

# ERC News Letter



## Volume 6

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ERC's Functions include-

- Provide for equality of opportunity between persons of different ethnic groups and to promote harmony and good relations
- Promote the elimination of all forms of discrimination
- Promote education and training programmes and research projects which provide for and encourage ethnic peace and harmony
- Encourage and create respect for religious, cultural and other forms of diversity in a plural society

### ERC completes Region Four research on employment practices

A research initiated by the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) into the employment practices in the public and private sectors and trade unions has found that organisations in both sectors have policies to ensure equal opportunities and non-discrimination, but these do not always guide their employment practices. The research was intended to ascertain whether there has 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 promotions. 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 is

representation of all ethnic groups employed across the private and public sectors, but there are 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: senior, middle, first level and ancillary staff, particularly in the public sector, a larger proportion of East Indians occupy positions in the higher categories of the tier than Africans, who predominate the ancillary positions. Amerindians occupy positions at the senior, middle and first Levels. **(Cont'd on page 2)**



**Findings of research on employment practices in Region Four in private and public sectors and trade union organisations**

### ERC commences research on equitable distribution of services

The Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) has embarked on a programme to investigate whether services provided by government and other agencies are being done on an impartial basis. This inquiry is aimed at acquiring information from the agencies responsible for land distribution, award of capital finance and other types of loans,

award of contracts, scholarships and other educational opportunities. The research will also be investigating tendering and procurement procedures to find out whether non-discriminatory procedures are observed. According to Article 212 A (13) of the Constitution of Guyana the ERC should promote equal access by all ethnic groups to ser-

vices and facilities provided by the Government or other bodies. The Commission has sent letters to all private sector and government agencies, including the commercial banks, and government ministries, requesting information on the policies for employment and promotion of employees as well as the services .... **(Cont'd on page 2)**

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**Findings of research on employment practices in Region Four in the private and public sectors as well as trade union organisations**

## ERC completes Region Four research on employment practices cont'd

Out of the total number of mixed races who participated in the research, fifty percent occupy ancillary level positions while approximately 17% occupy positions at each of the levels.

This research has found that the phenomenon does not exist in the Private Sector. Higher proportions of Africans occupy the highest categories of positions while the majority of Indians occupy ancillary levels. Amerindians employed in the Private Sector occupy only two positions, the Ancillary and first Level while the mixed groups oc-

cupy the same positions reflected in the Public Sector.

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

### **Employee Intake and Exit**

Overall employee intake over the period August 2001 to August 2006 signifies a change in the recruitment pattern among the two domi-

nant ethnic groups. This accounts 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 seems to suggest that Africans accounted for ...

(Cont'd on page 3)

## Clips ERC 2007 Debating Competition between St. Stanislaus and President's College



## ERC launches 2007 Debating Competition

President's College, St. Joseph High, Covent Garden, Institute of Business Education, St. Roses High, Fort Wellington Secondary, Kwakwani Secondary and New Silver City Secondary all qualify for round two of the ERC's 2007 Inter-Secondary Schools Debating Competition.

President's College defeated St. Stanislaus College in the first

debate to launch the competition, held on March 7, 2007 at the National Centre for Educational Resource Development (NCERD). The two schools debated the moot, "*The celebration of national festivals has the potential to unite the various ethnic groups in Guyana.*" President's College, the proposing team, was lead to victory by Amir Dillawar while

Saraswati Bharrat led St. Stanislaus College.

However, it was the second speaker of the proposing team, Neilson McKenzie, who received the Judges' as well as the audience's approval as the best debater in the competition. His presentation was described by the Chief Judge, Mr. Aggrey (cont'd on page 3)

*"The celebration of national festivals has the potential to unite the various ethnic groups in Guyana"*

## ERC Commences Research on equitable distribution of resources (cont'd from page 1)

... they provide to the public. The ERC is hopeful that responses will be forthcoming from all of the agencies approached for the information.

## ERC completes Region Four research on employment practices cont'd

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 indicates that organisations in the sectors have policies for ensuring equitable distribution of employment, non-discriminatory practices and equal promotion opportunities. With respect to individual sectors however, the policy which seems to be least evident, particularly in public sector organisations, is 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 has 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 is recommended that public and private sector organisations carry out regular updating of their employment records to ensure that there is equitable representation of the various ethnic groups existing in Guyana on their staff.

*“organisations in the sectors have policies for ensuring equitable distribution of employment and non-discriminatory practices”*

## ERC Launches 2007 Debating Competition Cont'd

Azore as an excellent presentation of oratory which should be emulated by anyone who is interested in becoming a debater.

Both teams were applauded for exhibiting high-quality debating techniques. The Chief Judge noted that it was refreshing to have been given the opportunity to listen to a debate of such remarkable standards.

The other member of President's College team was

Deandrea Grenville while Michael Partab and Reza Manraj comprised the remainder of St. Stanislaus's team.

Covent Garden Secondary School secured its spot in the second round after defeating Bladen Hall Multilateral. Covent Garden, the opposition team, was represented by Janelle Blackman, Yolanda Callender, and Maria Phius, who was adjudged the best debater.

Chrysanti Braithwaite, Myonette

Pritchard, Kenola Francis comprised Bladen Hall Multilateral School's team.

The first between the first two private schools to be included in the competition was described by the judges as possibly one of the best they have judged in the entire series. Institute of Business Education (IBE) and Camille's Institute of Business and Science Studies (CIBBS) debated on March 16. Both teams were fiercely

competitive. Even among the members of each team, it was difficult for the judges to decide which student would be adjudged the best debater because of the outstanding nature of their presentations. Leading the proposition team, CIBBS, was Kavita Singh; Marlene Kanhai and Candasy Willems were the supporting members. The judges singled out Singh for her presentation of CIBBS's rebuttal, which they said was the finest they

have heard in two years of judging ERC debates.

The Chief Judge commended her fluency, and the smoothness with which she attacked the opposition's arguments and restated her team's position on the moot.

Lead speaker of IBE, the opposition team, Gopaul Sukhu, was applauded for starting his team's point of view in a commendable manner. However, his two supporters, Chandini Sugrim and Oma

Devi Sukhu, came in for higher praises from the judges for sustaining their team's arguments logically and convincingly.

The Chief Judge noted that even though CIBBS had a high scoring rebuttal, Sugrim and Sukhu copped the victory for IBE.

Meanwhile, St. Joseph High School, Kwakwani Secondary, New Silver and St. Roses High each secured a

**(Cont'd on page 4)**

*“It was refreshing to have been given the opportunity to listen to a debate of such remarkable standards”*

*“It was difficult to decide which student would be adjudged the best debater because of the outstanding nature of their presentations”*

### ERC Launches 2007 Debating Competition Cont'd

*“the debating competition is a public education programme aimed at creating a peaceful environment for students to debate”.*

walk over to the next round after their opponents pulled out of the competition.

The ERC Inter-Secondary Schools Debating Competition is a public education programme aimed at creating a peaceful environment for students to debate issues pertaining to race relations in Guyana. 22 schools from Georgetown, Regions Two, Three, Four, Five, and Six are debating in various elimination rounds of the competition, leading up to the finals on June 24. During those rounds, the teams will debate moots such as: “Perceptions

of inequality and injustice are to blame for ethnic tension in Guyana,” “Interracial marriages present the only hope for racial harmony in Guyana,” “The tranquility and non-violence which followed the August 28, 2006 National Elections indicate a willingness in Guyanese to live in peace and harmony,” and “Shared governance could reconcile the racial differences which exist between the two main ethnic groups in Guyana”.

The Commission is also planning to involve the tertiary educational institutions such

as the University of Guyana and the Cyril Potter College of Education in similar debates, later in the year. The ERC Inter-Secondary Schools Debating Competition began in 2006. Zeeburg Secondary School emerged winner in the final competition held on June 28, 2006.

### MSF National Conversation Working Group holds inaugural meeting

*“the working group is expected to be the action faction to keep those dreams alive”.*

The priority of the Working Group selected from among the participants of the 2006 National Conversation will be to continue 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 Conver-

sation to scrutinize the draft report of the Conversation.

Speaking at the opening segment of the meeting, Chairman, ERC, Bishop Juan Edghill said that the central idea of the Multi Stakeholder Forum (MSF) process was *Guyanese working together to realize our dreams*. He noted that at the National Conversation, each political party was given the opportu-

nity to present their dreams and vision for Guyana. Therefore, the Working Group is expected to be the action faction to keep those dreams alive. The group should be 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.

**(Cont'd on page 6)**

### ERC to use sports to promote racial harmony among youth

*“Females were singled out as the programme’s target audience since they are often alienated from sporting activities.”*

The Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) in an effort to find innovative ways for fostering racial harmony among young people, has undertaken a sports programme, beginning with a female wind ball cricket competition.

Cricket has been included in this year’s programme of activities for the ERC in keeping with the ICC Cricket World Cup Competition The

CWC games as anticipated, has been building a momentum across the country, and thus the ERC expects much energy and collective effort will propel the competition.

Girls were singled out as the programme’s target audience since they are often alienated from sporting activities. Young ladies from secondary schools in Regions Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Ten

and Georgetown are expected to participate in the competition. They will compete intra and inter-regionally.

Before the start of the final match, there will be a Road Relay involving schools on the East Bank Demerara. It is anticipated that the final game will be played at the Guyana National Stadium.



### *Editorial*

Tusankine English

## ERC Execution of its Mandate

Since its work began in September 2003, the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) has been engaged in executing its 24 point functions set out in Article 212 D of the Constitution. Those function are grouped into four categories: public education and awareness, investigation, conflict resolution, and researching.

In the early months of the Commission's life, its focus had been on public education and awareness which was necessary to sensitize citizens from Regions One to Ten of the existence of Guyana's first constitutional race relations commission and its functions. The public education and awareness's programme has now shifted from sensitization to stimulating the public to tolerate, respect and make accommodation for the cultural diversity that exist in Guyana.

As the nation prepared for General and Regional Elections 2006, greater demands were made for the ERC to intensify this aspect of its function. This was a reasonable demand since it would be the first time Guyana would have had an ethnic relations commission to prevent or reduce the tensions which are evident during elections period.

Responding to this call, the ERC redoubled its efforts 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 before, during and after the elections.

The Commission's objective was to change the feature of elections in Guyana which had been characterized by suspicion, intimidation and acts of violence. With the support of the Elections Advisory Bureau (EAB) and the British High Commission, the ERC implemented a concentrated electoral communications strategy aimed at ensuring a non-violent elections period, through messages calling for peace and non-violence. The campaign utilized influential voices from across sectors of civil society: the politicians to the discs jockeys.

*Culture Fest 2006* was part of the communication strategy to encourage the appreciation of the ethnic and cultural diversity of Guyana. Thousands of Guyanese showed their willingness to accommodate and tolerate our racial multiplicity.

The Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF), was yet another approach to generate a sense of optimism and commitment among Guyanese, towards a positive future. For several months, citizens throughout the length and breadth of Guyana were involved in discussing issues which affect their daily lives and offered possible solutions for them. The MSF National Conversation, which culminated the process, can be seen as a catalyst for participatory democracy in Guyana and should be used as a model for future national engagements.

However, the process did not come to an end at the conclusion of the National Conversation in November last year. The *Working Group* selected from among participants of the conversation is the lobbying agent that will seek to ensure the implementation of the recommendations suggested by participants during the MSF process. The *Working Group* is also tasked with exploring ideas for a system of governance which will ensure ethnic harmony in Guyana.

### **What's next for the ERC?**

The ERC's focus for 2007 is building partnership and strengthening the relationships which had been established throughout 2006. It was posited during the National Conversation that the tranquility and non-violence, which was evident during the elections period signifies that Guyanese are ready to put the past behind them and relinquish the racial animosity that have defined our political, and economic culture for decades. The Commission will be researching the undercurrents shaping the ways Guyanese relate with each other, from the award of contracts to equal employment opportunities. This will allow the Commission to monitor and review legislation and administrative acts or omissions relating to or having implications for ethnic relations and equal opportunities.

*“The ERC redoubled its efforts to ensure an election environment free from fear and intimidation; where person could go about their daily activities in the regular manner”*



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**National Conversation Reports.  
The Reports are being sent to  
all parliamentarians, members  
of the seven constituencies  
represented on the ERC, the  
Working Group and Regional  
Chairmen.**

## **MSF National Conversation Working Group holds inaugural Cont'd**

Representatives from the United States Agency for International Development who (USAID) who were present at the meeting indicated that the USAID is willing to provide training in the areas of advocacy and lobbying.

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 comprises 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.

The National Conversation culminated the MSF which was planned with the objective of creating a safe space for Guyanese to agree on strategies for overcoming ethnic and other differences. It was intended also for citizens to focus on how best they can contribute to the development of their community and country.

Throughout the MSF process, citizens who never engaged with each other because of geographical or other barriers, gathered in respectful conversations.

The process was conducted in three phases: 143 Neighbourhood meetings, 10 regional conferences and the National Conversation. Apart from raising their concerns, participants were asked to highlight their views about the positives in Guyana as well as their vision of what the nation should be. These views were aggregated for the Regional Conferences where recommendations were garnered for addressing the issues highlighted in the aforementioned meetings. During the National Conversation, participants suggested the course of actions to ensure the implementation of the recommendations which came to the fore during the Regional Conferences.

## **National Conversation Report to be tabled in Parliament**

The report of the Multi-Stakeholder (MSF) National Conversation has been completed and is ready to be submitted to the National Assembly.

The draft report was examined by the *Working Group* at its first meeting on March 20, 2007 to see whether it accurately represented the views expressed by participants at the conversation, before its final completion.

Included in the report are the action oriented recommendations and suggestions participants posited to address the concerns they brought to the fore during the MSF

The issues are grouped as equitable access to opportunities and resource, improvements to infrastructure and economy, government, democracy and public administration, social issues, environment and land issues and Amerindian concerns.

It also outlines a presentation by ERC's Chairman, Bishop Juan A. Edghill about his vision for Guyana. Visions presented by the parliamentary political parties, and the seven constituencies which are represented on the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) are also

included in the report.

The National Conversation which culminated the MSF process was held on November 15 and 16 2006 at the Guyana International Conference Center Liliendaal, East Coast Demerara. Its focus was to bring together Guyanese from all sectors, strata and regions in a discourse to explore initiatives for national development.

The discourse was guided by the theme, *"Enhancing Social Cohesion and Deepening Participatory Democracy through Dialogue."*