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PROMOTING HARMONY AND GOOD RELATIONS

2008/2009

Neighbourhood Conference ...

On July 27, 2009, the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) commenced its Neighbourhood Conference project which to date has seen the Commission engaging over 2,500 Guyanese from all ten administrative regions.

The Conferences were held in every Neighbourhood Democratic Council and Municipality. The theme of the Conference was **"Enhancing local capacity for participation in governance and the development of initiative to resolve conflicts and contribute to community security."** Thus, with the idea of creating a safe space where participants can come together and agree on strategies for overcoming ethnic and other differences, the specific objectives were:

1. To encourage active participation by community members in

the establishment of effective Neighbourhood Democratic Councils.

2. To enable community members to develop the capacity and skills to work together for the good of the community.

3. To equip community members with dispute resolution skills.

Approximately 56 Neighbourhood Conferences were held in all ten administrative regions which were deemed very successful in terms of participation and attendance.

The Conferences allowed for discussions on two short video presentations and how they were applicable to Guyana.

Participants were also asked to inform the Commission of some of the issues affecting the communities and how they can be solved.

The participants were also engaged in a role play through which they gained conflict resolution skills. At the conclusion of the Conferences the participants signed a pledge giving their commitment to ensure peaceful communities, where people lived in love and unity and where everyone were involved in developing their communities.



Participants at the Linden Municipal Conference

Approximately 900 Women Participated in Conferences to Fight Against Racial Discrimination....

In strategically planning for the year 2009, the Ethnic Relations Commission decided to include women as key participants to help in fulfilling its mandate.

Hence, it was of vital importance to the Commission that women were consulted to have their suggestions and recommendations as it related to improving race related conflicts and fostering ethnic cohesion in our society.

Since women felt the burden or most times are at the center of conflicts that are race related, the central focus of the ERC was to have the participants decide on a strategic approach to achieve racial harmony.

Thus, the Women's Conferences

were held in all ten (10) administrative regions in Guyana where women from all across the regions were brought to one central location .

A total of twelve (12) of these Conferences were held i.e. three Conferences in region 4 and one each in the other regions. These Conferences saw a magnificent total of 889 women participating. Of that total, 277 women belonged to various organizations and came from a wide cross-section of 228 communities.

The Conference saw the women discussing issues with which they were faced as it pertained to race and ethnic relations; and putting forward recommenda-

tions for a better Guyana and the kind of Guyana they desired.



Women at Tain Campus making their contributions



Meeting With Guyana Times Staff



Engaged youths representatives at the ERC's Headquarters



Muslims Constituency at the ERC's Secretariat

**ERC has the responsibility to:
Investigate complaints of racial discrimination and make recommendations on the measures to be taken if such complaints are valid and where there is justification therefor refer matters to the Human Rights Commission or relevant authorities for further action to be taken.**

ERC Met With Both Public and Private Sectors Employees....

A total of 637 workers from 22 organizations participated in the Ethnic Relations Commission, Public Education and Awareness Unit workplace programme which commenced on March 12, 2009 as part of its work programme for 2009. 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 related to their places of employment. At these 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 was applicable to their workplaces and what were the lessons learnt. Some of the workplaces that participated were: The Office of the President, Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company, Guyana Post Office Corporation, Guyana

Power and Light, Digicel, Guyana Forestry Commission, Guyana Times and Banks DIH Ltd.



Meeting held at Office of the President

ERC Annual Constituencies Engagement For 2008/2009

The Ethnic Relations Commission held its annual Constituency Meetings during the periods March 26th to April 7th, 2008, January 12th to 16th, 2009 and August 3rd to 5th, 2009.

These meetings allowed the Commission to meet with representatives of its eight constituencies which are Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Women, Labour, Private Sector, Youth and Civil Society.

The aim of the meetings were to get feedback on the work of the Commission, to inform them of the projects the ERC was undertaking, listen to their concerns and determine how best the ERC could assist in resolving the issues.

At the meeting in 2008, Chairman of the ERC, Bishop Juan Edghill disclosed that the Commission will be executing several programmes aimed at fostering racial harmony and engendering ethnic security. Among those programmes were a Religious Broadcasters' Consultation, an Ethnic Based Conversation, Inter/Intra Community Dialogue and Local Government Elections Monitoring.

Meanwhile at the same 2008 meeting, the representatives of the Constituencies commended the Commission for the magnitude of work it executed in

Public Education and Awareness, Investigation of Complaints and Research into the Equitable Distribution of Resources in Guyana.

In 2009, the Chairman disclosed the hosting of Neighbourhood Conferences, Workplace Meetings and other programmes that promoted the mandate of the Commission.

Some of the issues that arose in those series of meetings were: the recommendation that there must be a change on application forms to read "First Names" instead of "Christian Names" (particularly on the Passport Forms) to cater for persons who do not have a Christian Name; claims that only Christian sermons were done at the Guyana Defense Force's Inter-Faith Services.

It must however be noted, that the GDF has since been written in this regard by the ERC.

Several other issues were discussed and recommendations were made on how to resolve them. These were recorded by the Commission and are being followed up.



Civil Society constituency met with the ERC at the ERC Secretariat.



Representatives of the Christian constituency met with the ERC at the ERC Secretariat.

ERC ... PROMOTING HARMONY AND GOOD RELATIONS

The ERC can Make recommendations on penalties, including the prevention of any political party or any person from participating in elections for a specified period, to be imposed for any breach of the provisions of the Constitution or any law dealing with Ethnicity.

Creating racial harmony requires on going commitment to communication and compromise..

The ERC discourages and prohibits persons, institutions, political parties and associations from indulging in, advocating or promoting discrimination or discriminatory practices on the grounds of ethnicity.

Religious Leaders Called For Ethnic Harmony Among Worshipers At Various Places Of Worship..... Religious Leaders Conference

The Religious Leaders Conference was held in accordance with the ERC's function to encourage and create respect for religious, cultural and other forms of diversity in a plural society.

The Conference was hosted to engage religious leaders in discussions to propagate their faith in a responsible manner.

It was held under the theme **"Propagating faith in a multi-cultural, multi-religious society"**.

The ERC felt that an informed and educated society is more predisposed to tolerate, respect and accommodate the diverse

cultures, religions and ethnicities that make up the Guyanese society.

Three hundred and eighty six (386) religious leaders from regions 1-10 participated in the Conference which was held at the International Conference Centre, Liliendaal, East Coast Demerara on November 20, 2008.

The main objective of the Conference was to forge a closer understanding by encouraging tolerance and respect for the various religions/cultures that constitute the Guyanese society. The opening ceremony was

attended by His Excellency President Bharat Jagdeo, Members of the Diplomatic Corp, Ministers of Government, Parliamentarians and His Worship the Mayor of Georgetown.



President Bharat Jagdeo addressing the Religious Leaders

"Tolerance And Respect For Cultural Diversities Are Needed" Were The Focus As Youth Came Together To Promote Harmony...

As part of its Public Education and Awareness activities for 2008, the Ethnic Relations Commission engaged youths in workshops with the objective of sensitizing them on the need for tolerance and respect for all races.

In so doing the discussions allowed the youths to have their input on how they can contribute to the promotion of racial harmony in Guyana.

Workshops were held in regions 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

Participants were provided with information on the work, composition and function of the ERC. They were asked to share their opinion on the kind of Guyana they desired, the obstacles affecting them from getting it and to suggest possible recommendations for a harmonious Guyana. These were used as motivation for discussion in keeping with the objective of the workshop. The youths were also engaged in discussions relative to the involvement of

young people in decision making and governance.



Participants at the Region # 10 Youth Workshop

Over 12,000 benefitted from the ERC's Film Festival Programme in 2008 and 2009.....

The Ethnic Relations Commission in 2008 and 2009 held Film Festivals in 134 schools in regions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7.

The main objective of the programme was to foster an appreciation for cultural diversities among youths. The Film Festival also provided the opportunity for the students to view short video presentations after which they were engaged in active discussions on the themes, messages and lessons learnt from the film.

The students were also encouraged to be more involved in

activities that will promote ethnic harmony and to impart to others the knowledge that they had gained by participating in the ERC's Film Festival.

In 2008, the Film Festival was taken to regions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 where approximately 11,000 young people from 121 schools benefitted.

However, in 2009, Film Festivals were held in regions 5 and 3 where a total of 1839 students from 18 schools participated. The Commission therefore proposes to continue this activity.



Participants at the ERC's Film Festival Programme

Do you know that any person causing racial or ethnic violence or hatred, can be fined of one hundred thousand dollars together with imprisonment for two years?

Do you know that where a person is convicted of an offence, the registrar of the supreme court shall send the particulars of the conviction to the chairperson of the ERC who shall, subject to the provisions, take such measures, issues such instructions as are required or necessary to give effect to the provisions subsections?



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Politics is “the activity through which personalities make, preserve and amend the general rule under which they live.” Thus, capability of dealing with issues matter and not race or ethnicity.

The ERC recommends to the National Assembly criteria to be considered for the purpose of deciding whether any person has committed acts of discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity...

Procedure to make a complaint:: Complaints are received from organizations and individuals by letters, telephone calls, walk-in process, correspondences, and sometimes emails.

INTER/INTRA COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

During the period June 16, 2008 to October 20, 2008, The Ethnic Relations Commission, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), executed 39 community meetings. Ten (10) were done in region 7 and twenty nine (29) on the East Coast of Demerara.

These meetings which were called Inter/Intra Community Dialogue were held in light of the Lusignan and Bartica Massacres which occurred in January and February of 2008 that resulted in 11 and 12 persons respectively, brutally murdered. The ERC intervened to avoid any escalation of potential ethnic tension and insecurities. Thus, the ERC moved apace with the hosting of the Inter/Intra Community Dialogue which was hosted under the theme “Building Trust through

Dialogue.” The main objectives of the dialogue were:

1. To encourage the understanding, acceptance and tolerance of the diversities among the ethnic groups through dialogue in a safe and harmonious environment.
 2. To forge solidarity among the ethnic groups particularly between the Africans and Indians in affected areas.
 3. To create a sense of security among the ethnic groups by examining stereotypical perceptions.
 4. To harness recommendations and suggestions for policy and behavioral changes for the fostering of harmonious relationships among the ethnic groups.
- The Inter/Intra Community Dialogue was deemed a success with a total number of 1,450 persons who attended and ac-

tively participated and offered recommendations for achieving harmony in Guyana.



Participants at Inter/Intra Community Dialogue

ERC ... PROMOTING HARMONY AND GOOD RELATIONS

Religious Broadcaster's Workshop, A success in 2008..

In keeping with Article 121 D (f) of the Constitution of Guyana which states “Encourage and create respect for religious, cultural and other forms of diversity in a plural society”, the ERC engaged religious broadcasters and talk-show hosts in a discourse on how to utilize the electronic media to propagate their faith in a manner that does not border on disrespect and insensitivity to other religious beliefs.

The ERC believed that verbal spats on the airwaves among religious broadcasters and talk-show hosts, if not curtailed, can escalate into crisis proportion. It is against this background that the ERC developed a mechanism to address any potential religious conflicts that may be caused by this practice. The Religious Broadcasters' Workshop brought together 70 religious broadcasters and talk-show hosts from the ten(10)

Administrative Regions to participate in discussions on :

- Religious pluralism (with specific reference to the teaching of religious doctrines in a plural society).
- Behaviour change Communication.
- Social responsibility in the absence of a broadcast Legislation.
- The law and religious teachings
- The use of derogatory remarks against other religions.
- Conflict transformation.

This activity was held at the Umana Yana on December 2, 2008.



A participant making a point at the Religious Broadcasters' Workshop. In picture also are ERC Chairman, Bishop Juan Edghill and Mr. Pat Dial, Chairman, ACB

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