive undercurrents in Guyana. They were encouraged to relate their vision for Guyana. People in Regions One, Three, Four and Ten celebrated the freedom of expression allowed in Guyana while others were heartened by the racial and religious tolerance which is evident among Guyanese.

As it related to their vision for Guyana, participants throughout the regions said that they hoped for closer racial integration, equal opportunities to resources and employment, improved law enforcement performance, an efficient education system and improvements in the infrastructure and in the economy. Despite these visionary perspectives, participants bemoaned the non-existence of these things they envisioned.

Delegates of the ten (10) Regional Conferences were expectant of the improvements to their communities and Regions, which they hoped would have been made possible as a result of the MSF. They saw the Forum as a means whereby policy makers can be made aware of the issues affecting citizens. Many felt a sense of satisfaction having had an opportunity to express their concerns as members of local communities and as Guyanese.

Total Number of Meetings of the MSF held in the various Regions and the number of participants which attended those meetings are listed below:

REGIONS	NO. OF CONSULTATIONS	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
Region 1	6	315
Region 2	15	356
Region 3	17	353
Region 4	34	744
Region 5	15	403
Region 6	23	771
Region 7	4	61
Region 8	5	137
Region 9	4	193
Region 10	15	477
TOTALS	138	3810

The key issues raised by participants at the meetings are listed under the following broad headings:

- Infrastructure
- Social Inclusion/ Cohesion
- Morals/Values
- Social Issues
- Equity
- Access to Opportunities and Resources
- Youth
- Crime
- Law and Order
- Land Issues
- Environment
- Economy/Markets
- Education
- Governance and Democracy
- Public Administration
- The Amerindian Bill
- Health

Women, Youth and Religious Conversations

Initially, it was intended to culminate the MSF meetings with a National Conversation involving Parliamentarians, Civil Society and representatives from the Neighbourhood and Regional Meetings, but because the date for national elections was just two months away, the MSF Steering Committee agreed to postpone the National Conversation and instead organize meetings with five of its constituencies which were grouped under the **Women, Religious Leaders and Youth**.

It was recognized that although members from the three groups had attended the community and regional meetings in their personal capacities, it was necessary to interface with these constituencies to have them share their thoughts and visions for a better Guyana. The **Women, Religious Leaders and Youth** conversations were held on 8th, 9th and 10th August at the National Cultural Centre. Over **300** women attended the Women's Conversation, while there were approximately **160** participants at the conversation for Religious Leaders and **250** at the Youth Conversation.

The National Conversation

Government, Parliamentary Political Parties, Trade Union, the Private Sector, Labour Unions and Civil Society gathered together in a historic National Conversation of the ERC/UNDP Multi Stakeholder Forum (MSF), November 15 and 16 2006, at the Guyana International Conference Centre.

The discourse was guided by the theme **“Enhancing social cohesion and deepening participatory democracy through dialogue.”** The National Conversation created a safe space for Guyanese from all sectors to candidly discuss issues which affected their livelihood at the national, regional, neighbourhood and individual levels. 264 participants among who were Regional Representatives, representatives from the Private Sector, Religious Groups, Youth Women, Labour, Political Parties as well as Parliamentarians were among the groups represented at the Conversation.

The discussion was based on eight (8) themes, namely: access to opportunities and equitable distribution of resources; infrastructure market and economy; governance and democracy; crime, law and order; morals, values, social inclusion, social issues; health, youth and education; environment and land issues, and the Amerindian Bill.

A high level of participation and interaction was accomplished in an environment in which social, economical, cultural and political differences existed. During the National Conversation, Guyanese with different opinions, views, ideologies, religious and belief systems sat together and discussed issues relating to National Development. The National Conversation can be used as a template of how issues can be discussed at the community level, regional level and national level.

3. PUBLIC EDUCATION AND AWARENESS PROGRAMMES

Constituency Meetings

During the period January 23- February 7, 2006 the Commission met with the following constituencies in several Administrative Regions. A total of eight meetings were held at which three hundred and twenty-five persons participated (325)

1. Christian
2. Hindu
3. Muslim
4. Labour Movement

5. Private Sector
6. Women

7. Youth

The Objectives of those meetings were to give an update on the Commission's work and invite feedback on:

1. ERC's role in Elections 2006
2. The Commission's Public Education Programme
3. Improving the image of the ERC
4. ERC's investigative capacity

Letter Writing, Essay and Poster Competition Programme

As part of its Public Education and Awareness work, the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) began its Poster, Essay and Letter Writing Programme.

The Essay and Poster Competitions were initiated to stimulate the involvement of children and adolescence in the peace building process through art and writing. The Letter Writing Programme was intended to provide a channel of communication between citizens and policy makers. Through this programme the ERC encouraged Guyanese – especially youth and senior citizens to write to the political party of their choice with a view to expressing a “vision” towards the national development thrust in a race-free Guyana.

Winners of the Essay and Poster Competition were awarded prizes at a simple prize giving ceremony held in the ERC Boardroom.

Television Scrolls during Football World Cup

Messages promoting racial harmony and good relations among Guyanese were disseminated during the Fifa Football World Cup on NCN television.

The Debating Competition

The ERC initiated its Debating Competition programme in an effort to create a peaceful environment for insightful debates on matters of racial tension and racial reconciliation in Guyana. In 2006 the Inter-Secondary Schools Debating Competition engaged 22 secondary schools from Regions Three, Four, Five, Six and Ten to ascertain the perceptions of young people on issues of racial animosity and racial reconciliation.

Billboard Planting Exercise

The Ethnic Relations Commission erected several billboards around Region Four disseminating peace messages. Billboards were erected at Young and High Street in Kingston, Sheriff Street and Railway Embankment junction, Church and Irving Streets and Independence Boulevard. Another can be found on the eastern fence of the Guyana Cricket Ground. Five more billboards will be mounted at Adventure, New Amsterdam, Parika, Rosignol and Vreed-en-Hoop, stelling.

Ambassador for Racial Unity Workshop

In the first quarter of 2006, the Public Education and Awareness Unit in collaboration with the University of Guyana conducted a workshop which was attended by youth from Buxton, Golden Grove, Enmore and Lusignan. The workshop convened under the theme ‘Ambassador for Racial Unity’ was conceptualized by a group of final year Communication students who requested presentation by the Commission. The Workshop sought to create an environment of trust and understanding among Guyanese youth from areas considered ‘trouble spots’. It was also designed to effect changes in false perceptions and the eradication of racial stereotyping among young people.

Film Festivals

The Commission continued its Film Festivals to stimulate discussion among young people through films on issues relative to racial tension, particularly in the Guyana context. ERC's heavy work programme in 2006 did not permit extensive work in this area. However, the Public Education and Awareness Unit was able to conduct forty-five (45) sessions of the film festival in schools, youth groups and groups in Regions 3, 4, 5, 10.

Culture Fest

The Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) with support from USAID hosted a "Culture Fest" to celebrate Guyana's cultural diversity, at the National Exhibition Site, Sophia on 11-12 August, 2006. This activity was held to encourage all Guyanese to participate and highlight the various cultures and religions, aimed at creating a better understanding among our people and acceptance of each other's way of life. It involved the bringing together of the cultural and ethnic groups in a grand exhibition of Guyana's ethnic diversity in song, dance, poetry, food and craft.

There were forty eight booths in the main auditorium exhibiting cultural and religious artifacts: Timehri Maha Kali Temple, The Chinese Association, the Science and Spirituality Religious Group, the Sri Satya Sai Baba Group, The Central Islamic Trust, the Bahai Faith Movement, the Inter Religious Organisation and others.

There were also exhibits from the local exhibitors such as Museum of African Heritage, Help and Shelter, Red Cross Society, National Aids Programme Secretariat, Georgetown Prison Service, the Culture Ambassador, Exquisite Craft, Farley's Art and Craft, Anancy's sculpture and craft, the Awaraks Linden Foundation, Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, the Rural Women Society, among others. There were also booths displaying foods of all ethnic Groups which included the Rastafarians.

In the evening, entertainment was provided by Fire Clan Band, New Melody Makers Band, Apex Education, Charmin Blackman of the Signal Band, Indian Cultural Centre, Institute of Business Education, recorded music by Stereo Sonic, First Born, X- Treme Band , Second Coming Gospel Band, Brutal Tracks Band, Signal Band X-Factor Dance Troupe, National School of Dance, SITARE Dance Troupe, Camille's Institute of Business and Science Studies Dance troupe, Chinese Embassy, Flame of the Heart Dance Troupe. There were also fashion displays of designs by Lynette Mangar and Michelle Cole.

4. PRE AND POST ELECTIONS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR PEACE

The objective of the Elections Communication Strategy for Peace was to ensure an elections environment free from fear and intimidation; where persons could go about their daily activities in the regular manner; where the sense of peace and calm prevailed through the period before, during and after the 2006 Elections.

With the support of the British High Commission, the ERC, in collaboration with the EAB and the IRO, implemented a communication strategy aimed at ensuring a non-violent elections period through messages calling for peace and non-violence. With the assistance of Ms. Colleen Harris, MVO, of the Commission for Racial Equality of England, the Strategy was designed. It called for a number of prominent citizens, well known personalities and political parties to appeal to their audiences for peace and non-violence. The Strategy was implemented in a number of simultaneous phases.

Peace Messages

The ten political parties contesting the 2006 elections were invited to issue a message calling for non-violence and for the elections to be conducted in an environment that is free from fear and intimidation. These messages were broadcasted repeatedly on August 27th, the day before elections, and appeared in the three dailies on the same day.

Messages were issued by The United Force (TUF) and Alliance for Change (AFC). A message was issued by the People's Progressive Party but after close scrutiny of its content, it was decided that the message was political in nature and it was not in the best interest of the Commission to be seen as supporting such a message. The other Parties did not issue messages. All the peace messages were broadcasted on HBTV Channel Nine, NCN TV and Radio. They were also ERC Time-Checks on NCN Radio with themes promoting peace and racial harmony.

Involvement of Talk-Show Hosts

Recognizing the influence Television Talk-Show Hosts have on public perceptions and behaviours, the Commission held a meeting with a group of seventeen Talk-Show Hosts and Private Programme Producers on August 19th to discuss their involvement in promoting a peaceful and non-violent elections environment.

At that meeting the Talk-Show Hosts and Private Producers suggested that there should not be *live call-in programmes* for the period immediately following the polls. They recognized that in the absence of a delay broadcast system, callers can make statements that could fuel tension in the society.

The suggestion to disallow telephone calls on live programmes was accepted across the board and those present asked the ERC to work with Talk-Show Hosts who were not at the meeting to get their support. The Talk-show Hosts and private producers also agreed to use their programme time to call for peace before, during and after the elections and for persons not to encourage, promote or engage in any act or actions which could be seen as intimidation or designed to cause fear, against any individual or group. This group also agreed to air messages to be prepared by the ERC calling for peace and non-violence.

Media Involvement

The media exerts considerable influence on society and can shape the way people behave and think. Probably no other group has such influence on society and as such the media is an integral part of any strategy designed to influence persons' behaviour. Recognizing this, the Commission invited all managers, owners and editors to a meeting to discuss the media's role in promoting peace and non-violence before, during and after the elections.

At the meeting, participants were updated on the various phases of the Communications Strategy. The support of the media houses in ensuring the success of the strategy was discussed. The media was asked to match all advertising placed under the Strategy and to work in their own way to promote peace. Television station owners and editors agreed to provide 'responsible programme content' during the elections period.

Peace Messages by Local Celebrities

It was recognised too that some members of society exert considerable influence over the general public. It was therefore agreed that with the assistance of the EAB, a number of such persons would be approached to issue messages calling for peace, tolerance and respect. These messages were recorded and broadcasted on radio and television. Disc Jockeys, Beauty Queens, Gospel

Artistes and other performers carried their own audiences and these individuals influenced the behaviour of a significant section of society. With this in mind, the ERC engaged this group to have them voice messages appealing for the promotion of peace before, during and after the elections. They prepared their messages, using their unique styles which appealed to their audiences. The messages were broadcasted on radio and television.

Involvement of Tele-Evangelists

There are a number of private television hosts and producers of religious programmes. These Hosts/Producers have their own audiences and can be quite influential. They were invited to a meeting at the Commission. The discussion centered on ensuring an elections environment that is free from fear and intimidation. The Host/Producers agreed to use their broadcast time to call for peace before, during and after the elections and for an end to violence.

Host/Producers from New Amsterdam agreed to, and produced a live television discussion on August 24th where representatives from the major denominations, Christians, Hindus and Muslims called for peace, unity and non- violence.

Fortunately, the elections proved to be free of violence. While no scientific study was done, the reality of a violence-free election speaks volumes for the impact the Communications Strategy must have had.

5. 2006 ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN MONITORING

During the run up to the August 28, 2006, General and Regional Elections, beginning in July, the ERC monitored some 320 public meetings across the country. Audio recordings of speeches from the campaign platforms were made and the Commission noted with commendation the responsible behaviour of political activists and party leaders.

In the weeks before the elections, the ERC also noted an improvement in media coverage relating to elections matters and the positive reports coming out of the independent Media Monitoring Units. In a press statement, the ERC commended all media managers and journalists for generally fair and accurate coverage.

Television programmes also steered clear of statements that would have excited ethnic or racial animosity, and producers were commended for this. However, some sour notes were sounded when a few members of the public acted in a manner than caused disruptions and threatened the peace the ERC and other agencies had been striving for.

The ERC noted reports of media operatives being disrupted in the execution of their duties at meetings in Linden and Georgetown by persons who seemed to be activists of a particular party. The leadership of the party publicly expressed regrets at these incidents. Fortunately there were no recurrences and the elections campaign concluded in a peaceful manner.

6. LEGAL AND INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY

The Commission received a total of thirty- four (34) complaints for 2006 among which were:

1. A complaint against the staff of Saraswat Primary School, Meten-Meer-Zorg, West Coast Demerara
2. A complaint against the residents of Tain, Berbice
3. A complaint by a Taxi Driver at the CJIA
4. A complaint against the Al Madina Islamic Academy School's Administration in Essequibo
5. A complaint by residents at Onderneeming, WBD

6. A complaint by the Bakja Movement against the Commission, GRA and Ministry of Finance
7. A complaint by the residents of Vigilance/Bladen Hall/Strathspey, East Coast Demerara

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES OF THE COMMISSION FOR 2007

1. To resolve the issues of the status of the Commission at the present time
2. Acquisition of the data from agencies on land distribution, economic opportunities, award of contracts, employment practices, award of scholarships and educational opportunities.
3. Promotion of Women participation in all spheres
4. Discussion of ethnic discrimination in all spheres
5. Regional Visits
6. Continue the process of the MSF through the Working Group
7. Public Education and Awareness Programmes

1. The Working Group Selected from the National Conversation

The priority of the *Working Group* selected from among the participants of the 2006 National Conversation was to be continued to explore and exchange ideas that will address a system of governance which will ensure racial harmony in Guyana.

This was the agreement reached when the group met on March 21 for its first meeting after the National Conversation to scrutinize the draft report of the Conversation. The Working Group is expected to be the action faction to keep the dreams alive, which were envisioned during the MSF meeting and the National Conversation. The group should have been able to decide on a road map to the implementation of those visions, not only saying what should be done, but how it should be done and who should do it.

At the first meeting of the Working Group, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) had indicated that it was willing to provide training in the areas of advocacy and lobbying. This training was done by Ms Bonita Harris when the Group had its second meeting on June 19, 2007.

The *Working Group* was composed to ensure the implementation of the various recommendations for regional and national development suggested throughout the MSF process. The group comprised representatives of all ten Administrative Regions, one representative from each parliamentary political party and one member from each of the seven constituencies represented on the ERC.

2. PUBLIC EDUCATION AND AWARENESS PROGRAMME

Debating Competition

The Public Education and Awareness Unit (PE&AU) launched its 2007 Debating Competition on March 7, 2007 at the National Centre for Educational Resource Development (NCERD). This Debating Series involved secondary school students from Georgetown and Regions Three, Four, Five, Six, Ten in debates on issues pertaining to racial harmony in Guyana. New Amsterdam Multilateral School emerged as the winner of the competition after defeating President's College at the final competition on July 3, 2007.

Essay and Poster Competitions

The ERC executed its Essay and Poster Competitions early in the year in keeping with the theme for Mashramani, "A Cultural Invasion in 2007". The respondents were given options based on that theme. These competitions aimed at heightening awareness of the ERC while encouraging

the youth to participate in building social cohesion through the written and artistic expressions.

The Poster competition allowed young people between the ages of 9 - 25 to present scenarios, through art, showing all races working together in a multicultural society, while the Essay Competition was planned to provide an avenue through which young people can intelligently express their perception of ethnic harmony in Guyana. Promotion of these competitions was done in the mass media and through the Ministry of Education. Letters of participation were sent to schools in all Ten Administrative Regions. Winners of these competitions were presented with their prizes at a simple prize giving ceremony on July 3, 2007.

Windball Competition

The Public Education and Awareness Unit (PE&AU) embarked on a programme which utilizes sports to foster racial harmony among young people. Working in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture Youth and Sport, the ERC conducted a Windball Competition for females from secondary schools in Regions 2, 4, 5, 6, 10 and Georgetown. Females were encouraged to participate because they were normally alienated from sporting activities. This programme was to be continued in the new school year.

Film Festival

This programme had been boosted by the acquisition of four (4) new films on conflict resolution relative to the work place and other social settings. The PE&AU was then taking the programme to Public and Private Sector organisations. Sessions were conducted at the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) and the Guyana Forestry Commission.

The Unit was also involved in conducting sessions of the Film Festival at youth camps sponsored by the Ministry of Culture Youth and Sport.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR 2007

The year 2007 was challenging for the Commission. Beginning in May 2007, many persons were apprehensive about the continued functioning of the ERC, and what it would mean for ethnic relations in Guyana if the Commission ceased to exist in light of the failure of Parliament to gain two-thirds majority for the reconstitution of the Commission.

Despite those challenges, the work of the ERC continued with fervency, resulting in 2007 being a very significant year in the history of the Commission. The year saw the completion of:

- Five research reports on pertinent issues relating to equitable distribution of opportunities and resources in Guyana
- The fourth consecutive visit by the Commission to the ten (10) Administrative Regions
- A consultation with the African Guyanese community to address their perceived needs as well as claims of marginalization and discrimination
- Fourth annual Constituency Meetings
- A historical consultation with the largest gathering of Amerindian leaders
- An intensive Public Education and Awareness programme

RESEARCH

Article 212D (q) of the Constitution mandated the ERC to investigate on its own accord or on request from the National Assembly or any other body, issues affecting ethnic relations. In 2007,

the ERC embarked on a programme to investigate whether opportunities and resources provided by government and private enterprises was being done on an impartial basis.

There had been claims of marginalization and discrimination in specific areas (as listed below) thus the ERC sought to find out through scientific research, whether there was any basis for those claims and what recommendations can be made to the relevant agency to foster a sense of ethnic security among the populace.

Research was conducted in the following areas:

- Employment practices in the Public and Private Sectors and Trade Unions, with particular reference to Region Four
- The award of economic opportunities
- Public procurement and tendering procedures
- The award of academic scholarship
- Land distribution in Guyana

AN OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH REPORTS

Employment Practices

The research into employment practices investigated the public and private sectors and trade unions in Region Four. It found that these sectors had policies to ensure equal opportunities and non-discrimination, but that these do not always guide their employment practices.

The research was intended to ascertain whether there had been equitable distribution of employment among the various ethnic groups existing in Guyana, particularly within a five-year period, August 2001 to August 2006. This was done by examining records of incoming and outgoing staff members and interviewing human resource personnel within the private and public sectors as well as trade unions. Human resource representatives were asked to respond to questions regarding existing policies and standard employment procedures and practices. They were also required to indicate whether social characteristics such as age, sex, race and religion were requirements for employment or attaining promotion.

Employees were asked to respond to similar questions in addition to their opinions on the existence of discriminatory practices in their organisations. The findings revealed that there was representation of all ethnic groups employed across sectors, but there were some peculiarities. For instance, Africans were identified as the majority of employees in Region Four, consistent with its regional population distribution statistics.

However, when an analysis was carried out based on a four-tier structure, it was found that: senior, middle, first level and ancillary staff, particularly in the public sector, a larger proportion of East Indians occupied positions in the higher categories of the tier than Africans, who dominated the ancillary positions. Amerindians occupied positions at the senior, middle and first Levels.

Out of the total number of mixed races who participated in the research, fifty percent occupied ancillary level positions while approximately 17% occupied positions at each of the levels. This research has found that the phenomenon does not exist in the Private Sector. Higher proportions of Africans occupied the highest categories of positions while the majority of Indians occupied ancillary levels. Amerindians employed in the Private Sector occupied only two positions, the Ancillary and first Level while the mixed groups occupied the same positions reflected in the Public Sector.

In Trade Union organisations, both East Indians and Africans accounted for higher proportions in the first and senior Levels employees in comparison to other levels. Notably, the Amerindians and Other group seemed to occupied the senior level positions while the mixed groups were proportioned equally at all levels.

Employee Intake and Exit

Overall employee intake over the period August 2001 to August 2006 signified a change in the recruitment pattern among the two dominant ethnic groups. This accounted for the recruitment of 50% East Indians compared to 47% Africans over the five-year period.

With respect to individual sectors, however, a larger proportion of Africans were recruited in the public sector than were East Indians; 22% Africans compared to 17% Indians. Nevertheless, in the private sector, a larger proportion of Indians (74%) were recruited compared to Africans (68.6%).

With respect to employee exit, the data seemed to suggest that Africans accounted for the majority of employees (87%) that exited the participating sectors. While Indians accounted for 83%. A small proportion of mixed and other races exited also.

The overall data accumulated from the research generally indicated that organisations in the sectors had policies for ensuring equitable distribution of employment, non-discriminatory practices and equal promotion opportunities. With respect to individual sectors however, the policy which seemed to be least evident, particularly in public sector organisations, was the Equal Employment Opportunity Policy while Equal Opportunity and Non-Discrimination policies were absent in private sector organisations.

An interpretation of the data accumulated from the research determined that little concerted effort had been made over the five-year period to evenly distribute employment among the races. One of the recommendations to address this is that an Employment Monitoring Commission (EMC) should be established to monitor employment policies and practices. This Commission should be tasked with developing a proactive equity plan to be implemented by all sectors. The ERC must also play a part by working in concert with the EMC to address all claims of ethnic discrimination in the work-place.

In addition, it was recommended that public and private sector organisations carry out regular updating of their employment records to ensure that there was equitable representation of the various ethnic groups existing in Guyana on their staff

The award of economic opportunities

This study examined whether there were any discriminatory practices in the state, private sector or NGO sponsored economic opportunities. It also sought to determine whether there was a perception of discrimination within the varying ethnic communities in the Guyanese society. This was done to find out if there was dissension between perceptions and reality regarding the questions of discrimination and inequality.

Additionally, the study attempted to scrutinize the activities, procedures and processes used in the administration and distribution of economic opportunities, in order to make recommendations regarding the enhancement of those to generate increased transparency, which would consequently address perceptions of discrimination and inequality.

The research found that discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or race was illegal and no evidence of direct discrimination was detected in the economic sphere on the part of the

state/government. Further, no evidence was found of direct, systematic or deliberate strategy on the part of the State to disadvantage any of the minority ethnic groups. In fact, the research report posited that the State had legislated and adopted a number of measures intended to guard against such discrimination and this could have been seen in the ratification of most of the main human rights treaties of the UN including the International Convention on the Elimination of all Form of Racial Discrimination in 1977 and, several other domestic legislations including the Racial Hostility Act 1964 and the Prevention of Discrimination Act 1997.

However, according to the research report, the State did have considerable capacity nonetheless to influence and discriminate in the construction and service sectors through the distribution and award of contracts for consultancy, works and goods. The State, the researcher noted, had enacted procurement legislation that on the surface guarded against such discrimination, and no evidence was found of intent to engage in deliberate discrimination.

Nonetheless, what can be detected, the researcher stated, in the award of contracts for consultancy, works and goods, are instances where treatment is premised on reasons apart from ethnicity but which still has negative repercussions and results in differential racial effects.

Private Financial Institutions and NGOs

The research found no evidence of direct discrimination or bias on the part of private financial institutions. The lending institutions did not keep records which described the ethnic breakdown of loan disbursement.

While there was no stated policy in any lending institution of discrimination, the researcher noted that there was evidence to suggest that in this sector, it manifested itself in subtle discrimination, statistical profiling and discrimination that was rooted in an organizational culture.

Three NGOs participated in the study: LEAP, IDB and IPED.

Among the recommendations were

- Increased transparency in State allocation of economic resources – greater transparency within the tender and procurement of consultancies, goods and works as the system that obtained was vulnerable to abuse which could have resulted in ethnic discrimination
- There was need for continuous annual surveys undertaken by the Bureau of Statistics to generate data that indicated the equity among ethnic groups, residential location and employment
- The ERC should advocate for voluntary, and if necessary, mandatory collection of information regarding the ethnic allocation of awards and resources by financial institutions, and encourage reporting of discrimination by the State in order to generate over time, an administrative count of discriminatory incidents.

Public procurement and tendering procedures

The research was carried out to investigate the public procurement activity in Guyana over the period January to April 2007. The researcher found that there was no expressed power to award contracts in the Procurement Act of 2003 and posited that that clouded the vision of who was responsible for awards. In that regard, the researcher noted that the ERC should consider obtaining legal opinion of how well the functions exercised by the National Procurement and Tender Administration confirmed to the Constitution.

Procurement methods seemed adequate, according to the researcher. However, the disclosure of score sheets after a tender was accepted seemed to not be recognized so that any complaint

would have little chance of allowing remedial action on that particular procurement. The research proposed that the ERC considered making recommendations for transparency and integrity in the public procurement system under the Procurement Act.

The award of academic scholarship

This research was initiated by the ERC to determine the “Equitable award of Scholarships” in Guyana. The research investigated existing activities, processes and procedures used to select eligible persons and comparatively assess whether or not there had been an equitable approach to all concerned. It also encompassed all kinds of staff development training provided by the various organisations.

An analysis of the information showed that for the most part, there had been an “equitable approach in the award of scholarships.” However, that statement did not apply ‘without reservation’ to the Government of Guyana organisations, Public Service Ministry and Office of the President because the required information was not forthcoming.

The researcher noted that procedures and processes used in selecting eligible candidates in all of the organisations examined were generally transparent and provided equality of access. While the information examined did not reveal any inequality of access to opportunities for academic scholarships, the researcher recommended that the ERC should be vested with the authority to demand information, since that was a difficulty during the research. In addition, the researcher stated that in light of Guyana’s ethnic relations realities, Public and Private Sector organisations should consider collecting and storing information on employees’ ethnicity.

Land distribution in Guyana

The research on land distribution in Guyana were intended to identify the existing practice followed to select persons with respect to land distribution for housing, agriculture and commercial activities including mining and forestry, with a view to assessing whether or not the practice was equitable. A major limitation of the study was the reluctance of some heads of agencies to grant permission for the implementation of the study and the aggregated nature of the record keeping systems within organisations.

With respect to distribution of land for agriculture, housing and commercial activities, checks and balances as a requirement for equity seemed satisfactory. In terms of inadequacies, the existence of land policies needed to be addressed. There was no national land distribution policy in place which met the required standards for equity. There was a white paper on land and house-lot distribution which the researcher was told is being implemented. However, that paper needs to be re-worked in line with the policy guidelines for equity.

All five research reports were presented to the Speaker of the National Assembly on October 8, 2007. The findings and recommendations for policy changes are in the hands of every elected representative in Parliament. The ERC held three Press Conferences to appraise the media on the findings of the researches as they became available. The research reports are available on the ERC’s website: www.ethnicrelations.org.gy

REGIONAL VISITS

Regional Visit is a programme featured on the ERC’s Strategic Plan every year, as a proactive method to assess the state of affairs of ethnic relations in the ten Administrative Regions. This programme also formed part of the Commission’s continuous public education and awareness drive.

Last year, the Commission conducted an intense outreach initiative to the all the regions, in which it held meetings with Regional Executives, civil society, accepted complaints from persons who felt that they had been discriminated against and conducted its public education activities (film festivals and youth workshops). An important facet of the 2007 Regional Visit was the presentation of the findings of the five researches to Regional Executives and civil society representatives.

A comprehensive Regional Visit report was enclosed in the ERC's Annual Report to the National Assembly with recommendations for necessary policy interventions to foster greater ethnic security in Guyana. The reports are available on the ERC's website: www.ethnicrelations.org.gy

AFRICAN GUYANESE CONSULTATION

Article 212D (u) of the Constitution mandated the ERC to *consult with other bodies and persons to determine and specify the perceived needs of the various ethnic groups for the fostering of harmonious relationship.*

Based on overwhelming concerns expressed by African Guyanese of marginalization and discrimination, the ERC conducted a special consultation with the African Guyanese Community from November 13-16, 2007. The Forum was widely advertised in the print and electronic media. In addition, during its outreach programme to the Regions, the ERC announced its intention to consult with the African Guyanese community. Persons who could not attend the consultation were encouraged to submit written presentations to the Commission.

During the 4-day consultation, 13 members of the African Guyanese Community made presentations.

The areas of concern of the presenters were:

- a. Marginalization of the African Guyanese community.
- b. Underdevelopment of African Guyanese villages.
- c. Internal problems that contribute to the underdevelopment of African Guyanese.
- d. Refusal of National Communication Network (NCN) to air African related programmes
- e. Reference to African Guyanese in derogatory terms.
- f. Need for recognition of the Rastafarian Community as a religious and cultural group.
- g. Repercussions for the African Guyanese community as a result of the delay in reviving Globe Trust Operations.
- h. Need for adequate street lighting, proper drainage and a Community Centre in the Tucville area.
- i. The promotion of racism through education.
- j. Lack of industrial arts training equipment in the majority of Community High Schools located in African Guyanese communities.
- k. Need for a review of the Laws in relation to narcotics and marriage, in particular the Bigamy Law
- l. Lack of political representation for the African Guyanese community.
- m. The negative impact of VAT on old age pensioners
- n. A call for Government to support the application for compensation for slavery.
- o. Discrimination by the army, police and judicial system against the African Guyanese.
- p. Introduction of a strong remedial programme for school drop outs
- q. Prejudice by the African Guyanese middle class against other members of the African community.
- r. A call for the establishment of a Development Fund

- s. The damage of the “black male” psyche caused by practices of the State.
- t. A call for affirmative action to bring African Guyanese up to the level of other groups in the society.

The comprehensive report was readied and presented to the National Assembly. Soon after, it was available to the public and on the ERC’s website.

2007 CONSTITUENCY MEETINGS

The ERC hosted its annual Constituency Meetings with various constituencies from August 13-17, 2007 at its Peter Rose and Anira Streets secretariat. The central focus of the meetings was for representatives to exchange ideas and suggestions on the way forward for the ERC, in light of the failed motion tabled in the National Assembly on May 10, 2007, for the renewal of the terms of its Commissioners. In addition, the Commission presented the findings of the researches it had commissioned.

ERC’S CONSULTATION WITH AMERINDIAN LEADERS

For the first time in the history of the ERC, it met with Toshaos representing every Amerindian community in Guyana at the International Conference Centre, Liliendall on October 23, 2007.

The preservation of the rights and status of Amerindian people was underscored as paramount, along with their integration into mainstream society. Among the concerns expressed by the Toshaos was the existence of friction between themselves and miners over lands that are now titled to Amerindian communities. The ERC Chairman conveyed that the Commission was mandated to provide alternative dispute resolution, so it could have facilitated mediation between the two groups to avoid an escalation of conflict.

Present at the consultation were Prime Minister Samuel Hinds, Minister within the Ministry of Education, Dr. Desrey Fox and Commissioners Cheryl Sampson and Shahabudin Mc Doom, of the ERC. Commissioner Shahabudin McDoom expressed appreciation to the Toshaos for welcoming the other race groups into Guyana, which is indigenous to the Amerindians. This expression of gratitude received a resounding applaud from the gathering.

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND AWARENESS PROGRAMMES

The Public Education and Awareness Unit is an arm of the Ethnic Relations Commission that is responsible for sensitizing people about the work of the Commission, through the implementation of its Public Awareness activities intended to foster ethnic harmony and good relations among all Guyanese.

During the year 2007, the Public Education and Awareness Unit conducted:

- **A Female Windball Competition** - an activity launched in March in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports, to promote harmony and good relations among young people through sports. This activity was conducted in Regions Two, Three, Four, Five, Six and Ten. A total of 1184, young women from across the country participated in this competition.
- **Film Festival** - The ERC’s Film Festival programme was boosted with the acquisition of four (4) new films on conflict resolution and good relations in the workplace, the school environment and other social settings. The Public Education and Awareness Unit took the films to Public and Private Sector organizations including: Guyana Public Service Union, the Guyana Power and Light Company and the Guyana Forestry Commission. During the ERC’s Regional Visits, Commissioners conducted lectures at various sessions of the Film Festivals in schools within the Regions. The Unit also catered for the out-of-

school youth through Youth Workshops aimed at engendering within them skills to become ambassadors for peace. Approximately 3000 young people benefitted from the ERC's Film Festival programme in 2007.

- **Debating Competition** - The ERC Debating Competition was designed to create a peaceful environment for intellectual debate among secondary schools students on issues pertaining to race relations in Guyana. The 2007 competition was launched in February at the National Centre for Education and Research Development (NCERD). Thirteen secondary schools from Regions 3, 4, 5, 6, 10 and Georgetown, including 2 private schools participated in the series.
In the end, New Amsterdam Multilateral defeated President's College in what was described as a scintillating debate. The two senior secondary schools argued for and against the moot, "Shared governance could reconcile the racial differences which exist between the two main ethnic groups in Guyana". New Amsterdam Multilateral opposed the moot, arguing that shared governance cannot reconcile the stereotypical prejudices ingrained in the psyche of individuals of the two main ethnic groups, while President's College proposed from the perspective that shared governance could forge political and inter-racial harmony and as a consequence, effect changes in Guyana's political landscape.
- **Poster and Essay Competitions**- This programme was intended to provide an avenue, through art and written expression, for children and young people to express their visions for Guyana with respect to racial harmony. The 2006 competitions were held in keeping with the theme for the 2007 Mashramani, '**A cultural invasion in 2007**'. **56 entries were received for the Essay Competition while 34 were received for the Poster competition.**
- **ERC's Participation at GUYEXPO**:-In an effort to promote awareness among the public about the work and functions of the ERC, the ERC participated in GUYEXPO 2007. Thousand of pamphlets were distributed, detailing the conceptualization, work and functions of the ERC. A number of religious, social and educational organisations indicated their interest in having the ERC facilitate programmes on harmony and conflict resolution.

LEGAL AND INVESTIGATIVE UNIT

Article 212D (j) of the Constitution mandated the ERC to "investigate complaints of racial discrimination and make recommendations on measures to be taken if such complaints are valid." The Legal and Investigative Unit received 36 complaints for the year 2007, 34 were brought over from 2006. 28 complaints were closed for 2006 and 23 for 2007, giving a total of 51 complaints being addressed over the two-year period.

As at 2007, 82 complaints were on record in the department, some of which were brought over from 2007, 30 were received for the year year. Many of the complaints the department received did not fall within the ERC's mandate, thus they were referred to the relevant agencies for attention.

The ERC received a complaint from Mr. Cyril Walker pertaining to remarks made by a director of the New Building Society at a specially convened meeting held in November 2007. This matter was still pending because of the need for further information. The Commission wishes to advise the general public that when complaints are made, adequate information has to be supplied- speaking to the media does not mean that the ERC is aware of the details of a matter.

PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR 2008

The following are the ERC's priorities for the year 2008

1. Inter/Intra Community Dialogue
2. Ethnic Based Conversation
3. Religious Broadcasters Consultation
4. Regional Visits
5. Local Government Elections Monitoring
6. Complaints Investigation and mediation
7. Public Education and Awareness programme

➤ Inter/Intra Community Dialogue

The Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) is mandated, according to Article 212D (d) of the Constitution of Guyana to foster a sense of security among all ethnic groups, by encouraging and promoting the understanding, acceptance and tolerance of diversity in all aspects of national life and promoting full participation by all ethnic groups in the social, economic, cultural and political life of the people.

The Inter/Intra Community Dialogue is a two-fold programme. The first dimension began on February 7, 2008, as an intervention in the aftermath the January 26 L-11, which the ERC believed created the need for communities to interface with each other in an environment that is free from fear, intimidation and animosity. The Commission conducted meetings in nine communities: - LBI, Chateau Margot, Annandale, BV, Enterprise, Lusignan, Buxton, Friendship and Mon Repos. It also met with students in a number of schools including: Life Spring Ministries Primary School, Institute of Business Education, and Urmilla Primary.

In response to the Bartica murders, the ERC conducted two intense interventions in Region 7. The first was on February 19, 2008; Chairman of the ERC Bishop Juan Edghill, led a delegation which included Private Sector representative on the Commission, John Willems, Hindu Priest, Shri Prakash Gossai and members of the Inter Religious Organisation, Rev. Ronald Mc Garrell and Mr. Roshan Khan into the community to offer moral support to the grieving families and words of comfort to the grief stricken community.

During this visit, the team conducted a live call-in programme, and a community meeting in which hundreds of residents were given the opportunity to "exhale". The second intervention was conducted over a two-day period from March 4 - 5, 2008. The Team lead by Commissioner John Willems comprised the Chief Executive Officer, two Investigators from the Legal and Investigative department and a Programme Officer attached to the Public Education and Awareness Unit.

They conducted Peace Talk sessions with students at the following schools:

- Bartica Secondary School
- Bartica Annex
- St. Anthony Secondary School
- St. John the Baptist Primary School
- Two Miles Primary School

In addition, the team conducted meetings with residents in the following communities: Bartica, Karrau, Dag Point, Agatash and Goshen. They also hosted a live television programme. These meetings provided opportunities for residents to express their views on the recent occurrence in Bartica and their concerns on ethnic security:

The Commission then submitted a proposal to the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) to expand its Inter/Intra Community Dialogue. That exercise was to target those areas in Regions 4, 5, 6, and 3 were perceived to be ‘trouble spots’ for racial conflict because of their distinct ethnographic concentrations.

There was a high degree of racial exclusivity in villages and communities on the East Coast of Demerara and wider geographical areas. Such ethnographic concentration had repercussions for ethnic relations - geographic separation may transcend into economic and cultural separation. Lack of intermingling reinforced differences, buttressed ethnocentric ideals and breed suspicion of other ethnic groups.

While ethnic concentrated villages may be a permanent feature in Guyana, interventions can be made to encourage racial understanding, tolerance and acceptance among people at the grass root level. Therefore, the ERC was seeking to encourage the understanding, acceptance and tolerance of the diversities among the ethnic groups through conversation/discussion in a harmonious and safe environment, thus the Inter/Intra Community Dialogue.

Ethnic Based Conversation

According to Article 212D of the Constitution, the ERC is responsible for promoting harmony and good relations among Guyanese. Article 212D (d) states that the Commission is mandated to foster a sense of security among all ethnic groups, by encouraging and promoting the understanding, acceptance and tolerance of diversity in all aspect of national life and promoting full participation by all ethnic groups in the social, economic, cultural and political life of the people.

The dynamics of racial tension in Guyana are complex, but it is clear that there is need for concerted confidence building along with the engendering of trust, acceptance and understanding between the two main ethnic groups, to lessen racial animosity and to bolster faith in the institutions which are tasked with the governing of the nation.

Against this backdrop, the ERC had planned an Ethnic Based Conversation which was targeted specifically at the two main ethnic groups: Indo Guyanese and African Guyanese, but also encompassed the other ethnic groups. The ERC recognised that the best solutions for conflicts were not wrought through revolutionary struggles but through dialogue and participatory democracy.

Therefore, the Commission was seeking to create a peaceful atmosphere for dialogue to flourish among the ethnic groups and produce meaningful changes in their interactions with each other. It was projected also that the Conversation will effect greater understanding and acceptance of the cultural diversity of the races.

Religious Broadcasters Conversation

According to Article 212D (d) the ERC is to encourage and create respect for religious, cultural and other forms of diversity in a plural society. The Religious Broadcaster Consultation was proposed by the ERC to engage religious Talk-Show hosts in discussion on how to utilize the electronic media to propagate their faith, while not offending others.

Religious broadcasters were very vociferous in proclaiming their faith and in many instances they denounce other religious practices which were in contravention to their beliefs. The ERC planned to engage all religious broadcasters currently airing programmes on the electronic media (state and privately owned) to forge a commitment among themselves to propagate their faith, without offending others.

Local Government Elections Monitoring

In the run up to the Local Government Elections the ERC:

1. Sought assurances from politicians and campaigners to actively discourage violence and ethnic mobilization through a MOU between the Politicians and the ERC
2. Secured balanced and accurate reporting and editorial content from the media in an effort to engender a sense of ethnic security
3. Monitored elections campaign meetings

This programme was to ensure that political parties campaigned responsibly, and ethnic harmony was maintained before, during and after the elections.

The ERC continued its Regional Visits and other public education and awareness programmes that year. The Commission was committed to its work to promote harmony and good relations in Guyana.

For more information on the Ethnic Relations Commission, its functions and programmes, please visit the Commission's website at: - www.ethnicrelations.org.gy

HIGHLIGHTS FOR THE YEAR 2009

The year 2009 proved to be yet another successful year for the ERC. Despite the many challenges, the Commission effectively executed its Work Programme. The undermentioned were a list of the ERC's 2009 Strategic Priorities:

1. Constituency Meetings
2. Inter-Intra Community Dialogue
3. Women's Conferences
4. Neighbourhood Conferences
5. Film Festivals
6. Workplace Meetings
7. Complaints/Investigations and Mediation

Constituency Meetings

For the year under review the Commission met twice with members of its various Constituencies. The first series of meetings were held from January 12 to 16, 2009 and the second from August 3 to 5, 2009. The schedules for the first series of meetings were:

January 12	10:00hrs	Muslim Religion
	13:30hrs	Hindu Religion
January 13	10:30hrs	Private Sector Constituency
	15:00hrs	Labour Constituency
January 14	10:00hrs	Christian Constituency
	14:00hrs	Inter-Religious Organisations (IRO)
January 15	16:00hrs	Youth Constituency
January 16	14:00hrs	Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

The aim of the meetings held from January 12 to 16, 2009, was to update the Constituencies on the work of the Commission for the year 2008 and to solicit their views/suggestions which can contribute to enhancing the Commission's Work Programme for 2009.

The undermentioned were the schedule for the second series of meetings:

August 3	9:00hrs	Hindu Religion
	13:00hrs	Muslim Religion
	15:00hrs	Women Constituency

August 4	9:00hrs	Christian Religion
	13:00hrs	Youth Constituency
	15:00hrs	Labour Constituency
August 5	9:30hrs	Private Sector Constituency
	13:00hrs	Civil Society Representatives

The Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) hosted its second series of Constituency Meetings for the year 2009 from August 3 to 5. The principal aim was to exchange ideas on the way forward for the Commission while at the same time creating feedback on its work.

These meetings also informed members on the Commission's Plans to host the 'Neighbourhood Conferences', an ERC project with support from UNDP. The meetings also provided an opportunity for the Constituencies Representatives to express their concerns on issues which the Commission will assist in resolving.

The meetings which were conducted within a three-day period (August 3 to 5, 2009) were all successful and brought the Commission up-to-date on issues of national importance. The first meeting was held with 13 representatives of the Hindu constituency, nine representatives from the Muslim and 12 women representatives while 20 persons participated from the Christian Constituency. The Youth constituency was represented by 12 persons, 10 from Labour, nine representatives of the Private Sector and 15 representatives of Civil Society.

During the interaction several issues affecting the various constituencies were brought to the fore and recommendations were made on how to resolve these issues. These were recorded by the Commission and are currently receiving its attention.

Inter/Intra Community Dialogue

The main objectives of the Inter/Intra Community Dialogue were:

- To encourage the understanding, acceptance and tolerance of the diversities among the ethnic groups through dialogue in a harmonious and safe environment.
- To forge solidarity among the ethnic groups particularly between the African and East Indians in affected areas.
- To create a sense of ethnic security among the ethnic groups by examining stereotypical perceptions.
- To harness recommendations and suggestions for policy and behavioural changes for the fostering of harmonious relationships among the ethnic groups.

For the year 2009, three Inter/Intra Community Dialogues were held in Region Three. Meetings were held with residents within the following Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs):

- Toe Vlught/Patentia
- La Grange/Nismes

Women's Conferences

As part of the Commission's Strategic Plan for 2009, the ERC prioritized "Consultation with Women" as key participants to help in its effort to continue to fulfill its mandate. In doing so, it was of vital importance to the Commission that women were consulted with to have their suggestions and recommendations as it relates to improving race related conflicts and fostering a more cohesive and tolerant society. The conferences were also geared to have women decide on a strategic approach to achieve racial harmony since most times they are at the centre of such conflicts.

It is against this background that 12 conferences were held in the ten Administrative Regions of Guyana with a total of 893 women participating. The details of the respective conferences as it related to participating organisations and communities were as follows:

REGION	VENUE	DATE	NO. OF WOMEN	NO. OF ORGANIZATIONS	NO. OF COMMUNITIES
1	Port Kaituma Secondary School	December 15, 2009	53	3	10
2	Anna Regina Town Hall, Essequibo Coast	August 25, 2009	30	10	12
3	Aracari Resort, West Coast Demerara	July 23, 2009	75	31	31
4	Le Chalet Country Club, East Bank Demerara	July 21, 2009	71	30	16
	Grand Coastal Inn, East Coast Demerara	July 22, 2009	95	49	25
	Roraima Duke Lodge, Georgetown	July 24, 2009	44	18	16
5	Regional Board Room, Fort Wellington, West Coast Berbice	May 20, 2009	46	21	23
6	Tain Campus, Berbice	November 24, 2009	168	39	44
7	The New Modern Hotel, Bartica	September 1, 2009	19	19	19
8	Paramakatoi Community Centre	October 14, 2009	65	3	9
9	Arapaima Primary School	October 16, 2009	66	23	21
10	Egbert Benjamin Conference Centre, Linden	November 20, 2009	161	52	25
TOTAL	12		893	298	251

Neighbourhood Conferences

ERC successfully concluded 71 “Neighbourhood Conferences” countrywide – equipping over 3000 Guyanese with Conflict Resolution and Negotiation skills

The Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) in February 2010 successfully completed its “Neighbourhood Conferences” where over 3000 Guyanese from all across Guyana were engaged in dialogue for a better country and were also equipped with Conflict Resolution and Negotiation Skills.

The Project was executed with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and saw the Commission hosting 71 Community Meetings within the 65 Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and the Six Municipalities countrywide.

The theme of the conferences was *‘Enhancing local capacity for participation in Governance and in the development of initiatives to resolve conflicts and contribute to community security,’* while the specific objectives were;

- To encourage active participation by community members in the establishment of effective Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs),
- To enable community members to develop the capacity and skills to work together for the good of the community and;
- To equip communities with Conflict Resolution and Negotiation skills

These conferences created a safe space where participants came together and agreed on strategies for overcoming ethnic and other differences and focused on how best they could contribute to the development of their respective communities and the country as a whole.

Two short films were shown; *‘Elbow Room Distances’*, a film which show ways to deal with issues at the workplace without resorting to dispute and conflicts and *‘Guyana’* a skit which carries the message of peace, love, co-operation and unity for the development of Guyana.

The “Neighbourhood Conferences” programme facilitated an **Open Discussion** where residents informed the Commission of problems affecting the communities and how they can be solved. Participants were also engaged in a **Role Play**, through which they gained Conflict Resolution and Negotiation Skills. During this exercise residents were placed into groups to review a case study under the guidance of trained facilitators. The case study highlighted a conflict scenario between two communities. At the end, they are asked to report on lessons learnt.

All the Conferences concluded with residents signing a pledge giving their commitment to ensuring peaceful communities, where people live in love and unity and where everyone will be involved in developing their communities. The ERC also had a **Complaints Desk** at all of the conferences and several complaints were received.

Importantly, the participants at the Conferences indicated the need for more interactive foras to be held countrywide where people can freely express themselves on issues affecting them and the development of their communities.

The ERC is particularly pleased to note the participation of youths at all its conferences and would like to assure them that their comments and suggestions for the development of their communities were properly identified and were recorded by the Commission.

The recommendations/suggestions and views expressed at all the conferences will be compiled into a report and sent to Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and other local Government bodies within the respective areas for them to know the needs of the communities and those that the residents have prioritized. This has equipped the ERC with answers to deal with the issues that fall within its mandate. The details of the conferences including number of participants per conference, location and region were:

<i>NDC/Municipality</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Venue</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Attendance</i>
Union/Naarstigheid	5	Bushlot Secondary School.	July 27, 2009	115
Soesdyke/Coverden	4	St. Mary’s Primary School.	July 28,2009	64
Crabwood/Moleson Creek	6	Crabwood Creek Primary School	July 29, 2009	87
ToeVlugt/Potentia	3	Potentia Primary School	July 30, 2009	16
Linden Municipality	10	Egbert Benjamin Con. Hall	July 31, 2009	213
Grove/Diamond Place	4	Grove Primary School	Aug. 19, 2009	40

<i>TD CMunicipality</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Venue</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Attendance</i>
Kwakwani	10	Kwakwani Secondary School	Aug. 20, 2009	74
Mocha/Arcadia	4	Mocha Primary School	Aug. 21, 2009	21
Charity/Urasara	2	Charity Primary School	Aug. 24, 2009	24
Good Hope/Pamona	2	Aurora Secondary School	Aug. 26, 2009	58
Anna Regina Municipality	2	Cotton Field Secondary School	Aug. 26, 2009	45
Best/Klien Pouderoyen	3	West Demerara Secondary School	Aug. 26, 2009	43
Little Diamond/Herstelling	4	Covent Garden Secondary School	Aug. 26, 2009	4
Caledonia/Good Success	4	Friendship Secondary School	Aug. 27, 2009	17
Evergreen Paradise	2	8 th May Community High School	Aug. 28, 2009	43
Aberdeen/Zorg-En-Vlygt	2	Queenstown Primary School	Aug. 28, 2009	16
Annandale/Riverstown	2	Johanna Cecilia High School	Aug. 28, 2009	17
Bartica	7	St. John's Primary School	Sept. 2, 2009	26
Black Bush Polder	6	Mibikuri Secondary School	Sept. 4, 2009	29
No. 52./74	6	Tagore Memorial Secondary	Sept. 4, 2009	67
Canals Polder	3	Kawall Primary School	Sept. 16, 2009	24
Plaisance/Industry	4	Plaisance Primary School	Sept. 17, 2009	33
La Grange/Nismes	3	Nismes Primary School	Sept. 18, 2009	51
Eccles/Ramsburg	4	Peter's Hall Primary School	Sept. 21, 2009	21
Malgre Tout/Meer Zorgen	3	Goed Fortuin Primary School	Sept. 22, 2009	17
Better Hope/L.B.I	4	Vryheid's lust Primary School	Sept. 23, 2009	31
Hague/Blankenburg	3	Den Amstel Primary School	Sept. 24, 2009	52
B.V./Triumph	4	B.V. Community High School	Sept. 25, 2009	2
Stewartville/Cornelia Ida	3	Leonora Primary School	Sept. 28, 2009	18
Mon Repos/La Reconnaissance	4	Lusignan Primary School	Sept. 29, 2009	57
Buxton/ Foulis	4	Strathspey Primary School	Oct. 19, 2009	37
La Jalousie/ Nouvelle Flanders	3	Windsor Forest Primary School (Senior School Building)	Oct. 20, 2009	21
Haslington/ Golden Grove	4	St. Andrew's Primary School	Oct. 21, 2009	67
Greenwich Park/ Vergenoegen	3	Greenwich Park Primary School	Oct. 22, 2009	40
Enmore/ Hope	4	Enmore Hope Primary School	Oct. 23, 2009	8
Mora/ Parika	3	Multi Purpose Centre	Oct. 26, 2009	30
Mahaicony/ Abary	5	Novar Primary School	Oct. 27, 2009	49
Tuschen/ Uitvlugt	3	Meten Meer-Zorg Primary School	Oct. 28, 2009	65
Leguan	3	Leguan Secondary School	Oct. 29, 2009	33
Hydronie/ Good Hope	3	Multi Purpose Centre	Oct. 29, 2009	34
Cane Grove	4	Virginia Primary School	Oct. 30, 2009	40
Woodlands/ Farm	5	Mahaicony Community Centre	Nov. 2, 2009	20
Profit/ Rising Sun	5	Youth Initiative Building	Nov. 3, 2009	46
Seafield/ Tempie	5	Litchfield Primary School	Nov. 9, 2009	36
Gelderland/Blairmont	5	Blairmont Primary School	Nov. 16, 2009	49
Bath/ Woody Park	5	Bath Primary School	Nov. 17, 2009	35
Woodlands/ Bel Air	5	No. 8 Primary School	Nov. 18, 2009	40
Zeelust/ Rosignol	5	Cotton Tree Primary School	Nov. 19, 2009	51
Wakenaam	3	San Souci Primary School	Nov. 21, 2009	14
Unity/ Vereeniging	4	Helena Primary School	Nov. 22, 2009	20
New Amsterdam	6	Berbice High School	Dec. 11, 2009	37
Georgetown	4	Town Hall	Nov. 30, 2009	154
Hamlet/ Chance	5	Pert Community Society Hall	Dec. 8, 2009	60
Lethem	9	Arapaima Primary School	Oct. 16, 2009	49
Madhia	8	Madhia Community Centre	Oct. 14, 2009	25

<i>NDC/Municipality</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Venue</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Attendance</i>
Port Kaituma	1	Port Kaituma Sec. School	Dec. 14, 2009	41
Enfield/ New Doe Park (IMC)	6	Edinburg Community Centre (Upper Flat)	Jan. 28, 2010	49
Gibraltar/Fyrish	6	Fyrish Primary School	Jan. 28, 2010	49
Kilcoy/ Hampshire	6	Civic Centre	Jan. 28, 2010	32
Rose Hall Town Council	6	The Annex Restaurant	Jan. 29, 2010	37
Canefield/Enterprise	6	Rose Hall Estate Primary School	Jan. 29, 2010	36
Port Mourant/Johns	6	Port Mourant Community Centre	Jan. 29, 2010	42
Bloomfield/Whim	6	Whim NDC (Upper Flat)	Feb. 4, 2010	27
Lancaster/Hogstye	6	Manchester Secondary School	Feb. 4, 2010	31
Adventure/No. 28 (Bushlot)	6	Kildonan Community Centre	Feb. 5, 2010	41
Maida/Tarlogie (IMC)	6	Wellington Park Primary School	Feb. 5, 2010	58
Corriverton Town Council	6	Civic Centre (Corriverton)	Feb. 11, 2010	74
Good Hope/No. 51	6	No. 48 Primary School	Feb. 11, 2010	19
Macedonia/Joppa	6	Eversham Primary School	Feb. 11, 2010	79
Kintyre/Borlam (IMC)	6	Bohemia Primary School	Feb. 12, 2010	31
Ordinance Fort Lands/No.38	6	East Canje Secondary School	Feb. 12, 2010	21

Film Festivals

Region Five – Mahaica/Berbice

The Public Education and Awareness Unit conducted twelve (12) sessions of Film Festival in Region #5, Mahaica/Berbice during the Commission’s Regional Outreach in that region on Wednesday May 20 and Thursday May 21, 2009. Below is a list of the sessions that were held in Region # 5.

NO.	SCHOOL	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
1	Mortice Primary	85
2	Mahaicony Primary	150
3	Zealand Primary	120
4	Belladrum Primary	100
5	Seafield Primary	81
6	No. 29 Primary	85
7	Bath Primary	255
8	Woodley Park Primary	203
9	Hamilton’s College of Excellence	150
10	Croal One to One Educational Institute	150
11	Cotton Tree Primary	150
12	Rosignol Academy	40
	Total	1569

Region Three, Leguan - Essequibo Islands/West Demerara

The Public Education and Awareness Unit also conducted three (3) sessions of Film Festival in Leguan, Region # 3, *Essequibo Islands/West Demerara* during the Ethnic Relations Commission’s “Neighbourhood Conferences” on that Island on Thursday, October 29, 2009. Below is a list of the sessions that were held in Leguan, Region # 3.

SCHOOLS	ATTENDANCES
Richmond Hill Primary	65
Maryville Primary	135
Eastern Leguan Primary	70
Total	270

work continues in others. Apart from investigating and pronouncing on complaints, the ERC has also been mediating in disputes as part of its strategy to encourage and promote peace and stability in society.

Workplace Meetings

The Ethnic Relations Commission’s Public Education and Awareness Unit commenced the Workplace Meetings Programme on March 12, 2009 as part of its work programme for the year. The main objective of the programme was to meet with both Public and Private Sectors employees to educate them about Harmony and Good Relations especially as it relates to their places of employment.

The list below outlines the Workplaces visited during the period under review:

ORGANISATIONS	DATE	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
Mahaica Hospital	March 12, 2009	14
Bourda Post Office	March 12, 2009	9
East La Penitence Post Office	March 13, 2009	18
Woodlands Hospital	March 13, 2009	7
Campbellville Post Office	March 13, 2009	12
Charlestown Post Office	March 13, 2009	10
Anna Regina GPL	March 13, 2009	12
GPL- Georgetown	March 15, 2009	14
GPOC- Main Branch	March 18, 2009	16
Banks DIH Limited	March 19, 2009	11
Melanie Health Centre	March 20, 2009	44
Guyana Forestry Commission	March 20, 2009	39
Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company Limited	March 26, 2009	60
West Demerara Regional Hospital	March 30, 2009	17
Davis Memorial Hospital	April 1, 2009	34
Guyana Geology and Mines Commission	April 17, 2009	30
Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation	April 22, 2009	17
Guyana National Newspapers Limited	May 13, 2009	35
Caribbean Containers Inc	May 15, 2009	120
Sterling Products	May 14, 2009	18
MMA/ADA	May 25, 2009	28
Blairmont Sugar Estate	May 21, 2009	74
Guyana Lands and Survey Commission	May 22, 2009	15
Laparkan Group of Companies	May 13, 2009	38
CBJ International Airport	May 27, 2009	14
GPL – New Amsterdam	March 13, 2009	26
Digicel Guyana	July 2, 2009	12
Guyana Times	Oct. 19, 2009	43
Office of the President	Oct. 21, 2009	46

At those sessions short films such as “**Dinner for Two**” and “**Elbow Room Distances**” were shown to stimulate discussions based on the content. The participants were asked to identify the messages and themes from the films, how it is applicable to their workplaces, what were the lessons learnt and recommendations to achieve the kind of Guyana they desire. A total of **833** Workers participated in the programme. It is anticipated that the programme will continue in 2010.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR 2010 JANUARY – APRIL

Strategic Priorities for the year 2010

- Completion of the “Neighbourhood Conferences”
- Meetings with Private Sector Organisations
- Workplace Meetings
- Constituency Meetings
- Film Festivals
- Regional Visits
- Complaints, Investigations and Mediation

Completion of the “Neighbourhood Conferences”

Among the many priorities outlined by the Commission for the year 2010 was the completion of the “Neighbourhood Conferences” which suspended in July, 2009. This project re-commenced on January 28, 2010 after closing off on December 14, 2009. The remaining 15 meetings were in Region Six and were concluded on February 12, 2010.

Film Festivals and Workplace Meetings

Currently, the Public Education and Awareness Unit are conducting countrywide Film Festivals and Workplace Meetings in both Private and Public Schools and Workplaces. For the period under review, the Commission held 18 Film Festivals in Regions 2, 4 and 6 with approximately 1,850 students participating while nine workplace meetings were held with approximately 280 employees and employers in Region Four.

The aim of the Film Festivals was to sensitize young people on the need for tolerance and respect for all races and to discuss how they can contribute to the fostering of racial harmony in Guyana while the aim of the Workplace Meetings was to sensitize workers on the need for tolerance and respect for all races and to discuss how they can contribute to the fostering of racial harmony in the workplace and ultimately Guyana.

Constituency Meetings and Regional Visits

The Commission is currently engaged in planning its Constituency Meetings for the year 2010. These meetings are expected to take place in May. Work will soon commence on the preparation of Regional Visits.

Complaints, Investigations and Mediation

The Investigative and Dispute Resolution Unit of the Commission continues to effectively execute its mandate. So far, the Unit has received 17 new complaints for the year. This adds to the 86 complaints which were brought forward from 2009. However, 14 complaints of the 86 brought forward to 2010 were closed in February. Currently, the total complaints under investigation by the Unit are 89.

CONCLUSION

It is to this end, that the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) in its continued efforts to promote harmonious relationships among Guyanese will engage Private Sector bodies through consultations as the Commission unfolds its 2010 work plan.

The Commission continues to witness successes in its Film Festivals and Workplace Meetings and therefore, anticipates more execution of these programmes as it engages citizens at all levels. The ERC anticipates that with the full realization of its 24 functions, our Nation’s Motto, of *‘One People, One Nation and One Destiny’*, can be fully attained.