

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ethnic Relations Commission in keeping with its mandate under Article 212 D of the Constitution of Guyana, held public consultations on the perceived needs of the African Guyanese Community on November 13-16, 2007. Thirteen members of the African Guyanese Community made presentations.

The areas of concern to 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 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.

It was the view of one presenter that the African Guyanese community is marginalized in the areas of land, finance, indigenous religion and culture. He observed that since emancipation, the efforts of African Guyanese to develop their villages have been sabotaged by the Colonial masters and others (whom he referred to as enemies) that do not have the interest of the African community at heart. He noted the marked difference in infrastructural work in African and East Indian communities.

The presenter argued that there is no political representation for the African Guyanese man in Guyana. He added that since Post 1992, African Guyanese have been experiencing a regime not only of discrimination but of revenge.

It was noted that although there had been a positive change for local contractors in the award of contracts after 1992, the situation continues to be negative for African Guyanese contractors. According to the presenter, this

has forced African Guyanese from a position of marginalization to one of exclusion.

In terms of the education system, it was pointed out that where there are schools in the African Guyanese community, the children are not properly educated, because of the lack of competent and qualified teachers. It was observed that while competent African Guyanese teachers are appointed to teach in East Indian communities, East Indians are not teaching at schools in African Guyanese communities. One presenter in support of the point that education is used to promote racism, made reference to the subliminal messages in teaching texts that portray African people and things African in a negative way.

There was also a call for a revitalization of African Guyanese villages where there is obvious degradation (from Georgetown to Parika and Georgetown to Rosignol). It was felt that since African Guyanese are at the bottom, there should be a process to put them on a par with other ethnic groups in Guyana. It was also suggested that there should be reformation of the local government system, which must cater for all races.

Another presenter reported on the refusal of the National Communications Network (NCN) to air African related programmes. He submitted also that it was derogatory and insulting to refer to people of African descent as Negroes.

A representative of the Rastafarian Group spoke on marginalization and victimization of the Rastafarian community and the need for them to be recognized and accorded relative rights as a religious and cultural group.

The suspension of Globe Trust Operations was another issue raised since the majority (95-98%) of depositors was African Guyanese. It was felt that the unreasonable deadline set by Bank of Guyana for potential investors to complete the Due Diligence process can seriously affect the African Guyanese community.

The Commission was told that neither the ERC nor the government can organize the African Guyanese community, since African Guyanese have to follow rules and guidelines that are not suitable to them; and that African Guyanese who should represent them have not done so.

The need for a review of narcotics and Laws pertaining to marriage and bigamy was also highlighted.

DAY ONE
Tuesday, November 13, 2007

THE FIRST IN A 4-DAY SERIES OF PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS WITH RESPECT TO THE PERCEIVED NEEDS OF THE AFRICAN GUYANESE COMMUNITY—HELD DAILY FROM 14:00 HRS.

ATTENDEES:

ERC: Chairman Bishop Juan Edghill	-	Christian Community
Commissioner Carvil Duncan	-	Labour Organisation
Commissioner Cheryl Sampson	-	Women's Organisation
Commissioner Shahabudin Mc Doom	-	Muslim Community
Commissioner L. John P. Willems	-	Private Sector Commission

PRESENTERS:

Mr. Lennox King
Mr. Elton Mc Rae

OTHERS:

Members of the public
Media Representatives

The proceedings commenced at around 14:30 hrs. by way of opening remarks and introductions by Bishop Juan Edghill, Chairman of the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC).

The Chairman greeted everyone and said that beginning from this afternoon, Tuesday, November 13, 2007 until Friday, November 16, 2007, the Commission will be holding special consultations with the African Guyanese community, enquiring into their perceived needs—to assure them that the ERC, and by extension the nation, know exactly what are the concerns of the African Guyanese community. He added that the issues that are going to be raised from these consultations will be formulated into a special report which will be sent to the National Assembly where every Member of the House will know what are the concerns, views, recommendations and the issues of the African Guyanese community. He continued that these hearings were designed with the intention that issues affecting the African Guyanese community privately will now become public matter and that all and sundry can know that these are the issues that you are demanding to be addressed—these are your recommendations; these are your views; these are your issues.

The Chairman sincerely thanked the participants for coming forward and remarked that there are a number of persons who are scheduled to appear over the next four days and time slots of 15 minutes are allotted to each presenter who will make his/her presentation for the specified period without interruption.

He proceeded to introduce the Members of the Commission after which he announced the first presenter, Mr. Lennox King. (*This is how he introduced each session*)

He also enquired whether anyone had any objection to being on camera (*media representatives were present*). No one did.

FIRST PRESENTER:
MR. LENNOX KING

Mr. Lennox King

Good afternoon brothers and sisters, I am here before you as a son of the true and living God, who we all accept and acknowledge—a human being and a descendant of the so-called Blackman of Guyana—a Guyanese citizen. One of the burning questions that we have, is the marginalization of the African Guyanese community. This has been discussed at bottom houses, rum shops and maybe at cocktail gaffs. Marginalization of the African Guyanese community started before 1992. We have had issues of land problems, financial problems—we have also had issues of our indigenous religion—some folks call it Obeah, some call it Comfa—various prejudices that have affected our culture. We have had issues with problems of education where our people have been systematically pushed aside covertly or overtly in many cases. During this period I am sure you will find no shortage of individuals who will speak specifically of certain areas.

Today I will speak about the land question as I see it. My presentation may not be as structured as some may want it because of the time factor but in the interest of what we are here to discuss and the sincerity of what we hope the ERC would put towards this, and if the government is serious they will listen attentively because we feel that there is no political representation with the interest of the African Guyanese. That is our position and that is my personal, unapologetic opinion.

Having said that, there exists a situation of what has happened to our people since emancipation. We have had the formation of villages which we celebrate but we have not acknowledged that those villages have not been developed due to consorted efforts by enemies of our people to ensure that we stay in a state of neo-slavery or wage slavery. I say that because after the villages were formed, taxes were imposed and taxes were only paid in cash. You could not have bartered your commodities, so you had to work on the sugar estates to get the money. So they forced you to get into the cash economy.

In addition, our fore parents were not allowed to get into the end market for their produce. They had to stop at Sparendaaam where they had to give over their produce to the Portuguese merchants who were then able to get to the end market. So there is where our production and our development were affected. So most naturally your income level would have been severally constricted.

There was also the issue of the flooding out of the backlands by the planter class which affected the drainage and irrigation projects and which in turn affected the productivity of our fore parents. This resulted in heavy migration of our people from the land—to the forest regions to pioneer for gold and diamonds. Even though we have pioneered, the question is, to all those gold and diamond seekers and forestry workers, what have they bequeathed to their children? Could a people of such resource, imagination and fortitude, just deliberately go and sacrificed themselves—not for their children? If the children have not obtained something, there has to be another cause. A man just does not sacrifice himself for the sake of sacrifice. Those of us who subscribe to the major religions, understand what sacrifice is—we do know that whether it was Mohamed; whether it was Jesus; we understand what sacrifice is. If we understand that then we would understand that there have to be other forces at play whether overtly or covertly that has affected our people.

Independence did not change the situation much. I am not here to praise anyone, neither am I here to decry or cast blame but we are here to at least make the record straight and let folks understand our issues. What I am saying now I know most of us already know and we are speaking from the heart. Mr. Forbes Burnham tried in putting certain things in place to assist a situation—in setting up the coop societies—in doing certain things. But there were forces within and outside of the African Guyanese community that thwarted those efforts, and we have to accept that.

Post 1992 we have been experiencing a regime not only of discrimination but a regime of revenge—either perceived or ill conceived positions—that was couched in the language of democracy, tied into a Westminster—winner-takes-all model of politics, which has

spelt disaster. Disaster in the sense that coming out of an era where the politicians dabbled with socialism and where the state controlled most of your financial and social existence; where subsidies were the name of the game—in order to keep certain things in place.

Then with the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) coming into existence without any cast nets to the most vulnerable, and a people looking to the government or the state to take care of certain needs, and when that is removed from you, you are like a ship without a rudder.

In this situation where the state is now controlled by folks who are trying to maybe right perceived wrong, and where they see every African Guyanese as an enemy or as a PNC or as part of their problem—they seem to be doing things to protect themselves regardless of what. And here is where we are talking about justice and equity that has not been accorded us. Especially in the last 15 years, it has been ridiculous—it has been atrocious.

As I said earlier, this did not start from '92. It started before but it has accelerated. Before '92 the country had problems financially—we had all kinds of problems and those of us who bit the bullet, who tied our bellies because in a patriotic effort we figured that we would work with this thing because we saw that it would have benefited the nation. There was patriotism in what we did. We expected dividends at the end of it. Those dividends did not materialize because “he” opened up the economy for external rape and plunder. That is what the ERP meant to us—External Rape and Plunder, and it is a continuing process.

We have been caught up in that because most of our people are wage earners, depending on salaries and government jobs. So when you retrench or redeploy, or when you try to use all kinds of managerial jargons to put people out of the work place and you do not have an alternative for them to support their families, you are courting disaster.

The African Guyanese community has been impoverished, and especially so, from 1988. Its descent started from the first devaluation.

We have now reached a stage where the period of raising expectation has been thorn at its head in Guyana, especially in the African Guyanese community where we have been forced to accept declining expectations. A man who has been accustomed to a certain standard of living has now been subjected to a demeaning form of existence.

I remember the days in the 80's when we sent money to relatives in the USA. Now we have to depend on barrels for survival. I do not think that spells good for any government, any nation.

My time seems to be short but if you want to see what is happening in the East Indian communities, the infrastructural work that is being done, in comparison to the African Guyanese communities, there is a marked difference—there is no excuse.

Sophia, for instance, was in a state of readiness for regularization since before '92. It was structured, everything was laid out. The Hoyte's administration put a hold on the housing programme for whatever reason, I do not have the time to go into that. When you look at the other areas that have sprung up, how far they have progressed, the money poured into those areas—and when you look at areas such as Paradise or Dazelle Scheme which has been deliberately frustrated, and where the government of today tried with a bogus transport to steal those lands from those people to give it over to IMAX for development—then you ask yourself what are we dealing with.

I can also cite allocation of house lots, a flawed and ridiculous situation where you are impoverishing people and creating shanty towns. You say that your criteria for allocating a house lot give preference to a single woman with three to four children. She gets priority but does not have the necessary finance to build—no infrastructure in the community—what are you really doing?

You are also scarifying the psyche of the African Guyanese male because he might have the money to build but he cannot get a house lot because he does not have a family. You are not talking about the family or family structure but now you are going to give a woman priority because she has a family. I am not saying that she should not be given consideration but when you are going to use those criteria for allotment, in this land of plenty and waste, you ask yourself what are you doing to a people—you are further destroying them. As I said, consciously or unconsciously we do things and we make it a policy but then it affects a people who do not have political representation and who are afraid to speak out for some reason or the other.

I am glad that this forum has allowed us to come out and speak—somebody has to speak.

Chairman:

Thank you Mr. King. I think that your presentation has been quite passionate and I can tell that you were speaking from the heart. Commissioners, any questions for Mr. King?

Commissioner Carvil Duncan

There are two simple questions that I need to ask for the sake of clarity and if you can expand a little bit more on what you have said. The first question is, you are saying that the African Guyanese has not really benefited from the neo-political system when it was in office. I was wondering whether you can expand on that by saying what were the African Guyanese's expectations at that time, and analyse it to what he has achieved, if any, so that we can at least get an idea of where he has lost out.

Mr. King

Basically, when the PNC came into power in '64, I think there was the expectation that—we were in this cold war atmosphere, we were fighting against Communism and they would have moved forward into a capitalist environment—we would have obtained certain benefits. Added to that, coming from a family that was in business, I can tell you, you could have only developed so far, and no more because the financial institutions at the time were not prepared to give the average African Guyanese, especially if he was not

within a certain class, the financial assistance to move forward. I am saying that because of the experiences my family had personally with the Royal Bank in Linden and what happened after the GNCB was established in 1970. Mr. Bascom was manager and they allowed the company to go. The records would show what happened. The records would also show the effects of political interference.

Chairman

In fairness Mr. King, you have made your presentation. Go directly to the answer. What were the expectations?

Mr. King

The expectation was that we would have developed and we would have continued to enjoy the benefits of the patrimony of this nation, as a citizen.

Chairman

Do you want to be a little more specific?

Mr. King

If you are selling gold, diamond or rice and you are getting money and the money coming in, fostering development—then one set of people must not be driving the fancy cars, building the high rises, or one set of people should not be getting the contracts for the capital works, etc. One set of people should not be shoved out from getting the contracts where there are proven records of competence. Now they have to work as wage earners if they want to survive. They expected to be treated like a man. They need to take care of their families, using their God-given talents. That is all we asking for.

Commissioner Duncan

The next question is, you talked about the Westminster model that we now use in parliament and that it is not beneficial to the African Guyanese. Do you have any perception of a model that you think would raise the standard of African Guyanese in Guyana—increase their expectations?

Mr. King

We know that the Westminster model has not been the best—it is the model we are using—where the winner-takes-all, and in our situation you have people from different groups are fighting over the spoils so to speak—if I win, I get all the spoils. I can use it the best way I can. I cannot be annoyed if I am in a game and you win and get the spoils—it is a game and that is the rule. However, it does not augur well for the nation because you have a group of people who make up excess of 40% of the population, who are excluded. Those people feel that they have a legitimate right because of the fact that they do not only feel but they know and they expect, because of what their fore parents have done in civilizing this land. As I mentioned before when we bit the bullet and tightened our belts we did this to ensure that the boat stayed afloat, all benefited. As your friend Lincoln would say, when rice was in trouble, bauxite went to the rescue.

Commission Cheryl Sampson

You talked about our financial difficulties before 1999 and the patriotism we had and the ERP. I think I remembered it was the Economic Recovery Programme although you have another terminology for it. You said that it had no cast net for the vulnerable. Somewhere along the line I think there was something called the human face of the ERP—SIMAP—it started out looking at the vulnerable, pregnant mothers, etc. You spoke about the external rape and plunder of our economy, admitting that we had to band our bellies and tied our waists but it happened in '89 when it started, to 1991—by 1992 there was change, but there was economic growth—there was growth for a little while.

Mr. King

What I was saying Madam Commissioner, with the ERP you opened up the economy and there were certain things that happened and both Messrs. Duncan and Willems would know, those who were in business would know certain things happened then to which the Authorities turned a blind eye. Customs were slack. That is why some Customs officials got themselves into trouble immediately post '92 because of things they allowed to happen. It was not all that straight managerially in terms of the economy. Certain things were allowed to happen to show growth.

The growth of the drugs trade and money laundering happened with the opening up of the economy. Any fool would have seen that once anybody could go and buy money off the road, and a free capitalist system involved, you would have money laundering. That is a scourge that came upon us. The wrong people have now taken control of the major industries.

Chairman

You said the wrong people, referring to whom?

Mr. King

I am talking about what is happening in Guyana right now—the drug lords, where they are controlling the major productive sectors in Guyana.

Chairman

I just needed clarification on who are the wrong people—the evil guys?

Mr. King

I do not know if they are evil. They might be evil today and good tomorrow—they might have been good yesterday. Sir Walter Raleigh was a good man until he was beheaded. Then you had brigands and bandits who were knighted by the Queen. One even became governor of Jamaica.

Commissioner John Willems

This is more of an observation. The Commission has recently had a number of consultants who studied some of the points you raised. It would be very interesting for you that you study that and give feedback to us. You put a point of view on it. They have sent us information which might be incorrect. We do not know. They have established themselves—not fly-by-night people but it is important to have your feedback on their findings.

Mr. King

I would be happy to do a critical analysis of their findings.

Commissioner Shahabudin Mc Doom

I would like that this entire exercise that we are going through to be constructive. We have to deal with a million grievances. I am positive that you have a million grievances since emancipation. I am sure that you can go on forever. I have studied the history of this country and I am trying to be constructive. I have asked myself which is the most potentially successful step that we can take to address these grievances and I could not come up with anything more than this one which I would recommend to you because I am being constructive.

I do not know how a people who have been aggrieved could be righted more, than if you were to put those same people in positions of gifts and authority, people from that same group because there is no point trying to speak all the time to people of different groups and hope that because of God there would be fear for their fellow men. Some of them might listen because they believe in God but most people might not be bothered because they might not want to be concerned with history. But if you put in positions of authority: parliamentarians; judges; people who have gifts; people who can give you house lots; people who the Board would decide to have on the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CHPA) and whatever—if you put members of that group in those positions, I believe that there is not greater step that can be taken.

Do you say that in this country there is no representation or too little representation of your group in those areas like parliament, the judiciary and housing?

Mr. King

I say there is no representation.

Commissioner Mc Doom

No representation?

Mr. King

Exactly. I am not saying that because we are African Guyanese and of the African community and that parliament is not looking after our interest. If they were looking after our interest we would have been better off. There are people in positions but they are not looking after our group.

Commissioner Mc Doom

There are people, but they are not representing the group?

Mr. King

Yes. And I am not talking about representing the group from a partisan position. I am talking about representation to help the group to develop basically. Then again they might not be able to represent you because of certain policies that might be hindering them. That is why I mentioned earlier that sometimes there might be systemic problems that the people who are making sacrifices and who want to help cannot do so because they are running into bottlenecks. For example, look at what is happening in Region 10 with the land Commission. There is no land policy by the government so even if you have everyone of a particular ethnic group there, what would happen? There is no land policy on how land should be distributed. What is happening now is a free for all with the rampant corruption that is going on and the blatant pandering to partisan interests—that is why they have problems.

Commissioner Mc Doom

I find all ex-colonial people look to some favoring sky to find fairness and justice. I do not believe in that. As I said, I believe in the representation of the group. I take your two points. You say that people who represent the group are not really doing so. Secondly, they are stymied in their representation. But you still have to grapple with that problem. You get representation of your group on Boards and where people who have the right to make decisions for or against you—how else are you going to do it?

Mr. King

Mr. Commissioner, we are now moving into an era of local government reform and that is one of the reasons we think it is an opportune time for this forum where we can work out those modalities, because at that level—at the ground level, is where we have to work together as a people. This is not working together in isolation—as An African Guyanese group in isolation. We must be respected for our talents, gifts—as well as our particular race must be appreciated just like how we would appreciate the others who make up the society—and we call that respect—we call that human rights. Once we accept that and accept that all of us have a stake in this country and we accept that we are not looking for poverty alleviation but we are looking for poverty eradication, and we move towards that. This country is too rich for there to be, what we are seeing on the roads outside.

Chairman

Mr. King, I have some specific questions to which we need specific answers for the record. You are saying that the African Guyanese person in Guyana has no political representation. Do other races in Guyana have political representation?

Mr. King

Yes.

Chairman

What are the races that have political representation? How did they get it?

Mr. King

Because of the party.

Chairman

What party?

Mr. King

The PPP party.

Chairman

It is a perceived view?

Mr. King

No. It is a fact because if I go into, you see

Chairman

No. No. No. We do not want an explanation.

Mr. King

I am giving you facts.

Chairman

You are saying from your standpoint that the East Indian man has representation through the PPP/C? The East Indian man at all times is properly represented, politically, through the PPP/C?

Mr. King

Yes. Yes.

Chairman

Is this the view of many Guyanese that African Guyanese support the PNC/R.

Mr. King

That is true.

Chairman

The PNC/R does not provide that kind of political representation?

Mr. King

The PNC/R said point blank that it is not an African Guyanese party.

Chairman

Is the PPP/C not an East Indian party?

Mr. King

Agreed, but the PPP/C is in power and when you are in power you have to be responsible for the nation. You cannot be in power and say that you will only look after one ethnic group.

Chairman

You are saying that the African Guyanese in Guyana feel that even though they have supported traditionally the PNC/R, they do not have political representation through the opposition PNC/R.

Mr. King

You are saying that?

Chairman

No. I am asking you.

Mr. King

If we were having political representation I would not have been sitting down in front of you today. The politicians would have been hammering out those issues.

Chairman

You said that since emancipation the efforts of the African Guyanese community to develop their villages have been sabotaged, the floods and all the rest of it by people who are our enemies. Could you name those enemies?

Mr. King

Colonial masters.

Chairman

So the enemies you are referring to are the colonial masters?

Mr. King

Yes. And anyone who does not have our interests at heart.

Chairman

The colonial masters are not in the system anymore.

Mr. King

But you also have enemies who do not have our interest in development.

Chairman

Who are those people who do not have interest in your development?

Mr. King

Whoever does not want to see drainage and irrigation—who does not want to see African Guyanese villages developed.

Chairman

Let us define the enemies of the African Guyanese—people who do not want to see D&I works in African Guyanese villages.

Mr. King

People who do not want to see proper employment—not under employment—but proper employment for African Guyanese. People who do not want to see development, financial and otherwise of African Guyanese. They are our enemies.

Chairman

Thirdly, you said that the “black” psyche was damaged, specifically that of the African Guyanese male, through the housing policy of giving out of house lots to single women

with children, in preference to the family unit, and the rest of it. Do you think that this was a deliberate policy of someone, or was it an answer to a vulnerable group?

Mr. King

I think it was an answer—misguided answer.

Chairman

So you do not think that it was deliberate?

Mr. King

I do not think that it was deliberate.

Chairman

It has consequences but it was not deliberate.

Mr. King

It was not deliberate.

Chairman

You also said that production and development of African Guyanese communities were affected; people were leaving the land, there was heavy migration into the interior and that the African Guyanese made tremendous amount of sacrifices but he has not yet reaped the reward. What is the cause?

Mr. King

As I said there are historic factors and as I pointed out once you do not control the financial system, for there to be development...

Chairman

So the African Guyanese man could only reap the reward when he is in control?

Mr. King

No. I am saying that the financial system has got to be able to assist him.

Chairman

His concerns have not been noted, taken seriously?

Mr. King

No.

Chairman

You alluded in your remarks that there are other forces at work and you mentioned that a number of times. Who are these other forces? Is there some sinister plot? Is there a diabolical plot to marginalize African Guyanese? Who are these other forces? We know that we have the political forces, financial forces and so on that you have spoken about but who are the other forces?

Mr. King

I think that we also have internal problems.

Chairman

Internal?

Mr. King

Within the African Guyanese community.

Chairman

Internal problems within the African Guyanese community could be described as the other forces that have led to their underdevelopment?

Mr. King

Yes.

Chairman

So if the African Guyanese community in Guyana is going to be developed, your recommendation is that some of the internal problems within the African Guyanese community have got to be solved. What are some of those problems that you identified that need urgent attention?

Mr. King

You have class problem. You have prejudices.

Chairman

Class problem? We do not hear about the African Guyanese class problem. So talk to us about the class problem among African Guyanese. Let the Commission and the nation be educated about this problem.

Mr. King

I cannot educate the Commission on that but the thing about it is that the African Guyanese middle class always have problems with other African Guyanese. Whether you want to accept it or not there is that perception that you cannot be accepted to do certain things. We have our own peculiarities and that has to be addressed. I think that you can see it being played out with the AFC and the PNC.

Chairman

Last question I have for you Sir from your very well presented discourse. You spoke about the African Guyanese being reduced to wage earners/wage slaves that depend on government jobs. In your view, what should be an action that can be done to put the African Guyanese on par with other communities that he should no longer be a wage slave?

Mr. King

I do not have all the ideas but some form of affirmative action has to be put in place.

Chairman

You want to take a minute and tell us in what particular ways you want to see affirmative action working?

Mr. King

You have to have affirmative action in the business place. In other words, the skills and the talents of lots of African Guyanese would have to show that they can create work. This does not take away from them working for other people because you know that some of the biggest conglomerates are managed by people of African descent. Lots of the energies and skills of people of African descent are used for other people. Why are they still poor? I think much more than a SIMAP programme or Scotia Plus programme has to be put in place. We have to go back to the cottage-type industries where folks can make use of their talents to generate income.

Chairman

Is that something you expect the State to organize or the African Guyanese community among themselves?

Mr. King

The state would have to assist because it has been demolished by the state. The ERP came into play and started to go factory-wise, then globalization. But the thing about it, we have been pauperized. We have people with talent—some are dying without passing on their talent. We have to go back that way to help create employment. African Guyanese people have to create employment for themselves, not look to the government, not look to other people for employment—they have to create their own.

Chairman

Thank you Mr. King for your presentation.

SECOND PRESENTER:
MR. ELTON MC RAE— EDUCATOR/ENGINEER/BUSINESSMAN

Mr. Elton Mc Rae

Good afternoon Chairman, Commissioners, PRO and all brothers and sisters.

I am here to discuss some issues relating to the disenfranchisement of the African Guyanese community. I am a Guyanese of African descent. I grew up on the East Coast of Demerara. I have observed over the years many issues which I will bring to light today. As Brother King has alluded, disenfranchisement did not really start only today. I am aware of the days when our parents were paid three dollars to cut down a mango tree so as to plant sugar cane. Today that mango tree would have given much more benefits than the pittances we have gotten from the sugar cane.

I would mention, with respect to the backlands, there is not a village on the East Coast today in which there is that integral link between the backlands and the townships as it was in the 50's. The African Guyanese villages along the East Coast were basically farming communities. Today what do we have there? We have dormitories—where people find a place to sleep at nights to work in Georgetown or somewhere else out of the community.

Those communities are not self sustaining anymore. The reasons for this are many fold. I really cannot point all out. What I know is that the backlands which was an integral part of our subsistence before now, is no longer making that contribution.

The village of Golden Grove for instance, President's College took up most of that. In Nabacalis, D&I works were not done since in the 70's. In Buxton it is the same thing. In Beterverwagting (BV), praise God, some work is being done there. In Plaisance we have a similar situation where no work has been done for the past twenty to thirty years—no significant D&I works.

Most of the D&I structures have been eroded—bridges, everything. There is that rupture. What we find today in those villages, lots of young men are into the “drug” business—stealing from their parents to buy the drug—and not doing anything much for themselves.

Over time there were some stop-gaps between, for instance, in the 70’s we had the Community High Schools (CHS), this provided, in the case of BV, pre-vocational training for persons before induction to the world of work. There was an industrial estate in BV where lots of young persons found employment after coming out of the CHS; some also found employment in the sugar estates. The CHSs have all ceased to function more or less.

There has been another stop-gap programme initiated some three years ago by the President where the aim was to train 5,000 young men. I do not know how that would solve our needs, since this number is grossly inadequate. The statistics are that 70% of the young people leaving our schools are unqualified. These do not only comprise the African Guyanese community—but African Guyanese do contribute to a significant portion.

Continuing on the school issue, when I was growing up the schools were located in the villages. There was definitely an imbalance between the East Indian communities which were not considered villages, they were estate grounds. In the villages, African Guyanese young men and women knew how to read and write. Today you go to the villages, young people do not know to read and write but on the estate grounds it is vice versa.

This was observed recently in Mahaica. A relative of mine went to Mahaica to conduct a training programme for young women. She said the programme initially catered only for East Indian women because it was apparently organized by the Women’s Progressive Organisation (WPO). She advised that she cannot only deal with East Indian women in a community of other races. So other ethnic groups were subsequently introduced to the programme. What she found was that the older East Indian women could not read while the young Indian women knew how to read. On the other hand, the older African

Guyanese women read while their younger counterparts could not. It was an over turning of the situation from the past. I cannot really say what is the rationale for this.

Again, looking at our villages, what we find is that our teachers from our villages are going to teach on the estate grounds, like Lusignan, Enmore, Success, Chatau Margot, Mon Repos, etc. While within the villages, many of the schools are short of staff. We are saying that you should staff our schools with our teachers from within the community and if there is an excess, then they can go to other communities. I do not know the rationale for teachers' placement in schools but this is affecting our children. Let us look at that (appropriate placement of teachers) as a means of getting the children taught. If we have the teachers, let us teach our own first, then others.

Now if we have a group of people coming out of school today they cannot go out there and claim the jobs that are available; they cannot go and claim places at the University that are available; they cannot effectively be efficient contractors, and that is the cradle of our marginalization. What is here today cannot be compared with what would be there in the next 10 years. Right now we are marginalized—we are not getting our contracts—our just reward. So 10 years hence, our present 15 to 25 year-olds who are ill equipped would not be able to fulfill the required leadership roles because they would not have the requisite skills to do so. We have to address these issues today.

I worked as a consultant sometime back for a project and like my cousin, I was introduced to groups of women in Parika and other communities on the West Coast of Demerara and the Essequibo Coast. I cannot remember the names of the villages. I also visited areas in the Essequibo River. What I observed was that the groups comprised mainly of East Indian women.

In Essequibo I requested to go into Dartmouth to see what was happening in that community. I started to organize in Dartmouth. My contract was for six months with the expectation that it would be renewed. After my second meeting in Dartmouth my contract came to an end. I was informed that it would not be renewed. I do not know if

the non-renewal of my contract was as a result of my visits to Dartmouth. I am saying these things because of what is happening out there.

I observed during some of the community meetings with the women's groups, after dispensing with the technical discussions, conversations usually veered towards WPO activities. This made me realize that these were just State sponsored WPO meetings. It also brought the understanding that developmental activities for women are channeled through this organization.

Bro. King alluded to the issue of infrastructure. I am aware that many villages on the East Coast have sought assistance to get works done in their communities. In fact it is rumored that unless a group is aligned to the PPP they do not get funding. It actually happened in BV, where one group publicly stated that they were formed by Minister X and were regrouped by Minister Y. This group basically gets everything they want. On the other hand other groups are not getting from the project financiers the funds they need to carry out their activities. They continue working with the meagre resources they have.

Your advertisement termed these consultations - perceptions, but I am saying that these things are realities—actually happening. I have observed some of it and I want to mention something that happened to me personally. Recently I have been working with a Council (which comprise a group essentially of African Guyanese) and we were not getting stipend for whatever reasons. The life of the Council had expired and it was extended but because of the frustrations members were not attending meetings. Therefore, because there were no meetings, no reports were submitted, except to report that there was no meeting.

Finally, there was a meeting before the period of expiration. At that meeting it was decided that my stay should be extended because my contract was coming to an end. I had previously written to the relevant Minister indicating my interest to continue. On the final day of my contract I visited the Ministry where I met my Chairman who asked whether I had received my extension letter. I replied in the negative. He advised me to

check and see if it was ready. When I got there I was told that the Minister said he was not renewing my contract, he will instead be advertising the position. (To date, the Ministry has not informed me officially, except for a verbal demand to hand over all inventory items, of the non-renewal of my contract) This was May and the advertisement was placed in the newspapers in June with the deadline for applications fixed for June 15. I applied. I an African Guyanese, have not yet been accorded the courtesy of even an acknowledgement. It is like saying to me get out, we do not want you around.

I managed a key Secretariat called the Technical and Vocational Education Training Council. That Secretariat should have been one the bodies to take us into the Caricom Single Market and Economy (CSME)—to have our people trained for acceptance in the Caribbean job market. But it does not appear to have any significance to some of our leaders. In this case the representation is not only on behalf of the African Guyanese community but the nation on the whole.

Going back to the village issue, I think that our villages need the sort of injection that would help them to become revitalized. Unless you revitalize those villages you are not doing anything for African Guyanese in this country because there is basically where our roots are although some of us reside in Georgetown, most of us are from the villages. If you pay close attention to the villages from Georgetown to Rosignol—Georgetown to Parika, where ever they are, you see degradation. The sight is not too pleasing. I do not think that a people would want—wished for such, for themselves. But as Bro. King said there are forces at work with which they cannot battle.

To confirm a situation as likened by what Dr. Jagan had said some time ago, that we are indeed at the bottom of the ladder, though rightfully we should not have been there because this country belongs to all of us and whatever there is to be shared, we deserve an equal part of it.

Chairman

Thank you very much for your presentation Mr. Mc Rae. Commissioners any questions?

Commissioner Sampson

You spoke about your involvement in work on the East Coast and West Coast of Demerara as a consultant, may I ask ...

Mr. Mc Rae

Not as a consultant on the East Coast. I live on the East Coast so I worked among people on the East Coast.

Commissioner Sampson

What type of consultancy were you involved in?

Mr. Mc Rae

Poor Rural Community Service Supply Project (PRCSSP).

Commissioner Mc Doom

You asked for special favours for African Guyanese brothers and sisters in schools in the villages. In other words, these schools should employ African Guyanese from the villages to teach their fellow African Guyanese rather than others?

Mr. Mc Rae

No. I am not saying rather than others. What I am saying is that if the teacher lives in BV then send her to teach at a school in BV. When the BV schools are satisfied then you can look at other areas such as Enmore, Buxton, etc.—where there is a need.

Chairman

To be objective one has to consider that if there is a vacancy for a Senior Master for instance, in La Bonne Intention (LBI), how would you keep the sister or brother in BV if there is a more attractive package with a promotion there? Having been a teacher myself, teachers prefer to teach where it is closer to their home and I think that is still the policy.

But when you apply for promotion and transfer that is different. Traditionally there is a heavy concentration of African Guyanese in the teach profession.

Mr. Mc Rae

What I am saying, if you go on the East Coast today and take stock you will find our primary schools in BV, in Buxton, in Golden Grove—there are vacancies and the people from these communities are teaching in LBI, Enmore and the other areas; while people from those communities are not teaching in our schools.

Chairman

That is a serious concern you are raising because what you are actually saying—and I want to make sure that I am hearing correctly—because I noticed you used the terms, villages and estate grounds—villages were African Guyanese communities and estate grounds were the sugar estate people?

Mr. Mc Rae

Yes.

Chairman

You are saying that educated African Guyanese are leaving their communities to teach on estate grounds and where there are African Guyanese communities, the children are not properly being educated because you do not have competent, qualified teachers at those schools?

Mr. Mc Rae

Yes.

Chairman

The picture that you are painting, if I am getting it correct, if that is allowed to continue, what you described a little earlier, mother cannot read, but daughter could now read, in the East Indian community—and in the African Guyanese community, mother could read

because there was a time when she was educated but right now the children cannot read. From your point of view, is it a deliberate policy towards the educating of East Indians—and the marginalization of the African Guyanese?

Mr. Mc Rae

I do not know why it is happening, but it is happening. The teachers are leaving Training College and they are placed in the Grade A and Grade B schools. I do not know if it is because of the schools' sizes, but our schools are neglected. We also have to take into account that many of our African Guyanese teachers have left between the mid 90's and early 2000 to go to Botswana, Antigua and other places. Those were coming from our village schools mainly. What I am saying is that all schools may have vacancies but there is a higher percentage of vacancies in the African Guyanese communities. East Indian teachers are not teaching in African Guyanese communities but African Guyanese are teaching in East Indian areas.

Chairman

You are saying that East Indian teachers are not teaching in African Guyanese communities but African Guyanese teachers are teaching in East Indian areas?

Mr. Mc Rae

Yes, but it is minimal.

Chairman

Another thing you said was that there were no D&I works done in the backlands of many African Guyanese villages—were D&I works done on the estate grounds?

Mr. Mc Rae

The estate grounds were controlled by Guyana Sugar Corporation (Guysuco) and Guysuco did what it had to do for Guysuco. On the other hand, the backlands were

owned by the village or villagers—in the case of Buxton, by the village—in BV by villagers—Bachelors Adventure, by the village, and so on.

Commissioner Mc Doom

Did the estate grounds have East Indian workers working in the backlands?

Mr. Mc Rae

No. On the estate grounds, some of East Indians had titles and earlier some had rice plots. I do not know what the arrangements were, but after a while I noticed that all the rice plots have disappeared.

Commissioner Mc Doom

What is the difference you are talking about between the estate grounds and villages with respect to the backlands? We know that Guysuco was responsible for the infrastructural and D&I works, but what is the difference so far as the people of the villages were concerned, between the backlands?

Mr. Mc Rae

The village council had responsibility for the backlands and National Drainage & Irrigation Board (NDIB) controlled D&I works, but the council subsequently became the PNC/PPP baby, and the council which collected the taxes and cleaned the canal, etc., was now controlled by central government. Villagers became neglectful in paying their taxes and funds were not available for the necessary D&I works.

Commissioner Mc Doom

I still do not understand the difference between the village council and the estate grounds so far as the backlands are concerned. You said that Guysuco was doing the estate grounds and they were seeing to the drainage and so forth. Were East Indians working there? And in the African Guyanese villages there was no D&I work? Is that what you are saying?

Mr. Mc Rae

With respect to the D&I works, some of it were the responsibility of the village council while some of it were done by the NDI Board. The council never had the authority from Government to raise the tax threshold to effectively maintain those canals. The council was also engulfed in this PNC/PPP nonsense, so hardly attention was paid to our villages.

Chairman

You said that African Guyanese communities are not self generating neither are they self sustaining. What are your recommendations for making them both self generating and self sustaining?

Mr. Mc Rae

Firstly, we need to have our education system looked at so that we educate people for the community. Secondly, we need the D&I work for our communities be looked at. We also need efforts and activities geared towards encouraging our people to go back to the land. At the same time showing them that the farmer is no longer the person who wears patched pants, the way your grandfather did. Farming is a business and they must be able to see what are the possibilities that can be derived from the by-products of farming—agro processing, marketing potentials and other linkages.

Chairman

Is this something the government should do or your community?

Mr. Mc Rae

The government will have to have an input. I guess some of the communities are prepared to work with the government. Some communities will have to be educated. Plaisance for instance, you go in there and talk to some of the fellows there—in fact most of the people there are outsiders and they do not have affinity with the ground.

Chairman

They are living there for housing purposes? They are not villagers?

Mr. Mc Rae

Right. It is more like a dormitory.

Chairman

I need to get something straight here. You said that if you were to travel along the African Guyanese villages, you will see the state of poverty and short comings and so on. You go to the East Indian villages or the estate grounds you see—they were the ones living in the logies—there are no logies there anymore. What is the difference? What caused that? If you are telling me that this problem started way back—state power has not always been a government that is perceived to be favoring East Indians.

Mr. Mc Rae

Yes.

Chairman

So there is one time when African Guyanese had a government that could have related to their cause and controlled machinery of the state—the D&I works and all these things you are talking about were controlled by them?

Mr. Mc Rae

Yes.

Chairman

You are telling me that this neglect started since the '70's and so on. What is it that needs to be done now? State power is not the only answer you are pointing to because state power did prove not to have satisfied those needs that you are talking about.

Mr. Mc Rae

State power at that point in time never really catered for the needs of the community. They were looking only for allegiance. What happened, the guys at the logies, what they were doing, they continued to do so that they could have gotten out of the logies. They had their goal.

We on the other hand, were doing things that had links to our backlands—planting vegetables, fruits, provision, and selling them. Then came the idea of getting quick money. We were paid \$3.00 to cut down a tree. That was a lot of money then in the late 50's and early 60's. So we cut down our coconut trees, mango trees and planted sugar cane. We got cheap fertilizers and tools free of cost and everything else to make it look good. Down the line they started controlling your prices. You started to experience diminishing returns. You were never taught about good husbandry. Anyway, you made your mistake and you started living with it. Then came the breaking up of our local government system as we knew it, which catered to our needs.

Chairman

You are saying as a recommendation, that the reactivation of the local government system is a strong point?

Mr. Mc Rae

Well, it is not just reactivation to what it was because the economics of the situation have changed. We will have to look at reform.

Chairman

I am looking at your fourth recommendation here—reforming the local government system that will take us to the villages, and not political allegiance?

Mr. Mc Rae

Yes.

Chairman

Because you could give your vote to a party but your village could still be left behind. That is what you are saying?

Mr. Mc Rae

Yes.

Chairman

I do not want to put words into your mouth. I just want to make sure that I am hearing you correctly. You are saying that they must reform the local government system which does not cater to party allegiance but for the villages?

Mr. Mc Rae

Yes. It must cater for the villages whether they are East Indians, Africans, Portuguese, etc.

Chairman

Village interest must be paramount? And we do not have that right now? We have political allegiance?

Mr. Mc Rae

Yes.

Chairman

So if we have a village that elects the councillors and we want to develop this village into an agricultural, vibrant village and we know that we need to pay a man fifty dollars to clear the drains, we are not depending on no Central Government, we put our taxes into the village to suit our demands—we pay our money—we get our production going. If we need to build a farm-to-market road—whether it is built with red bricks or bitumen, we would be able to control our own business? Is that right?

Mr. Mc Rae

Yes but we would still need an adequate subvention.

Commissioner Sampson

I would like to revisit the issue of the Community High Schools which Mr. Forbes Burnham instituted. I think those schools were instituted for children who were not academically inclined and who were more able to use their hands, so to speak—they were taught technical subjects—they learnt a skill. They did not pass the Common Entrance Examination in the first place so they could not get into a secondary school—they went to the CHS. However, if it was discovered by the time they reach third form, that they have the ability to pursue academic studies; they were channeled back into the regular secondary schools. Now the CHS are no longer there. You also mentioned that the CHS did not only train students for the sugar industry, but for the CSME. What recommendation do you have for the education system to cater for the “slow learner” who might be more technically than academically inclined?

Mr. Mc. Rae

To clarify, I am not saying that we train people for the CSME so that we can send them out of Guyana. I am saying that they should be trained so that their competitiveness is on par with those of other member states.

To cater for the “slow learner”, I think that we need to have a strong remedial programme instituted. Many of the children we call slow learners are the off springs of the single parents, who go to school two to three days per week because the parents cannot afford to keep them in schools everyday. We also need a feeding programme in all the schools so that we would not have very many slow learners anymore. If we neglect to deal with this issue and say that it is the child’s problem and not the nation’s, then we will continue to have the 70% failures we are having today.

Commission Willems

I am not all that knowledgeable about these issues but I was thinking about the Amerindian villages and the way they are set up—and I was wondering whether the African Guyanese villages cannot adopt the same principles in controlling their affairs. The Amerindians have all kinds of problems but they have their lands and their own councils which have not been quite polluted by the two “Ps”. They have a certain amount of independence which you are talking about. I do not know if this makes any sense what I am saying. As is said, I am not an expert at these things.

Mr. Mc Rae

I have no problem if it could get to that. If you have independent people then they can make proper decisions as to who should govern the nation at the end of the day and not vote for a man who promised to give me an engine boat—and when his back is turned someone else comes with a bigger boat and we will now vote for this other person, as it is today. No we should not do that.

Commissioner Willems

With respect to the dormitories, have the villages become such that you do not have villagers who are working outside, who are interested, or share the concerns of the villages they left behind?

Mr. Mc Rae

For the East Coast, Plaisance is at that level, I do not think there is much turning back.

Chairman

I guess because it is closer to Georgetown and the issue of transportation and so on.

Mr. Mc Rae

If you go to BV, Buxton and Golden Grove you still have the village cohesiveness which we can exploit to get the village going.

Chairman

Let me come back to Plaisance. I know a lot about Plaisance. African Guyanese owned a lot of the land in this area but when they wanted a party for their daughter's wedding, they pawned their transport with the Portuguese man, and they never went back for it—because after that party, they needed to have the second Sunday and then the christening.

Mr. Mc Rae

Yes. They took their transports and said, “Look lend me so much money and when I returned from the “gold bush” I will repay you”.

Chairman

They did not redeem those lands. That is why in many cases, one man ended up owning a majority of the land. So I ask, is it something about the African Guyanese man and the fact that he does not like delayed gratification, that causes him, that even when you give him something of value he ... ?

Mr. Mc Rae

That is something that needed to be discussed with the psychiatrist?

Chairman

I am putting it to you because it was even said to us—and I am talking about the African Guyanese community—that even when we had the housing development in Laing Avenue and West and East Ruimveldt, the former administration did not give people transport because of the fear that they will sell out their properties when they need money for party and frivolous things. So the lack of issuing of transport was one way of keeping them there. I am asking the question, even at this stage, if you meet every poor African Guyanese and you give him a land and you give him access to the bank for a loan to build his house—has that thinking changed—that he has to get his daughter married with 16 bridesmaids and a limousine to keep up with Mr. Jones down the road—and that he will not take the transport that he just got and surrender it to someone who is always willing and ready to own what he has, so that he could have another party?

Mr. Mc Rae

I cannot get into the minds of every African Guyanese person out there. I think we have seen a lot of that and many of us will agree that we need to change that attitude. What has been happening is that the African Guyanese was made to believe that his socialization process is such that even though he is living in a one room shack, he must sit at a table and eat with a knife and a fork—if he is entertaining, he must do it with a bang. So he is living a double standard life. We need to address that within our African Guyanese community. The reality is that we are not a middle class African Guyanese, we are at the bottom of the ladder and we have to deal with that—we have to work from there upwards.

Chairman

So you are asking that there be an acknowledgement that the masses of African Guyanese are really at the bottom and that there should be some process that is put in place to bring them on par with other Guyanese brothers and sisters?

Mr. Mc Rae

Yes.

Chairman

Thank you very much Mr. Mc Rae, for your presentation.

Hearing adjourned to November 14, 2007.

NB. Mr. Adrian Junior Eglin's made a presentation but his issue was observed to be in the nature of a complaint and was listed as a formal complaint with the Commission for investigation

DAY TWO
Wednesday, November 14, 2007

ATTENDEES:

ERC: Chairman Bishop Juan Egill	–	Christian Community
Commissioner Carvil Duncan	-	Trades Union Congress
Commissioner Cheryl Sampson	-	Women’s Organization
Commissioner Shahabudeen Mc Doom	-	Muslim Community
Commissioner L. John P. Willems	-	Private Sector Commission

PRESENTERS:

Mr. Heuvel Cunha
Mr. Lennox King (twice)
Rev. Reuben Gilbert
Mr. Andrew Williams (Ras Simeon)
Mr. Hamley Case

OTHERS:

Members of the public

FRIST PRESENTER

MR. HEUVEL CUNHA - SPORTS REPORTER (RADIO)/SANITARY INSPECTOR/FORMER PIONEER STAFF OF THE GUYANA NATIONAL SERVICE

Mr. Heuvel Cunha

Thank you for the opportunity to make an input into these issues. My comments will be general. I will not make specific allegations. The issues concern Africans in this society are too broad based to be specific. Many people have expressed their views and opinions via the media but I do not know whether these views are real or imagined, so it is difficult to draw conclusions in this regard. These views probably have elements of many things, such as perception of a situation that might have occurred that affected the individual—or someone might have been affected by an issue relating to hearsay of other people's experiences.

I feel that there are genuine concerns but I do not think that other ethnic groups are responsible for putting these concerns right, in their entirety while the African Guyanese community waiting for it to be righted. I think some of the difficulties/problems are within the African Guyanese communities themselves—how they interact with other ethnic groups in society, whether they are dealing with the other groups in a fair manner, when they themselves are operating from prejudices. Or they might be reacting to a situation that they perceived had occurred.

You also have a situation where each party might say that you are responsible for taking the initiative of putting things right so when you decide to put your side in order then I will put mine in order. With that kind of attitude, there will never be a solution to the problem. The African Guyanese community will have to put mechanisms in place—some valid mechanisms, not just informal chats and statements. These mechanisms should not necessarily be confined to the capital but networked throughout African Guyanese communities. Efforts are being made by some segments of the African community to deal with some of the more pressing issues such as economics and educational issues but it is still like a piece-meal approach.

While African Guyanese are reacting to perceived or real concerns that may have brought on by other ethnic groups; or are there due to other reasons such as historical factors/colonialism or the lack of progressive opportunities as an ethnic group, etc.— by looking at these factors in isolation, is counter productive to development. It defeats your purpose of the total development of your ethnic group.

This is basically my comments on the outlook of the African Guyanese community. Thank you.

Chairman

Thank you Mr. Cunha. Do you want to list for us some specific areas of concerns so that we can have a proper understanding of these matters? You have spoken of economical and educational issues, what are some of the others?

Mr. Cunha

For a couple of decades I have been involved in Sporting activities. I have been into reporting, officiating and adjudicating in areas of football, amateur boxing and cricket. I think we need a national approach to sports, where the majority of sportsmen and sportswomen are African Guyanese and without doubt, they have performed well in this area. However, some aspects of it are not opened to them for various reasons, including economical. For example, football is stagnated because of the lack of financial resources.

There are also problems with the Legal and Health sectors which people from those areas might very well tell you.

Commissioner Willems

You actually struck the cord when you said that the problem might lie within the African Guyanese community itself and there is the need for formal mechanisms. How can this be achieved? For instance, what do we recommend to parliament? There must be some idea of a structure, whether it is by the establishment of Credit Unions within the African

Guyanese communities or some other mechanism. But as you know anything dealing with money can become problematic.

Mr. Cunha

I have not touched on financial issues because I am unqualified to do so. However, some efforts have to be made to have some form of mechanism instituted. It is so necessary for African Guyanese communities. That is my main reason for coming here today, to see how these concerns can be addressed.

Commissioner Willems

It is excellent what you have done and that is what we are here for but somehow the African Guyanese community will have to work within itself with this. We have to accept community leadership rather than political leadership which could be a humbug at times.

Mr. Cunha

Within the African Guyanese community there is also issue of skin colour. Historically, the light skin was always favoured above the black skin and this has led to prejudices where the black skin is despised. This prejudice still exists to some extent today not only at the grass root level but at various levels of society. This issue needs to be dealt with within the group so that we would not be viewed as a flawed people. With over 40 years of independence we need to be truly independent of these issues. We cannot just pull them up now and then at our convenience to dangle them in front of someone else.

Chairman

Thank you very much for your contribution Mr. Cunha.

SECOND PRESENTER

MR. LENNOX KING

Representative of the United Apostolic Mystical Church

Mr. Lennox King

I am dealing with prejudices against the people of the Faithist Movement. We are grossly misunderstood and have been subjected to subtle and overt prejudices because of our religious persuasion.

Our medicinal practices are not accorded the right place that they deserve. The society is allowing “quack” to dominate this sacred profession. We feel that there needs to be a policy to allow for the limited use of certain substances and herbs in the practice of the sacred profession.

In all religions the way of life is not only confined to your spiritual health but also your physical health. If you look at the basic tenets of all religions, it is one of keeping the temple in a state that the spirit can have free communion with the Almighty.

All religions also have tenets of what you ought to do, and ought not to do from a natural and spiritual stand point. There has to be a balance if you want to be free and happy or to bring heaven down to earth, so to speak. In our religion, like any other, we operate from that level. Not only from specific regimental type of eating habits but also from regimental type of spiritual activities.

We believe that there are forces that affect us negatively and there are certain ways that exist in all cultures where you can exorcise these forces. The Pentecostals are now talking about doing a lot of exorcisms; whereas, in the past, they used to leave that to the Obeahman. Now everybody is doing it.

When the Faithists have their rituals and would ‘spin and dance’ it was derogatory. Now the churches are calling it anointing. The Catholics, for instance, are calling it the

Charismatic movement but we have always been vilified and told that we were dealing with the devil. This has been the situation since before, during and after slavery. In fact, our fore parents, as recent as the sixties, as herbalists, had to hide their medicinal practices which were healthy and helpful to the nation.

Those of us who grew up in the rural areas would know about the “Mama FeFe,” “Mother” or “Dada”—who not only administered to our physical health but also to our spiritual health. They understood that in correcting what was wrong in the spiritual level –would be easily corrected at the physical level – because what we manifest in the natural has bearing on the spiritual.

I am happy that the Pentecostals and other denominations have come to that glorious understanding which our fore parents were practicing and pushing all along. Those indigenous practices have always existed.

Guyana is blessed with five Ethnic groups. Which include the Chinese, Asians, Africans, Ameridians and Europeans. Each group has its spirituality and therefore, its part to play in our development, both materially and spiritually.

In our Faith we accommodate all ethnic groups because we understand in the approach of the higher self we all have to come through “a gate” and we accept that we, as a peculiar people, is that gate; so we allow those souls who need to move forward in serving the one and only Creator – to approach him in spirit and truth – to come through the gate. We accept, and put ourselves through that. But there are certain laws/specifics that have to be addressed.

We use the Bible and other books in our rituals. The Bible is just a blue print, but it is an Order. There are certain things that you will understand when you become initiated, which is not as simple as some quacks and philanders would have you believe.

We would like recognition of some or all the Feasts that are presented in the Holy Bible especially, the feast of the tabernacle. Bishop I think you know those three main feasts—the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and Harvest which we call the Feast of the Tabernacle. You might not be giving it all to your flock but you know the seriousness of those Feasts.

Those Feasts, as in any other religion, talk about atonement, self sacrifice and self healing and they are very important Feasts. If we want as a nation, to move forward—and I think the goodly Commissioner, as a practicing Muslim, understands and knows about Feasts—because they have similar aspects in their religion—we have to do what is right.

Our people have also been prejudice against because of their culture. I know through the Pan African Movement and other African organizations, we had to come to the ERC a few years ago, concerning some Rastafarian women who were not treated properly by a particular magistrate in Berbice, and you took up the matter and there was redress.

However, this issue continues; because we have social workers working with the Ministry of Human Services and they were told that their head wraps and other cultural attire are not the “proper” mode of dress. Ironically, it is not the other ethnic groups who would condemn this form of dressing. This is done by people of their own ethnic group.

In 1998 Elder Cyrus Boyce of the Saint Francis Xavier Universal Scientific Church wanted to build a church in Pheonix Park. He approached the NDC and the records would show that after deliberations, the officials said that they had no problems with his plan. The church started purchasing materials for the commencement of the fencing of the property, etc. The next thing that happened was that the Pheonix Park Assembly of God Church, headed by Pastor Grimmond, put forward a petition which effectively stopped the entire process. His objection was that if the church goes up, the Obeah people would affect him and cause disaster.

The Faithist church approached the NDC, RDC, Mr. Lumumba, Lands & Survey, the Post Office and other places to try to get a piece of land—they even paid fees, but because they are Faithist they were denied. (*Append. LK1 – 16*).

Those are some of the prejudices that we face even though Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, God bless his soul, made it legal for all of us to practice our culture equally in this country.

The same people who would tend to shun us in the day, are like Nicodemus, when they run into trouble, they run to the Obeahman house at night. When their children are going mad and they have certain diseases and the doctor cannot fix it at the hospital, they would quickly find us—and they still treat us like the dreaded type and despised us because we have kept the African culture alive.

We also have that class problem and that problem has evolved from creolisation, and an aspect of that creolisation has affected us mentally and has messed up our psyche. Our education has mis-educated us in terms of causing us to despise ourselves. Nothing can be more disgusting than a man not liking himself.

The problem with people of African descent in this country is that we do not like ourselves. We have lost our culture—we have lost our way. This is our biggest problem. We have become so low that we have been paid by other people to kill our own brothers. There is a letter to the President from Rev. Patrick Benjamin, Archbishop of the Guyana United Apostolic Mystical Council, where he wrote about the extra-judicial/phantom killings. (*Append. LK – 17*).

It is not that we have been idle by the wayside, but the Faithist Movement has not been accorded the acceptance by other religious and cultural organizations. Nobody cares and nobody wants to hear.

The African Guyanese culture in this country is with the Faithist Movement. If they want herbs they would find the Obeah people. If they want Masquerade Band, there is where it is. If they want healing that the hospitals cannot give, they look for us. Yet still we are despised and have no representation.

A Bill is being passed and a Minister is talking about Herbalists and so on but nobody is saying that we have some indigenous people here and let the “PI-men”, the Pandits, the Emams and the Elders get together and form a Council for the benefit of the people.

We should be promoting such things like vocational health in the jungles we have here. That would bring us a lot of revenue. Not people getting up and masquerading on television that they can cure this and they can cure that and the truth is, they cannot cure even a common cold or cough.

We have serious concerns with the killing and incarceration of the African Guyanese males, especially the youths. They are being placed in jail among criminals for a “joint”.

A fourteen-year-old is being sent to prison with hardened criminals for having consensual sex with an underage girl. Both of them are still at school—consenting teenagers. You are telling us about HIV and AIDS. You are promoting the use of condoms. The children’s hormones raging and when they have consensual sex among same age group, you are imprisoning the boy for rape. Why not lock up the girl too? Kids at that age experiment with sex because it is natural. We did that also when we were at their age. So we need to understand culturally what is happening.

The reason why the Asians had their girl children married off early is because they understood certain basic things. We are trying to go against nature.

Those are the things I expected our Parliamentarians and others to be looking at.

You have men going before certain female magistrates who usually have something against men, especially against African Guyanese men, and they just throw the book at them. When the police picked up the kids, the first charge against them is Robbery Under Arms (RUA) and RUA is a non-bailable offence. Ninety percent of inmates at the Camp Street prison are African Guyanese and we are not 50 percent of the population.

The other issue is with respect to our Social Workers. They hardly get time to come to worship sessions because they are busy working for the country. We would like our people to have the same privileges like those of other religions. For instance, when the Hindu has his “dead work”, he gets time off to attend and so it is with people of other cultures. But we are so cowed and scared to say, “*To hell with the work, I have to do what I have to do,*”—and afterwards to return to work. That appreciation is not shown to us but I guess at some stage we will have to demand it.

Commissioner Mc Doom

Has there been any organized attempt from within the African Guyanese community to get professionals to assist in areas such as medicine, financial consultants, human rights activists, vocational experts, to assist the church? Is there any assistance from any cultural or political organizations to deal with police brutality? Could victims get assistance from a lawyer from an organized group? Is there any such group?

Mr. King

We have connections with ACDA (African Cultural Development Association) who has lawyers that do assist. The PNC/R also has lawyers who avail themselves when necessary.

Commissioner Mc Doom

Is this service free of cost?

Mr. King

Yes. However, what has been happening is that in areas where we could have gotten assistance, most of them were not properly organized and our people figured that they would not have been granted assistance. But right now we are moving in that direction, to become more organized. There is also the issue of what you could call misplaced independence. Where folks felt that why should they go to the Whiteman to get assistance and so on and so you might have some zealots advising in that capacity.

We are in the process of organizing ourselves to capture whatever assistance is out there that we think would be beneficial to our people. We will also work along with any group or individual who is willing to work along with us in the interest of our development. We feel that if we develop, then the nation would also develop.

As I said earlier, if we will accept the Chinese entity, Spanish entity, European entity, Indian and whatever else coming through—and you are accepting all the various religious cultures to which we are not prejudicial, then we should be accepted also—although we find ourselves being the “butt” of prejudicial jokes and practices, and much more so, from within our own community.

Chairman

You said that you are discriminated against because of your culture. For instance, you say that African Guyanese supervisors are objecting to Faithist women wearing head wraps to work, saying that they are not properly attired for work and you are demanding this as your right?

Mr. King

Correct.

Chairman

Do they experience this from Indo Guyanese supervisors?

Mr. King

No. The Indians understand because they wear shalwars and other cultural garments. They understand what it is to be properly dressed.

Chairman

You alluded that this is a class discrimination?

Mr. King

Yes, that is correct. I feel that comes from mis-education. You have to understand our history. One has to be a certain way to be “up there” in society and if you are associated with the people beating the “drums”, it could have either cost you your job or generally your “down fall” from up there. That trend has continued to date.

There is also ignorance of our culture, in the sense that you have been away from your roots so long that you are culturally deprived and you do not understand the relationship with the drums and other aspects of the culture.

Chairman

I noticed your emotional outburst when you spoke about the incarceration of African Guyanese men. You said two things that caught my attention—as if the System is using African Guyanese females, who have grudges, to settle African Guyanese males in the judicial system. Is this something that is being set up through a system?

Mr. King

I would not say that. I would say that it is unfortunate what is happening because you might appear before a female magistrate who has problems with men so without much ado, would throw the book at you. I think that we seriously need to look at that issue.

Chairman

Are you saying from the stand point of the African Guyanese community, that you are having serious concerns about the chances of an African Guyanese getting a fair trial?

Mr. King

Yes, that is what I am saying.

Chairman

You are saying because of the way the system is set up, an African Guyanese man has a very slim chance getting a fair measure of justice when he goes to Court? And that is responsible for a large percentage of African Guyanese in jail?

Mr. King

Yes, that is partly responsible.

Chairman

What are the other factors?

Mr. King

The charges that are leveled against them. For instance, most of them are probably in there for maybe, a few grams of marijuana. These sentences have done a lot of damage to our people.

I would like to bring this aspect to fore also. It is about moving the age of consent for girls, from 13 to 16 years. At that age, early teenage years, where hormones are raging and kids are experimenting, someone might decide to cry foul, and the police are called in but the police are not thinking clearly in the matter and we do not have a system where the situation is properly analyzed, therefore, the male African Guyanese child is quickly thrown into prison. And if his parents do not have money, he will have to stay among criminals.

Chairman

My next question is that you want recognition of some of the Feasts mentioned in the Bible. What do you mean by recognition?

Mr. King

What we need is that our people should be given time off from their jobs in observance of our culture, in the same way other people from other religions are given time off to do what they have to do. If they do not want to make it a national holiday, then let us have the time off to celebrate when necessary.

Chairman

Is that a problem? The Muslims get time off to go to Masjid every Friday. There are holy days in the Hindu calendar that are not national holidays that they get time off to observe, like Navrat. If there is a death in the family and there is a religious function to perform, they get the time off to do so. Are you saying that the Faithist Movement is so misunderstood that they do not get any time off?

Mr. King

Yes.

Chairman

Please give us some examples because this is most interesting.

Mr. King

I am sorry that one of the “Mothers” is not here today because she is somewhere in Wakenaam distributing Pension Books. Many times they missed the Sabbath because they have to work on those days. We are not against working on the Sabbath but to have seminars fixed deliberately for Sabbath days, and when they do not attend, it becomes problematic.

Chairman

This has been happening on Sundays too?

Mr. King

No. They made accommodation for Sundays. We are saying just how you have accommodated the Adventist, accommodation should be made for our people also.

Chairman

Are you saying that the charges leveled against the young African Guyanese male, are trumped up charges by the police?

Mr. King

Yes, because I have seen it over and over again and I even sought your intervention once on such an issue. Children of members of our organization are affected and that is how I know about the RUA charge.

Chairman

Are the policemen African Guyanese, whom you are alleging to have been carrying out these acts?

Mr. King

The majority of the people in the Force are African Guyanese.

Chairman

Why would you have a situation where African Guyanese law enforcement officers would find delight in fabricating charges for young African Guyanese males, to have them incarcerated? What is the plot?

Mr. King

They are probably instructed to do so.

Chairman

By whom?

Mr. King

By their superiors. The army and police take instructions from the “top”.

Chairman

Are you smelling a rat?

Mr. King

I am not smelling a rat.

Chairman

So you are being suspicious?

Mr. King

No, I am not being suspicious. It is happening.

Chairman

Is it a diabolical plot to have African Guyanese males incarcerated?

Mr. King

I would say so.

Chairman

Is that the feeling of the African Guyanese community?

Mr. King

That is what is happening.

Chairman

This is a matter of concern and I do not want us to deal with it emotionally.

Mr. King

I am not being emotional. When you look at it, over 450 African Guyanese men have been killed extra judicially in two years.

Chairman

Do you have evidence of this?

Mr. King

We have the evidence. The Justice for Jermaine Committee has it and I am sorry that I did not walk with the document.

Chairman

I have heard this talk before and I have challenged the gentleman who spoke about it to bring the evidence to me so that we can approach the Commissioner of Police on the matter.

Commissioner Mc Doom

With respect to the statistics concerning the 90 percent incarceration of African Guyanese males, did you say that you received it from the prison officials?

Mr. King

Yes, I got that information from Georgetown prison and the social workers working there would tell us also.

Chairman

Is there a serious break down in the African Guyanese community with respect to criminal activities?

Mr. King

No, this has nothing to do with criminal activities. What I am saying is that if you have laws which can be used to put people who have committed small misdemeanors in places to do social/community related work—instead of incarcerating them with seasoned criminals.

Chairman

This law which imprisoned people for marijuana, which year was it instituted?

Mr. King

That law was instituted by former President, Desmond Hoyte.

Chairman

Do you think that there was a particular reason why the Hoyte's Administration put that law in place? Was it to deliberately incarcerate African Guyanese? Or was it to discourage a particular life style which needed to be reviewed?

Mr. King

I do not know why it was put in place or who it relates to. What I do know is that if it was analyzed properly they would have seen the deleterious effect it would have had on people. Even before 1992 we were crying out that the law was too draconian. The Opinion Leaders and Heads of the Judiciary were people like me—and they encouraged and allowed it. When the new Administration came into power, by way of petition we approached Mr. Jagan to have it reviewed but nothing has been done and now it is working to the advantage of the current Administration. Their people have a security problem so it would be to their advantage to keep these youngsters in jail but this will not solve the problem, only worsen the situation because African Guyanese are being criminalized and upon their release, it would not augur well for the society on the whole.

Chairman

Let me get this straight. You are saying that by criminalizing young African Guyanese males by turning a misdemeanor into a felony, you are not only affecting the African Guyanese community, but the country as a whole?

Mr. King

Yes.

Chairman

So that is part of our security dilemma?

Mr. King

Yes.

Chairman

Thank you very much for your presentation, Mr. King.

THIRD PRESENTER:

REV. REUBEN GILBERT

Rev. Reuben Gilbert

I thank you and the members of this Commission for this opportunity to make my short presentation. I hope it would be beneficial and serves the purpose in the long run.

I have three documents: One deals with the Value Added Tax (VAT), in terms of Old Age Pensions being eaten up by the VAT. (*Append. RG – 7*).

The other document deals with the name by which people of African descent are called Negroes. I seek to show that the name is derogatory and insulting. (*Append. RG 4-6*).

The third document is a letter which I wrote to Mr. Martin Goolsaran, Head of National Communications Network (NCN), Channel 11 television station. This letter deals with NCN refusal to carry programmes that are African in nature. It is more like bias programming. (*Append. RG 1-3*).

I am truly convinced that there is a nexus between indignity and self esteem on the one hand and; crime, counter productive activities and violence on the other. I am saying that there is this strong nexus because if you look at what is currently happening—one people, especially, the young males, you will notice that they have a very serious dilemma. I have observed by way of passing by the Court some mornings that 90 percent of the people being marched to the Court are African Guyanese males. This trend is not only confined to Guyana. I noticed in the USA that out of 6.6 million of incarcerated people, the majority are of African descent.

I feel the media has a responsibility to help in self elevation, developing of consciousness and generally giving our young African Guyanese men a sense of direction. The reason for choosing NCN is because NCN is a public institution and is expected to serve the

whole of Guyana. I will now read the letter I sent to Mr. Goolsaran, dated June 04, 2007. (*Presenter proceeded to read Append. RG 1-3*).

Commissioner Mc Doom

Did you get a response to your letter?

Rev. Gilbert

Not directly, but Mayor Hamilton Green wrote in the newspaper advising that the letter be taken seriously. The letter was also sent to His Excellency, President Bharat Jedgeo; Hon. Robert Corbin, Leader of the Opposition PNC/R and Ms. Violet Jean-Baptiste of ACDA. The others did not respond.

Chairman

If it is true that NCN changed its programming when things African are about to be broadcasted, then that is very disgusting. That has to be investigated. Apart from that being a part of the submission you are making, the ERC will launch an immediate investigation into the programming aspect of NCN. If there is a policy that things African are not to be a part of NCN's network, then we have a serious problem because you have highlighted that things Asia, China and Europe are being broadcasted. We will have to look at these serious issues. We thank you for bringing it to our attention. This is the kind of objectivity we need in society.

What we have in the form of this correspondence, is the first time the ERC since its existence has met an individual who has taken the time to articulate in such specific details, on a particular issue. You have listed date, time and the programme, etc. What you have done is indeed commendable and we thank you so much for your effort.

Rev. Gilbert

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to highlight these issues to the Commission.

FOURTH PRESENTER:

ANDREW WILLIAMS AKA RAS SIMEON

Representative of the Guyana Rastafarian Council and the Rastafarian Community

Mr. Andrew Williams

Good afternoon everyone. On behalf of the Guyana Rastafarian Council (GRC) and the Rastafarian community, I, Ras Simeon am privileged to present before you four pertinent issues with needed to be addressed immediately in order to foster security within the Rastafarian community. For too long the Rastafarian community has been marginalized and victimized.

In accordance with the Functions 4, 17, 20 of Article 212D, we are calling on the ERC to see that the Rastafarian community through the GRC, the only constitutional established organ of the Rastafarians, be given the proper recognition, respect and representation like the other major ethnic, religious and cultural groups.

In accordance with 212D we are asking the ERC to make recommendation to the government, Ministry of Culture, the Private Sector and other relevant bodies that a Rastafarian Development Fund be established to help the Rastafarian community to be economically, socially and politically on par with other groups.

Again, with respect to 212D, we are requesting that the ERC establish a panel inclusive of members of the Rastafarian community to review the Narcotics Act which will prepare and submit a proposal to the National Assembly for consideration.

The fourth request is for the relevant authorities to recognize the Rastafarian community as a religious and cultural organization that must be accorded its rightful place like other cultures and religions.

We have also observed that Christianity has been speaking for the Rastafarian community but we denounce this. We can speak for ourselves. We have shown ourselves worthy of representing our own culture and the ERC has evidence of this.

These are the issues in which the Rastafarian community would appreciate the ERC's intervention so as to bring about change.

Chairman

Is the GRC a registered body?

Mr. Williams

Yes, and the ERC need to take this into account and to know that on these shores there is enough evidence to support the exploitation, marginalization and discrimination of Rastafarians. People are not really knowledgeable about our culture and we have sent letter to the Ministry of Culture asking for dialogue on the issue but we have never received an invitation in this regard. We are appealing to the ERC to help us eradicate this ignorance which surrounds the Rastafarian culture.

Chairman

This Rastafarian Development Fund you mentioned, should this be a State sponsored Fund or is it something from your own community?

Mr. Williams

From the government, private sector and various institutions who are interested in the development of the Rastafarians.

Chairman

This should be a multi partnership approach?

Mr. Williams

Yes.

Chairman

Who do you think should initiate it?

Mr. Williams

We are saying that the ERC could perhaps see to it.

Chairman

We cannot do that. It is not part of our mandate. We cannot promote anybody's culture. We can only protect. We are here to ensure that there are equal opportunities for everyone and respect for everyone's religion and culture. We are not here to promote one culture against another. This is the responsibility of the leadership and the membership to propagate their faith, culture and belief. Our job is to ensure that while they are propagating their faith, that they are not discriminated against, or locked out or anything of that nature. That is why I am asking whether the Fund should be a deliberate State action to bring you on par with other sections of society. This presupposes that you feel that there has been a period when you were disadvantaged and robbed?

Mr. Williams

The security forces and the judicial system have been strangling the Rastafarian community merely for smoking a piece of herb. In our service to the Creator according to the scriptures by which we serve, it is seen clearly as a necessity in our worship. We have been raped and robbed of this financial income which has helped to stabilize the Rastafarian family. It helped to raise our living standards. We also need the support of the Private Sector, the United Nations and other institutions to help us rise above the poverty line.

Commissioner Duncan

I would appreciate if you could expand on two areas: (1) Whether you actually believe that the Rastafarian Faith is discriminated against? (2) What is your rationale for coming to that conclusion?

Mr. Williams

There is enough evidence to show this. For instance, the ERC and the Prison Authorities were in agreement at one time about the issue of our locks which were deemed unhealthy and which were shaved off while in prison.

Chairman

Did we actually agree to that?

Mr. Williams

I have a news article where it states that you said that the Prison Authorities should know whether or not to shave a man's head depending on if his hair poses an unhealthy risk.

Chairman

That is a different story. We also said there that the Laws of Guyana state that to shave a man's head is an assault.

Mr. Williams

There is also a stigma on the Rastafarian community which is a hindrance to them getting proper employment. We need to understand and recognize the good work our people have been doing in this country and not view us in a negative light. Not everyone that has dread locks should be considered a Rastafarian. Our plight has heightened because we do not have a panel or anyone to represent our cause.

Commissioner Duncan

You had a Rastafarian at the highest forum—a Member in Parliament.

Mr. Williams

At that time we were not an organized group and therefore, could not have utilized the services of that individual.

Commissioner Sampson

I do not think that the particular individual was actually a representative of the Rastafarian community, he was more like a member of a political party.

I just need to comment on this issue. The Constitution of Guyana talks about freedom of religion and the 1980 Constitution was written under the Burnham's Administration. I do not remember the name of the community, but at the back of Roxanne Burnham Gardens, Mr. Burnham gave a group of Rastafarians that area which they utilized for farming purposes and many of them actually settled there.

With respect to freedom of worship that is enshrined in the constitution, you have a right to worship, therefore I see no reason why you should not be allowed to do what you have to do. However, when it comes to the "weed" that is another matter because you have to deal with the Narcotics Act and it is the business of the lawmakers to handle that issue.

Mr. Williams

So what can the ERC do concerning Rastafarian culture on these shores knowing that the sacramental use of the herb is a part of I and I service to the Most High? We would like the ERC to know that the Rastafarian community is knowledgeable about the fact that this Institution was set up to ensure that we are not pushed aside.

Chairman

I know that this is a matter you have raised before with the President, in the presence of the ERC. However, we cannot ask for that on your behalf. What we can do is to probably ask for a review of the Act in question—but our power ends with a recommendation to the National Assembly.

Commissioner Willems

What you need to do to substantiate your request is to provide supporting documents/evidence, whereby it is a proven fact that the use of marijuana is an essential

aspect of your worship. This will have a more profound effect on the Parliamentary Committee.

Chairman

Something of the nature of your Code of Belief. You have been referring to the Functions of the ERC so I just want to point you to No. 11, where it states that we are to *monitor and review all legislations and all administrative acts or omissions relating to, or having implications for ethnic relations or equal opportunities and from time to time prepare and submit proposals for the revision of such administrative acts or omissions.*

So under No. 11 we can only facilitate your request for a review of the Narcotics Act. However, what we need from the GRC is to make a case that the Rastafarian community is being discriminated against, and that you are not having an equal opportunity because an important part of your worship requires the use of marijuana and the law prevents you from using this substance. Therefore, you are stymied in your worship. You will need to make a strong case and we will have our legal people look at the legislation and make recommendations.

Of course, you need to remember that it is not only Rastafarians are held for using marijuana. To use your term, there are a lot of bald heads too who are being held for using it.

You explained to me that when the GRC held its conference at the President's College, you were able to worship and use your sacrament unmolested. You were also requesting of me to provide a similar facility on another occasion, which I have no powers to guarantee.

I think with the issues here, we need to be careful when we discuss marijuana as a sacrament in the use of worship and the use of marijuana as a vice in society that leads to a lot of negative things because with the use of marijuana as a vice/addictive substance,

will probably have other sections of society up in arms against the Rastafarian community. Therefore, you need to be careful how you articulate your request.

What you are asking needs to be properly analyzed. For instance, if you are worshipping as a community and using marijuana as part of your worship and a policeman comes in and raid the temple, it can be viewed differently from a man who is sitting on a bridge smoking a joint or someone in a minibus trying to sell it to the school children to make a hustle/raise.

These issues need to be contextualized. You are operating in a society that has a law and that law has affected your culture and religion therefore, you need to produce the compelling evidence that the law has been used to harass and suppress your worship, activities and the propagating of your faith as against a control mechanism in the wider society.

I thank you very much for you contribution and look forward to your further submissions.

FIFTH PRESENTER:

MR. HAMLEY CASE

Chairman

Mr. Hamley Case you have given us a written submission of Globe Trust but I am not sure that all the commissioners are clear on the issues raised. You have also asked for a particular action to be taken, which relates to the extension of time for the closing of a particular deal which deadline is November 30, 2007. I would like you to tell us what are the implications here for the African Guyanese community and why you feel so strongly about it.

Mr. Hamley Case

Thank you Mr. Chairman. In order to do so, I need to give a little history of Globe Trust. In 2001, Globe Trust operations were suspended with GUY\$825M of depositors' money being held in limbo. That money is still floating around somewhere in space. It has not been repaid.

Chairman

Is it missing?

Mr. Case

It is not missing.

Chairman

Is it in an account somewhere?

Mr. Case

What I mean is that it is not available for distribution. The closure of Globe Trust was always intended to be temporary because it had not liquidity to pay its depositors. That situation has been endured for four to six years.

An Administrator was subsequently appointed in the person of Mr. Conrade Plummer who drew up a plan called “The Way Forward”. It is a plan to reorganized Globe Trust. The plan was approved by the Court and the Bank of Guyana and he then set about to look for a strategic investor.

The problem that Globe Trust had originally was that it had breached several sections of the Financial Institution Act (FIA). One such breach was that it granted unsecured loans in excess of 2 percent of its capital base. There is a banking police where you can only grant unsecured loans within the limit of your 2 percent capital base. The bank exceeded that. In the banking institutions of Guyana it is said that all banks have done this but I cannot prove it. I understand that it is a common practice.

The other breach was that it included interest income on non-performing accounts. That is, the interest it should have earned on non-performing accounts was included in its annual account. Obviously, this was done to give the impression that there was more liquidity, than in fact, there were.

It had a loan portfolio at the time of \$1B and over \$826M was non-performing. That was also a breach of the FIA.

These breaches were raised by Globe Trust auditors in the 1999 account which was sent to Central Bank. The Bank of Guyana took absolutely no action for about three years, after which they called in Globe Trust for a Hearing on the matter—and then suspended its operations.

That is basically in a nutshell, how the problem originated.

I am not an expert on these issues but I was advised by the Administrator that Globe Trust was perceived as an African bank. There are 5,000 depositors with this bank and the vast majority (95-98%) is Afro Guyanese.

Chairman

You are saying that a Trust with 95 to 98 percent African Guyanese money is being held in limbo?

Mr. Case

Yes. Globe Trust is in the process of being reorganized and there are three strategic investors but none has signed on the dotted line because they all have to do what is called Due Diligence. I just need to give you an idea of the scope of the operation. It was not merely an institution for depositing money. It initiated a credit programme with the Commonwealth Youth Programmed Initiative which obviously had a social aspect that was very important for the young people of Guyana. In fact, it had made a very strong investment in youth.

As I said earlier, three investors are in discussions with the Administrator and they have reached a stage where they want to begin the Due Diligence process. This means that they want to check on the information that they have received from the Administrator with respect to the bank's assets, liabilities, the type of business it did, its image in Guyana, and so on. Basically, to see that what it says about itself, is true.

Now, just as the three companies were about to start that process, the Bank of Guyana set November 30, 2007 as a deadline for proposals to be submitted. The fact is, Due Diligence is part of a process leading to the formulating of a proposal to invest in the bank. Without Due Diligence, you really do not know what you are buying. It is kind of like buying a pig in a bag, as the saying goes.

What has happened is that at one stage the investors were informed that they had 2½ weeks to carry out this lengthy process and one of the potential investors was about to send a team of people because they did not want to use established Guyanese firms—they wanted their own people—they were just about to do this when they were told that the whole exercise has to be wrapped up in 2½ weeks. The Administrator said that no extension is possible—and he has maintained that position.

I do not understand the reason for that and this is where I am hoping that you would be able to investigate and find out why it has to be done on this specific date—and why no extension.

Chairman

Is there someone earmarked and who has done their Due Diligence?

Mr. Case

I have no idea.

Chairman

If there is a reorganizing and you have three persons who could not complete the process in 2½ weeks, is there someone who wants to see this thing fail or it be given to someone else? What is your suggestion?

Mr. Case

I understand that there is no one who is ready to put a firm offer on this thing. The alternative would be that Globe Trust be liquidated and just disappear off the face of Guyana. The unfortunate thing is, those 5,000 depositors will never get their money if that happens. I understand also that the proposals are based on depositors getting back most of their savings, if not all. However, if it becomes liquidated, there will be nothing for anyone. Whether that could be a motive for the Due Diligence time factor, I honestly do not know.

Chairman

Are other depositors made aware of this?

Mr. Case

It has not been made public. I got this information from the Administrator about 1½ weeks ago.

Chairman

It would be good if we can get a petition from some of the depositors because one person asking through the ERC for an extension, would that be enough? Someone could say that you are looking after your personal interest.

Mr. Case

Is you were to put it in a similar context as I have done in this letter, they will understand that it has repercussions for the Afro Guyanese community. It is definitely not a one man issue. We are talking about life savings and pensions that are held in deposits there. It is unfair that people would not be able to have access to that money any longer. It is a very serious matter and part of the reason why the Administrator has not made it public is because it will make a lot of Black people unhappy which might escalate into an unhealthy situation.

Commissioner Willems

I cannot understand why it has not been made public for stakeholders' participation.

Mr. Case

Do you mean the Administrator or the Bank of Guyana?

Commissioner Willems

The Bank of Guyana. This should have been made public where everyone involved would get an opportunity to express a view.

Mr. Case

I do not think that is how the Central Bank operates. I get the impression that there is a clandestine approach to the whole thing because they only informed the Administrator recently about the deadline for the proposals.

Commissioner Duncan

Do you know if the investors are in Guyana?

Mr. Case

I understand that they are here.

Commissioner Duncan

Why I asked, I received a letter with the names of the investors and it says that as soon as the matter is crystallized, they will inform us. So I do not understand how they now arrived at November 30 as the deadline.

Chairman

That is the time period given by the Bank of Guyana for the Due Diligence to be completed?

Mr. Case

Due Diligence is only part of a process, but it is the main part.

Commissioner Duncan

This process started about five to six months ago. The question is, why was the Due Diligence not done?

Mr. Case

I think part of the reason is that there is the flow of information that takes ages and then it has to be understood. As far as I am aware, that process has been going on for many months. The way investors operate, when they have all the information they believe they need, then they move to the next stage which is to have a Due Diligence done by a firm of auditors—by a company or by their own people. These things take time to complete.

Chairman

Let us go to the heart of the matter. It is your belief that if the November 30 deadline to be met, none of the three investors would be in the position to offer a strategic plan for the reorganizing of Globe Trust and the only alternative would be the liquidation of the

Trust—which would mean economic disenfranchisement of a large percentage of Black people? Is that your case?

Mr. Case

That is correct.

Chairman

If that is the case then we would have to ask for an extension of the November 30 deadline to some reasonable time frame. Maybe another 30 days or so and the reason for this is that we do not want economic disenfranchisement of a large group of people because of some administrative bureaucracy that would have failed a group of people. It is interesting to note that a large percentage of the depositors are African Guyanese. Was that a deliberate policy of the Trust?

Mr. Case

I was trying to find out how that came about. I am not sure if it is because there was some relationship with the Coop Bank. It could have been the management—and Black people just gravitated towards it. I am not sure of the reason.

Chairman

You said that in 1999 the auditors' report showed irregularities in its operations and it took the Central Bank three years to mount an investigation. So what was the reason for that? Were they just waiting to see it fall?

Mr. Case

I really have no idea.

Commissioner Sampson

According to what you are saying about the Due Diligence, this process appears to have not started—so would one month be enough?

Mr. Case

My sentiments exactly, especially with the Christmas season right around the corner. I can see that the Bank of Guyana wants to wrap it up in 2007, but do not ask me why.

Chairman

Do you know any of the investors?

Mr. Case

I know one of them.

Chairman

Have you been talking to them? Would they give you an idea of how much time they need to complete this process? Of course, not in terms of giving one advantage over the other. I think what we would want to do is to have the Governor of Central Bank in consultations about this.

It is a potential area of conflict which we do not need at this time. People of African descent and money do not go too well together and when the “word” hits the road that you stand to lose \$825M, some of us might just want value where they think the money is, and ensure that if they do not get it, others should not have it either. We would need to speak with the Governor on this issue.

Mr. Case

I asked Christopher Ram & Co. how long it would take them to do a Due Diligence on Globe Trust because they were involved from the inception, they responded that it would take them about a month.

The investor that I am in touch with does not want to use Ram and Associates, they prefer their own people and it means that it will take longer because they would be feeling their way through.

Chairman

So what is your request?

Mr. Case

I would say that three months is a reasonable time frame for the process to be completed.

Chairman

This is an extension from the November 30 deadline?

Mr. Case

Yes.

Chairman

Of course, if the Governor refuses to extend the deadline, he will have to provide grounds for doing so. There might be some sort of regulation in terms of statutes—barring making declarations after a certain time. Maybe this deadline is probably to protect the depositors because if it comes after, it might cause the depositors to lose their money because of the time factor.

Mr. Case

I had put that question to the Administrator and he was not aware of any such regulation/rule to that effect.

Chairman

Maybe you still need to find out more. All interests have to be protected here and we just cannot hold a narrow view.

Mr. Case

I agree with you.

Commissioner Duncan

Do you think this rigidity by the Bank of Guyana has something to do with the promise Globe Trust has made in the past—that they will find investors and have the matter resolved? This is not the first time they are talking about investment.

Mr. Case

I have likened the situation to the “Bridge” issue. Look how long the government has been talking about the Bridge. Then there is also the Hydro-electricity business. What I am saying is that the problem lies in actually getting an investor to invest in Guyana. I can write a book on it.

Commissioner Duncan

These are not the first set of investors who have indicated their interest in Globe Trust. There were others before now.

Mr. Case

The problem is that most of the investors want to buy Globe Trust minus the depositors and their attitude is that you do whatever you want with the depositors, they are not our problem. That is why no deal has been done to date.

Chairman

So the Bank of Guyana has always acted in the interest of the depositors so far?

Mr. Case

Those proposals have not reached the Bank of Guyana as yet. The Administrator has not forged ahead with those deals because investors did not take into consideration the 5,000 depositors that would be out of their pockets.

Chairman

What in your view, would happen if these 5,000 depositors lose their money?

Mr. Case

As I said, if I had my pension in there and it was arbitrarily taken away from me—and I would consider a date for closing off proposals, to be arbitrary, unless you give me some very good reason, I would be very annoyed. What I would do with that annoyance, I do not know.

Chairman

I know there is big conference going on right now with the Caribbean Association of Bankers at the Le Meridian, Pegasus. We will attempt to make contact with the Governor of the Bank of Guyana, Mr. Williams, tomorrow morning (Wednesday, November 15, 2007). Once we make contact with him, we will see what the implications are and what can be done about the issue. We cannot promise anything at this point in time but what we can certainly ensure is that the matter is sorted out in a manner that would not lead to conflict—which could result from the economic disenfranchisement of a large amount of depositors. These depositors are no doubt thrifty Blacks because not all Blacks can save.

Commissioner Mc Doom

Could you say what is your connection with Globe Trust? Are you just representing African Guyanese interest?

Mr. Case

I am just representing African Guyanese interest.

Chairman

Are you a depositor?

Mr. Case

I am a depositor but with only \$10,000.00.

Chairman

You are being very moderate.

Mr. Case

And that is through ACDA.

Chairman

So why are they not engaged in getting ...?

Mr. Case

You are asking me some questions I cannot respond to.

Commissioner Mc Doom

You said that there is \$1B in loans and \$825M not performing, does this mean that they were not paying any interest on the loans?

Mr. Case

Yes, and probably principal as well. They were not making any repayments.

Commissioner Mc Doom

Do you know what proportion of this is secured?

Mr. Case

I would not be able to say.

Chairman

Do you know what percentage of the borrowers are African Guyanese?

Mr. Case

I cannot say, I only know that they make up the majority of depositors.

Chairman

Somebody had to borrow this money.

Mr. Case

I think there were a handful of heavy borrowers rather than a large number of small borrowers.

Chairman

Is there a class problem there, where the upper class misused the small class people's money? With these consultations we have been finding that within the African Guyanese community, apart from pointing to another ethnic group as the demons that are oppressing them, they are all saying that it is our own people in the class structure that are responsible for their problems.

Mr. Case

I do not know about the class structure. All I can say is that it was probably the entrepreneurial class that borrowed the money.

Chairman

I think we must respect the fact that Globe Trust was a good effort but it failed for some reason and we must protect the interest of the depositors.

Thank you very much Mr. Case, we appreciate your contributions.

Mr. Case

My pleasure. Thank you.

SIXTH PRESENTER:

MR. LENNOX KING (On the issue of Contracts)

Mr. Lennox King

My presentation is with respect to the award of contracts. Prior to 1992 the construction industry in Guyana took a nose dive because of the state of the economy of the 1980s. There was a down turn of activities due to a reduction of the housing drive, lack of foreign exchange, restriction on importation and the requirement of licensing, etc.

Capital works such as roads and institutional buildings were ceased and in some cases nonexistent—and when carried out, they were done by State entities such as Guyconstruct and Ministry of Works. A few local contractors like Ideal Builders, Nabi & Sons, Raymond Brothers, Harry Persaud, Carlton Ambrose, etc., shared the other works.

Government projects at that time were not that lucrative because contractors, many times had to be carrying a heavy burden on their over draft facilities and government took a long time to pay them. This necessitated the utilization of the overdraft facilities at high interest rates. This situation was compounded when the Hoyte's Administration arbitrarily raised interest rate above 20 percent, literally bankrupting many contractors with large overheads.

The closure of the very viable and successfully capable Guyconstruct which has drawn resources from the beleaguered Bauxite Company in Linmine, was a travesty.

In the new dispensation there was not provision for the meaningful participation of local contractors in the rehabilitation of new infrastructural work as was expected to be given after the 1992 elections.

Tender procedures were tailored to disqualify local contractors. Representations were made to the Hoyte's Administration to retool set procedures so as to allow for locals to

compete. This was not successful. In fact, Mr. Hoyte said plainly that we ought to work as subcontractors.

After the 1992 elections, representation was again to the new Administration—with positive results—but negative for African Guyanese contractors. Positive in the sense that Tender procedures were re-tooled but what happened, was that new contracting companies were created and these companies had no track record. Many of the older companies could not compete because they could not meet the IRD or NIS requirements because of past problems created by the economic downturn.

Contractors who were given jobs found themselves being the victims of deliberate valuation manipulation which affect their cash flows. For example, in 1998 a contractor approached Mrs. Jagan because he was not getting any work and he was allowed to build the St. Angela's School. He was bankrupted because "the guy" manipulated his valuations and pushed him over the brink. So even though the Authority might have moved in to assist, the guys within the system are messing you up.

There is also the problem where the lowest Tender is given out after which they work with the consultant to readjust the prices while that contractor is on the job.

Yesterday, November 13, 2007 a colleague of mine was at GWI, one of the worst corporation in the country. I have had personal interactions with them and I have been robbed blind. They are continuing with the process of awarding the lowest Tenders with a score rate of 50 percent. I am very concerned about Mr. Karran Singh whom I have had dealings with, and I say this publicly. I had been assisting as a subcontractor on a contract and we were just pulled from the job. The insurance company made a claim and we did not know about it until they took us to Court for the money. We had to pay the company and GWI refused to pay us. The matter was taken to Court. We won the case and Mr. Giddings, the contractor, decided to levy on the equipment for his money. Guyana Water Inc. lodged money in the Court but decided to appeal the case. They still owe us half of a million dollars and all this happened because a friend of Mr. Karran

Singh did not get the job. This is the kind of frustration we have been experiencing and it has forced us from a marginalized position to an exclusion situation.

In the past it was difficult for the average person to obtain credit facilities to help their businesses to expand. The advent of the GNCB facilitated credits but these institutions eventually lost their way for various reasons. Some key banking officials and political figures use these banks to control clients who might have fallen out of favour for various reasons.

With the advent of the ERP and the expectations of the dawning of a new era, approaches were made to the various administrations. We approach the PPP Administration and made recommendations in terms of equipment. We said that some of the expensive, technical equipment that we do not have in the country; let the government bring them in and have it as a pool where the contractors could rent or lease these equipment to do the work which would have increased the capacity because we had the skill but not the technical capacity due to stagnation of the economy for a long period, but the government would not entertain such thought.

As I said, when you looked at what has happened, after 15 years, we are seeing the results of a deliberate destruction of the key financial institutions – Mortgage Finance Bank, Agri Bank, GNCB and the divestment of GNCB trust and Coop insurance—those were lucrative entities. In fact, the total accumulated bad debts at GNCB were under \$1B. This was due to the fact that many African Guyanese contractors had owed, because of the previous Administration owing then and they were carrying these debt burdens. The Hoyte's Administration had promised to do a debt forgiveness after the 1992 election. He never did because the PPP came into power and this Administration lent one man \$800M⁺ unsecured loans, an Indian business man in the rice industry.

Then they decided to sell off GNCB. Most of the money at GNCB was African Guyanese's money. And if you were to check, the majority of the borrowers were Indian businessmen but nobody knew that. Most of the bad debts by farmers, were given as

loans against state land and equipment. When the government decided to seize things, most of the stuff is no good, either rotten or scrapped and on the other hand you run into state land. The average African Guyanese who got a loan, had to pawn everything to pay back.

I will tell you something from experience. If you have a million dollars to carry out a project, the standard banking procedure says that you are allowed 25 to 30% more. The average African Guyanese entrepreneur was forced to accept less than what those proposals were. You want to succeed but in many cases your back is against the wall. You accept less than what was necessary for you. So you started as a failure. Many people do not know that and many others do not want accept that.

These were African Guyanese who Burnham put in key positions in these financial institutions to help their own people but instead, they kill them. Then they turn and said that the African Guyanese do not know how to do business.

The situation for the past two decades has been taking place with the full approval of the International Institutions. All of the programmes that we have been pursuing have been done with their assistance. The “civil servants” of these institutions have been involved in a lot of corrupt practices—the stone scam, etc. What they are doing, I do not know, but they are assisting in carrying out policies that are detrimental to our people.

Here we have a situation where you have asked for a pool of equipment to work for everyone but the government decided that they will give contractors “where-withal” to bring in what they could. But what do you have? A ton of scrap metals are being imported. Most of those accidents on the Linden highway are caused by malfunctioning equipment. These accidents are cause by the aged scrap metals people are bringing into the country, so as to make a ‘buck’. The most capital intensive industry in this country is the timber industry. But you cannot bring in ten-year-old scraps and expect them to perform well.

What has happened is that you have opened the economy for a lot of “shop keepers”, money launderers and drug lords to get into the industry. They have gotten into the construction industry, in a big way.

That is why most of these buildings are either floating away or collapsing. Some contractors draw 80% of the money up front then they disappear because they have certain connections.

As a result of this many of the skilled people are leaving the country and when this happens our community becomes impoverished.

We are asking for the equitable distribution of contracts based on the following criteria – capacity, ability, etc.—everyone should be getting a favourable piece of the pie. Here we are talking about affirmative action and the President has to ensure that a section of the people who are being marginalized are not marginalized any longer, if he is really considering us.

All that is wrong in the Constitutions can be righted, like what was done with respect to the Amerindians—and the ERC can help in this respect—make adjustments and let us have a leveled and fair playing field. We are also asking for reasonable credit facilities that that been denied us.

Chairman

I need a few answers. When you said that there was deliberate destruction of key financial institutions, who did this destruction?

Mr. King

The present Administration.

Chairman

When you said deliberate destruction, what do you mean?

Mr. King

Privatized and closed down. Mortgage Finance Bank was closed. GNCB was sold out and GNCB was not in financial difficulties. GNCB Trust and Co-op Insurance were divested.

Chairman

You also said that the Tender procedures were tailored to prevent locals from being awarded contracts.

Mr. King

Yes.

Chairman

We have heard repeatedly that the lending agencies such as the Inter American Development Bank and Caribbean Development Bank are the ones who have set out the prequalification criteria.

Mr. King

That is not true. You as the borrower, can determine what criteria you subscribe to. The PPP Administration under Cheddi Jagan did it, and they also created new companies which forced the old contractors out.

Commissioner Mc Doom

I must say that Rev. Gilbert gave the best example of how marginalization can be proven but the approach that you have used, I am afraid that there is no machinery for anybody to take account of. I recommend that you follow the route of Rev. Gilbert and come through with your proof. The other way, using the “broad brush” method will not work much. You need specific proof of discrimination and bring it to us and we will work from there.

Mr. King

I accept your position. You will get a formal complaint and the people who have been affected will speak also.

Chairman

Thank you very much Mr. King.

DAY THREE
Thursday, November 15, 2007

ATTENDEES:

ERC: Chairman Bishop Juan Egill	–	Christian Community
Commissioner Carvil Duncan	-	Trades Union Congress
Commissioner Cheryl Sampson	-	Women’s Organization
Commissioner Shahabudeen Mc Doom	-	Muslim Community
Commissioner L. John P. Willems	-	Private Sector Commission

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PRESENTERS:

Ms. Tessa Greene
Ms. Pamela Joseph
Ms. Joan King
Mr. George Daniels

OTHERS:

Members of the public

FIRST PRESENTERS:

MS. TESSA GREENE - Public Education Officer

MS. PAMELA JOSEPH – Community Representative

MS. JOAN KING – Community Representative/Business Woman

(They are all residents of Tucville)

Ms. Tessa Greene

We wish to highlight two major concerns regarding the community of Tucville. One has to do with the lack of street lighting and two; there is a dire need for a community centre or building of that sort in the area.

With respect to the street lighting, Tucville comprised of four blocks and there are hardly any street lights in the four blocks to give residents a sense of security when they go into the area at nights. Recently we have had some minor robberies where a few residents have been relieved of their cell phones, etc. Mothers, are however, worried about their girl children who are pursuing tertiary and other levels education and who have to return to home late in the evening because of classes.

Some time ago residents of Gibson Street pooled their resources and bought some bulbs and had Guyana Power & Light (GPL) install same. Those are still there but only one is functioning. All the other lamp posts are without lights and in the nights, it is very dark in there. The only time we have lights, is when there is a football match being played in the area and the spotlights are on. When the football season is over, the area is soon returned to darkness. We are asking through the ERC whether the authorities responsible could give us lights in that area.

The other issue is to do with the community centre. We have a ground in the area which is basically used for football and sometimes other community activities (fund raisers). We were wondering whether a building/community centre could be erected there. There are two reasons for wanting this building:-

We have noticed an increase in dysfunctional families—juvenile delinquents and all the negativities affecting the family unit these days. We were thinking that the cooperative efforts of the citizens of the area who are good and positive role models can assist in holding workshops. These workshops will not only be targeting the educational aspect, but the over all welfare of the individual, including health issues—physical and mental—domestic violence, etc. We propose to target adult males and females, and children in this exercise. We have plans, what we need is a venue. In terms of furnishing, we can assist with that through fund raising activities and donations.

There is also a problem with drainage in the area. We know that the City Council is cash strapped and they are only collecting \$1.6B when they need \$2B but we really need some work to be done in the area. Some of the residents are trying their bit but help is needed from the City. We have gotten our roads after 35 years and we are pleased with that—good roads. What we need are street lights and a community centre.

Ms. Pamela Joseph

Originally that football field was earmarked for residents, to be used by the residents of Tucville. Children used to go and play there whenever they want to, but somewhere along the line it fell to different owners. We are not too sure how that happened

Chairman

Children are not allowed to play there now?

Ms. Joseph

The gates are kept locked unless there is a match; or sometimes the young boys would just scale the fence to gain entry.

Chairman

So it is not a community centre?

Ms. Joseph

No. It is not accessible to us as a community as we would wish.

Commissioner Sampson

I am not too sure but I think Telecoms at one time had control of it and I think someone subsequently built a concrete fence around it. Who controls it now?

Ms. Joseph

I was told that there is a group there who controls it through the football authority. There is someone else who was supposed to be here. She has a shop just at the junction and she is more au fait with what is taking place in the area. I am not sure who is in charge of the games but there is a young man living two corners away who at one time was in charge.

Chairman

Bottom line is, you have a ground that is only used for football and you would like to have a centre built in there?

Ms. Greene

Yes. It has adequate space to accommodate a centre. Having the centre would be a positive thing for the community. We were thinking about a building whether flat or with two stories, like the usual community centers around—not a building with just a pavilion.

Chairman

You are highlighting that there is a positive approach to self help activities in the community? You have a history of that?

Ms. Joseph

Yes.

Chairman

Who did the roads?

Ms. Greene

Courtney Benn Construction through the Mayor and City Council. However, prior to that we pooled our resources and we got some left over stuff from construction of the East Bank road with which we used to build Gibson Street.

Commissioner Mc Doom

How much was that? One-tenth of the area?

Ms. Greene

Probably less than that.

Commissioner Mc Doom

I congratulate you ladies on your initiative. What you are doing, everybody should be doing all over the world. You have a community—you have your children coming home from school at nights—you get up and try and help yourselves, but I agree with you that you should get some help also. Have you ever approached SIMAP because that is their function? If you could come together and organize yourselves and approach the chairman of your local authority for assistance to build the roads and bridges that might help. Have you ever approached them?

Ms. Greene

No.

Commissioner Mc Doom

Maybe you should do so.

Commissioner Sampson

I understand that SIMAP is on the verge of going out of existence.

Commissioner Mc Doom

I did not know that. Anyway, what I recommend is that whatever you are doing for your community, you must continue to do the same. However, you need to form yourselves into a group/organization so if anyone wants to help your community the proceeds will go to representative body. Even if you have a dedicated community centre you will have to put it in someone's name. For example, places like Malteenos, etc., have Trustees that the government gave a lease to and they represent the people. So you have to make yourselves "representable"—into some form of formal organization, with membership and run by a Council. I encourage you to set up some sort of Tucville Residents' Association. These things have to start in a small way and once you make a start, you will create the means of assistance from others.

Chairman

There are two things I want to address. The street lights that you bought and were installed by GPL—people seem to be doing that quite often. I know of other areas where people have done it but then it becomes the "bill" of the City Council because they have to pay for the electricity utilized. You were not disconnected or anything of that nature?

Ms. Greene

Actually street lights were there for awhile now but the majority were non-functioning so all we did were to replace some of the bulbs because as I said, the lamps were already there. We also had some of the lamp shades cleaned.

Chairman

Now you asking for street lights in other parts of the community?

Ms. Joseph

Yes. On the main road—where you come into Meadow Brook, by Go Slow Avenue. We are worried about the main road because there is a playground there and there is no light for that large block. It is a bit risky at nights.

Chairman

The issue of the building of the community centre—it there another building within the area that can be utilized for the purpose—whether State owned, community owned or any thing else that you know of?

Ms. Greene

None that I know of.

Chairman

There is a Youth Choice building in Lodge. How far away is it from Tucville?

Ms. Greene

From Tucville, it is about 15 minutes walking distance.

Chairman

Could you not take some of your programmes there while you are waiting for your own building?

Ms. Greene

Yes we could do that.

Chairman

I would suggest that to be your short term gap. You start some of your programmes there because that building which is just at the back of Mr. Hamilton Green, appears to be often locked up.

Ms. Greene

Could you assist us with a contact person for the building?

Chairman

I think you should speak with Mr. Allan Hill just down the street. I do not think that the building is adequately utilized and that is becoming a problem in the country where we construct buildings at people's request and after a while because of no sustainability, the programmes are not used.

The other thing I wanted to suggest if you do not want to use this building, there are schools in the area you could use. Our schools in Guyana are the most under-utilized properties in this country. We spend five hours a day at an institution that cost \$215M to construct and millions more are spent in maintenance costs—to only be in use for five hours per day. I have traveled the world over and I have observed that when school hours are over at 3 o' clock—the university extension centre takes over. Private organizations would use a part of it for keep fit programmes, etc. There many other things a school could be used for after normal school hours. We have many school buildings that we do not use.

A school building should be considered as a community building. I hope that I can get across that thinking to the majority of Guyanese—that where we have a school we already have a community building—the school is owned by the community. I know some Head teachers have developed an attitude in this regard but I am saying that a sufficient number of people need to walk into that school and say to the school's Head that there is a school building here that is not being fully utilized and we need a room to accommodate about 50 people to conduct training exercises on empowering women. If the Head should say that the people will destroy the furniture then that Head should be told in no uncertain terms that he/she is not interested in the welfare of the community.

The school has a wood working class that finishes at 3 o' clock. We could use the same facilities after school hours to train out of school youths. The school might have an auditorium where community meeting could be held. But when the Head locks the gates and leave after school nothing else can be done.

This group approach has to start somewhere, not necessarily in Tucville. I have heard people complaining that they do not have the facilities—and need a building. When you talk about constructing a building in Tucville, you are talking about \$15M to \$20M. Next you will hear that they do not have budgetary allocations for that and you will have to wait until 2010. And there you have a school in your community.

Ms. Greene

It is presently under repairs.

Commissioner Sampson

To get to use the school you may have to get permission from the Department of Education or the Regional Education Office or from some other office.

Chairman

But that is still cheaper than \$20M.

Commissioner Sampson

That is true but there is so much red tape.

Chairman

I think it is something that we will have to bring to the attention of the Central Government, on how communities could utilize facilities within communities to benefit the people of the communities.

Commissioner Mc Doom

The point I want to make is, that if you go to the Head of the school and you say to him or her that you would like to have a room to hold meetings every Tuesday from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., you would need to do so as a group. That is why the first step you need to take is to organize and have someone as a leader who you would have elected to represent your interests and then approach the Head of the school. I agree with the

Chairman that to have underutilized facilities in the community it is a waste of money—and this country is very poor.

Chairman

When I went to Columbia for the first time, in Bogota, the Sunday morning I was going to Church and I noticed that the main thoroughfare was blocked off. You could not have driven through there and I was made to understand that happened every Sunday because there are no public spaces. Therefore, the children came out to play and the people in wheel chairs came out to exercise and so forth.

In comparison, we are so blessed in Guyana. Often times what we look for, is to duplicate what is already there. I would want to advocate through your presentation and included in my report as well, that there needs to be more involvement of the community in the utilization of public buildings already established in the community rather than to think that there is the need another building.

Ideally, that community school should have a Boys Scout; a Girls Guide; IDCE training; remedial learning in the afternoon and so on. One must be able to play football or basketball on its grounds. If a women’s group want to meet, they must be able to do so. It must be a place for the community to meet. If the young fellows want to “knock” some dominoes, then they must be able to do so. If not, the police would pick them up at the street corner. I am afraid that sometimes some police officers do not really understand that the fellows do not have anywhere to go and “lime”—so they would “lime” at the corner. When they are found at the corner, the police interpret it to mean that they are bandits or vagrants, and they are picked up. The fact that they are “liming” on the street corner also presents a nuisance to passers-by because some of the wicked ones among them might grab a cell phone or some piece of valuable. That is why I think the school should be accessible for community activities.

Ms. Greene

I agree, but school Heads are not too keen on the idea.

Chairman

I think it has to do with taking care of school property/facilities. School officials are concerned that due care would not be taken in terms of ensuring that school facilities are taken care of properly because some activities could lead to the destruction of the school furniture, etc. Maybe if the group could take responsibility for the facilities, and maybe put some revenue into the school's coffer then the idea might be acceptable to the school. Is there anything else you want to add?

Ms. Greene

This is Ms. Joan King. She is the other person I was telling you about.

Ms. Joan King

I am one of the community representatives and most times the football ground is locked up and inaccessible.

Chairman

Is there any movement/community development group?

Ms. King

We started as a group and approached the custodians of the ground but our efforts to actually make some form of representation for the community were stifled and ignored by one of the custodians. So we decided to let it go.

Chairman

We have been hearing at the Commission, and I do not know if that is your experience, but many of the complaints coming from the African Guyanese community have shown that great many of the hindrances are coming from the African Guyanese themselves. Are you finding it to be so?

Ms. King

Yes.

Chairman

I find that to be is a disturbing feature because when I am listening to the political discourse and so on

Ms. King

In our community they are the majority.

Chairman

The particular point I am making is, while the issues that we are talking about for development and progress, and the issues that we should be looking at to make our society better—for example, you are saying that there are all kinds of unwanted activities in the area—and if we have more of the petty crimes—this could eventually lead to bigger crimes. Continuous reporting to the Police Station could develop into an attitude by the police, that when they go into the area, they would go with blazing guns. Somebody's son is going to get killed—I can prophesy that—it will happen. The innocent might be killed. Then we will have a protest.

Here is group of people who have expressed their concerns for the community. You spoke on three issues: Improved security through adequate street lighting. You have a history of self help which is commendable and which, as you say is continuing.

Ms. King

I put up a street light there already. I bought the pole, lamp and bulb. The thing is, we have a more severe problem in the area where there are lots of children home during school hours. There are also two big gambling rings there and even parents are involved in the gambling.

Chairman

These gambling rings are owned by residents? African Guyanese residents who have African Guyanese children there?

Ms. King

Yes. Sometimes the parents are in it as well?

Chairman

The parents are in it?

Ms. King

Yes. Sometimes the parents are there seeing their children gambling.

Chairman

Have reports been made to the police?

Ms. King

No. I wanted to do so once but the child told me that gambling is legal.

Chairman

I know casino gambling is legal.

Ms. King

That is how they believed it to be legal.

Chairman

Could you give us the addresses of the gambling houses? The Ministry of Education has a truancy campaign and we could ask them to assist in the situation.

Ms. Greene

It can be found through Go Slow Avenue.

Ms. King

There is another one through Bamboo Drive.

Chairman

Somebody who owns the gambling establishment is making some quick money, right? So they are not concerned with the destruction of the children. Since I travel a lot I know of some states in the US where, if you are selling marijuana, and you are caught, you get a fine or you go to jail. However, if you sell marijuana within a certain distance from a school, the crime is multiplied, more pronounced. It is almost like speeding. If you are speeding on the highway, you might get a ticket for about US\$1.50 but if you are speeding within a school zone, the penalty is harsher—because of the fact that you are supposed to be looking out for the vulnerable but you are exploiting them instead.

Maybe in Guyana we probably need that sort of thing. One hundred or two hundred and fifty feet from a school there must be no liquor shops. This will allow the teacher or Head teacher to supervise within the stipulated area so that they can know what is happening.

Commissioner Mc Doom

That is dependent on whether the magistrate will grant the license but I think that should be given consideration, whether anyone should be granted a license to sell liquor in the vicinity of a school.

Ms. King, you said that you are one of the officials of the community, do you know whether the football ground has a lease or something of that nature to which was signed?

Ms. King

I am not sure but I think it belongs to the Council.

Commissioner Mc Doom

The Neighbourhood Democratic Council?

Ms. King

Oh no. It is a Youth Initiative Programme.

Chairman

So the ground is under the President's Youth Choice Initiative Programme.

Commissioner Mc Doom

What I would suggest to you if you want to get organized, in the development of Tucville, just as you would have other housing schemes, you would have a Plan prepared by surveyors—maybe if you could look at your Transport or Certificate of Title you will see what the number of the Plan is, then you go and buy it for \$2,000.00 from Lands and Survey, you will then be able to put down on that Plan all the names of people who live there—and that is how you get organized. As I said, the initiative is with you because no one would want to give assistance to an individual. That is why I am asking about the football ground.

Ms. King

It does not matter if they use it but they are too dominating.

Commissioner Mc Doom

You need to get in touch with the people responsible for it. There must be something legal. I do not know much about the Youth Initiative. I do know that all the grounds, like Thomas Lands and so on were given by the Board of the City Council to Trustees and those Trustees have documents—stating how they are replaced when they die and so on, and they are responsible for the community. But you cannot have any Trustees unless you get organized first.

Ms. Joseph

As I mentioned before, that ground was earmarked for the residents but I do not know what happened. They are in control of the keys and the boys have to scale the fence to enter.

Chairman

That is what I was talking about earlier. The school is for the community but the Headmistress is in control of the keys. So you almost have to go and beg her if you need somewhere to keep a meeting. That is bad. However, the Headmistress did not always keep the keys. When I was studying for my GCE our school never used to be locked up. My parent could not afford to keep the electricity burning the whole night so we used to go the school and study until one 0'clock in the morning. You did not have to go and knock on people's door for the keys. The school was always open and available. There were 30 to 40 people studying there. I think you still have that at UG where students sit in classrooms and study late into the night.

The problem exists when people start to destroy and vandalize the school's property, but if the community could provide some amount of assurance to the school's administration that they will be responsible for the facilities—then they will get to use it.

I will have a word with Mr. Lumumba who is in charge of the President's Youth Choice Initiative and maybe we can also discuss as to who are the local coordinators of that ground so that you can have greater utilization of it.

The issue of street lighting, we will bring that to the attention of the relevant authorities. I cannot guarantee what they will do. One of our Commissioners, Mr. Carvil Duncan is a Director on the Board of GPL so we will see how he could assist in having street lights in Tucville.

Commissioner Duncan

Tucville does not have street lights?

Ms. Greene

Only one is working in Gibson Street.

Commissioner Duncan

The thing is, it is not that GPL does not want to provide the lights but the question is, who will pay for the service. You see, the City Council I understand, owes GPL about \$124M presently for street lighting and they are saying that it is not their responsibility to ensure that the lights stay in working condition. The Ministry of Works is also saying that it is not their responsibility either. Anyway, there is an emergency meeting of GPL's Board on Friday (*November 16, 2007*); I can raise this issue with them. I shall endeavour to do my best to ensure that you get lights—if not now, at least by Christmas.

Presenters (Chorus)

Thank you.

Chairman

Ladies, thank you for the interest you have shown for your community, we will see what we can do from here. This is what you call good citizens. You do not get a national award for what you are doing but keep doing it all the same.

Presenters (Chorus)

We thank you for inviting us here and listening to our concerns.

SECOND PRESENTER:

MR. GEORGE DANIELS – AGRICULTURE SCIENCE TEACHER, LINDEN

Mr. George Daniels

I have some documentation which I will leave with you but I would like to go through them quickly. I am particularly concerned about so many young people who are ending up on the wrong side of the law and my position is that the education system is failing them. If you were to examine the curriculum offered in the schools in Guyana you will see that overwhelming emphasis is placed on the study of English Language and Mathematics to the neglect of the Technical and Vocational areas which are known as the skills training subjects. Added to this is the dismantling of the Community High Schools (CHS) which focused mainly on the Technical and Vocational areas.

With the advent of the Secondary Schools Reform Programme (SSRP) which is under the guise of offering quality secondary education—having four subjects as the core subjects—English Language, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies—I saw that the sole intention of this programme is to marginalize the Technical and Vocational subjects. Ten years after the implementation of the SSRP which cost us US\$19M, and two years after it concluded I do not think that there has been an analysis or an assessment of its successes and failures.

While English and Mathematics are important, there is a neglect of the Technical and Vocational subjects. Skilled craftsmen and athletes do not necessarily need CXC certification in English and Mathematics to succeed at their trade. What they need is functional English and Mathematics. Here I make reference two of our sportsmen without any disrespect intended—Shivnarine Chanderpaul and Terrence Ali. Most people might be embarrassed by their inability to speak proper English. But look at the money they have made and are continuing to make.

I want to emphasize that there are multiple intelligences and I will list seven areas of intelligence. We have the narrow view where we tend to qualify and quantify people's

intelligence, solely in terms of how they speak English Language. There is linguistic intelligence—the aptitude for speech and language. Logical and Mathematical intelligence—the ability to think abstractly. Spatial intelligence—the ability to conceptualize the word in Art. Musical intelligence. Body intelligence—dancing, athletics and acting; and Interpersonal and Intrapersonal intelligence. The point I am making here is that we have narrowed the curriculum down to English and Mathematics.

Each person has a unique profile of these intelligences with strengths in some areas and weaknesses in others. Traditional education with overwhelming emphasis on English and Mathematics has neglected a large proportion of human abilities. Students considered slow by conventional academic measures might excel in other respects. Now whether you want to consider these areas as skills, talents or you accept it as an area of intelligence, I feel that the schools' curricula must appeal and nurture all abilities. To do otherwise, I see it as an act of discrimination.

I look at CXC which has broadened its scope to offer subjects such as music, physical education, theatre arts, mechanical engineering—these subjects target different areas of understanding. Sadly, our curriculum has not responded. We are putting young people out on the streets without any marketable skills and with no means of earning a living legitimately. The system which was intended to help them has failed and demoralized them.

Children learn differently. English and Maths would be good for producing our rocket scientists and Nobel Prize winners for literature. However, a large proportion of children learn best, subjects which have a practical component such as visual arts, building technology, electricity, electronics, mechanical engineering, physical education, music, theatre arts and so on. I would want to see much more emphasis placed on these subjects.

Commissioner Mc Doom

Is there a Government Technical Institute in Linden? Do they teach the technical subjects such as carpentry, etc?

Mr. Daniels

Yes, and they do. But since the advent of the SSRP, the multilateral schools up there have moved away from wood, metal and these technical related subjects. Some time ago they said that some gangs were being formed there. Now from the results of the Common Entrance Examination, the children are actually telling you where their abilities lie. There are those who are more academically inclined and they go to the top schools. But the others, their brains are ordered differently where they have this “hands on” ability. Let us take Wisburg for example, they took the same SSRP that is offered at the top secondary schools for the “high flyers” so to speak and give it to the children who did not do so well at the Common Entrance Examination—that type of education these children are not interested in.

That is the first aspect of my presentation. The second part of my presentation is on Racism.

My point here is that education is being used as a vehicle to promote racism. I have evidence here. (*Append. GD 1–16*). I start by saying that is a particularly troubling psychological disorder.

In Europe racial taunts and abuses have been hurled at an African footballer and just recently, Andrew Symonds, the Australian cricketer, was subjected to taunts from an Indian crowd.

Education is being used to demonize Africa. I consider myself of African descent but it is as if I am caught between a rock and a hard place. There is so much foolishness about Africa that is being promoted so that they want me to consider myself a Black person. I do not believe that people are black or white. I want to see myself as a descendent of Africa.

Here is what I have to teach in school as a part of the Agriculture Science Programme, that Africanized Bees are also known as killer bees. I have to be telling my students that.

There is something definitely wrong with this. When you look at the information they have presented here, there is not enough justification to label these bees, Africanized Bees. A European bee was also involved in the mating process and I think a Brazilian bee was also involved. (*Append. GD 3&4*). But there is this rush to judgment. The subliminal messages that they are sending to the children—and I am looking at the conditioning whether operant or classical conditioning. I strongly object to teaching children this and they have been doing this for a number of years.

I was particularly taken back by a remark made by one of our Presidents who said that African Guyanese are at the bottom rung of the social ladder. I still believe there was no malice intended in this remark. I am looking here at what is being taught in school.

Question 14 (History Test): Which of the following is the correct ranking, from lowest to highest social status, on the slave plantation? **Possible answers:** (a) Whites, coloureds, blacks; (b) Whites, blacks, coloureds; (c) Blacks, coloureds, whites; (d) Coloureds, whites, blacks. (*Append. GD-5*). This excerpt was taken from a Teacher's Manual prepared by Caribbean intellectuals. This is what is actually being taught in schools. One hundred and fifty years removed from the slave plantation, is it the same social status based on the remark made?

In another history book called **Caribbean Certificate History 3 – Development and Decolonialisation** (*Append. GD-9*), it is shown that the social stratification is according to colour, occupation, political status and social position. I find it to be very insensitive when they deal with these issues like this—when they write like this. It is lacking in objectivity.

One Caribbean writer (woman) was so bold to title a chapter **Race Relations: White over Brown over Black** in the history book **Social Life in the Caribbean – 1838 to 1938.** (*Append. GD-6 and 7*). This is taught in schools in Guyana and is recommended by the CXC body. When I saw the title of this chapter I remembered something from my childhood that if you are White it is alright; if you are Brown stick around and if you are Black get back. I think about the subliminal messages that operate at the level of the

subconscious—that we are sending to these children. Here is an excerpt from this book. (*Append. GD-7*). “... most white housewives treated their domestic in the same way, using ‘the lash of the tongue’ as a substitute for the whip. Planters and their families did not try to deal with Blacks as valuable and sensible employees, because the white Jamaicans did not see Black men and women as fully human, let alone as equals.

This conclusion was a harsh one, yet the evidence suggests it was more or less correct, even if there were always individual exceptions.”

The evidence suggests what? That the Blacks were not sensible employees? And they were not fully human?

There is another article here—a **Stabroek News Editorial of October 23, 2007** (*Append. GD-8*) where it states that Dr. James Watson, Nobel Prize winner for Genetics, is out on this mission to prove that people of African descent, are of inferior intelligence. (Quote) “*People who have to deal with Black employees find that this is not true.*” All of our social policies are based on the fact that their intelligence is the same as ours whereas all the tests say, not really. Now here is a man who wants to demonize us. And we also have Caribbean intellectuals who are writing that sort of thing and asking me to teach it to children. I am objecting to it—and objecting strongly.

This one is particularly interesting. I could not understand why this particular page in this book was defaced with pen scratches. (*Append. GD-13*). I wonder who could have done it and whether it was an emotional reaction to what is written there. (Quote) “*Whites held that African societies were barbarous, and Blacks inferior beings. Slaves came themselves to believe white’s racism and accepted white cultural values.*” I am saying the way the social relations are dealt with in these books, leaves much to be desired.

There is also a chapter in the book **Caribbean Certificate History I—From Arawaks to Africans** that deals with **Social Changes**, in which it says that, “‘Free’ meant ‘white’ and ‘slave’ meant ‘black’.” (*Append. GD-10*).

I want to construct an identity for the African people because all these things are demonizing Africans. They are saying that AIDS is from Africa. Where is the evidence?

I want to share what Martin Luther King and James Baldwin had to say about this issue. **King**, in **Where Do We Go From Here**, talked about the *word black, meant dirty or bad, while white meant clean or good. He said that the language had to change to stop Black children feeling bad about themselves.* (*Append. GD-14*). That is the problem we are having because once we accept that we are Black people then we have to conclude that English is a racist language because it sees black only in the negative term.

James Baldwin, the Author, said that, “*Even the language we use, forms part of the Architecture of our prisons.*” (*Append. GD-14*). This is what the English language could do to you psychologically.

I could give you an example of Michael Jackson and what the language has done to him. He has a song that goes like this, “*Baby, baby it doesn’t matter if you are black or white*” But in reality it is a different situation.

The “Big Man” said that he made us in His own image and likeness but the language is so racist that did not come up with words to adequately describe the human complexion. Animals are black, white, green, purple, red, brown and what have you. Once we accept those labels we are bringing ourselves down to the common animals and our behaviour is beginning to reflect how they behave. People are not black and white and this is what education is being used to do—perpetuate racial myths.

Bishop Egill this one should be of particular interest to you. This one is from **Bite In 2 – Book of Poems, Ballad of Birmingham**. It is a poem by an American Poet. In the book

they are giving a background to it to say that, “*On Sunday, September 15, 1963, during the years when Black Americans staged marches to get their rights, a dynamite bomb exploded in a black church in a town called Birmingham in Alabama.*” (**Append. GD-11**). Now, I was wondering whether this church was painted black in oppose to churches painted in white? Regarding this black church, what message are we getting across to the children? Churches having colours?

This one is from is from **Agricultural Science for Secondary Schools in Guyana, Book 3—looking at BREEDS OF GOATS**. Now, there is the Saanen which originated from Switzerland. It says that *the colour ranges from pure to creamy white.* (**Append. GD-12**). It did not say that the colour ranges from white; it says that it ranges from pure. There is a subliminal message there. My understanding is that white is a very bright colour and when you see white, you see a blend of certain colours—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo violet—these colours blend to produce white. But when you perpetuate this myth of white being pure, is misleading. Racism as I said has the characteristic of consuming everyone. It consumes the oppressor and the oppressed alike.

I was behind the promotion of this game in Guyana—the game of Chess—especially so because I wanted to make a point. I even wrote about it—the colour discrimination issue. My name would not be mentioned because I asked not to have it mentioned. I believe it is a very good game and it has a lot to recommend it. It is a game between blacks and whites. It is a game of warfare. Why is it being promoted as just a game between black and white? And white always moves first. That is the rule of the game. I also mentioned in another document that I did not put my name to, why not choose two other distinctive colours. The fact that white always moves first, sends a subliminal message to us. I noticed that Chess will be accepted at the Olympics. It is a very good game—the players developed problem solving skills, etc., but I have serious problems with the kind of conditioning of the game. (**Append. GD-15**).

I also want to mention one last point before I close. Many of the images of African depicted in the history books do not do justice to their natural beauty, form and grace.

People like Marcus Garvey, Rev. Jesse Jackson and many others tried to put a positive “spin” on black, that black is beautiful. There is even a poem which says, “*Lord why did you make me black ...*”, which also tried to put a positive “spin” on black. Interestingly, however, the poem ends with the person asking, “*Lord why don’t you redo creation and make us all the same.*” (NB: This poem can be viewed on the World Wide Web by using a search engine and typing in the first line—Lord why did you make me black.)

I am saying that we are not black or white, and when you send these messages, subliminal messages, to the level of the subconscious, the associations that are made—is that black is always in the negative.

Education is teaching us to despise ourselves. Therefore, if we despise ourselves then we cannot like anyone looking like us. Hence, I am making very strong objections to what is being taught in our schools.

Chairman

Mr. Daniels that was an excellent presentation. Any questions for the gentleman, Commissioners?

Commissioner Duncan

I would like to ask two questions: (1) What caused you to conclude that education is used to promote racism? (2) What is the rationale for you to conclude that the education system has failed the youths?

Mr. Daniels

As I mentioned there are different areas of intelligence—multiple intelligences. For instance, musically I am really ignorant, but I have been good in other areas. I have been a teacher for 27 years and during this period I have never drawn a diagram on the classroom blackboard. Every time there is a need for a diagram I would ask for the best artist in the class to perform the honour. That is because I cannot draw. What I am saying is that while people are strong in some areas, they are weak in others. I remember

there was a programme on television some three years ago where famous artistes/singers were giving their service free of cost to raise funds to purchase musical instruments for schools. They were saying that children who grew up learning music, developed better academically but they did not know the reason for this. I am saying that when you overwhelm children with English and Maths and they do not have the ability to excel in these fields, they would begin to feel like failures. I agree that there is a need for functional English and Maths.

There was this guy from Linden who worked in a Machine Shop and did not have English or Maths. Some people came down from Canada and discovered that he could make machine parts so they took him and his entire family to live abroad. He did not have English or Maths but he was a very skilled craftsman.

Have you ever heard Bob Marley speak? He could not really, but look at the kind of work he has produced.

Commissioner Duncan

This is a hypothetical question. Do you think the National Service could have assist in some way?

Mr. Daniels

I believe so—to promote agricultural skills and so on. We have to give children the sort of skills that when they enter the world of work, they are marketable. Do you know about the blue-card system? In Europe they are on a massive housing drive and they are looking for people with construction skills. It is the same with Barbados. This Island had advertised for “A-class” carpenters. You do not have to necessarily have CXC Maths.

I want to share something with you. The girl that topped Mc Kenzie High School in the mid 1990’s, she is still working at the bank in Linden. Someone who graduated with her and who went to Barbados and did construction work is now back in Linden building a

home while she is still at the bank. She has not even gone on to UG as yet. The skilled people are wanted all over the Caribbean.

Chairman

You said that the Community High Schools are no longer in existence.

Mr. Daniels

No. They have used the SSRP programme to bring all the schools into line where the core subjects of the programme are English, Maths, Science and Social Studies.

Chairman

The Technical and Vocational subjects appear to have been placed on the back burner?

Mr. Daniels

Right.

Chairman

Do you see that as a deliberate act to discriminate against a group of people—probably African Guyanese people who are leaning towards a more Technical and Vocational expertise?

Mr. Daniels

Just let me say this. I was in Georgetown during the August vacation I noticed some young Indian people were doing masonry work at the home I visited. I found it strange because those areas were reserved so to speak, for African Guyanese. I asked myself, why was this happening? Then I thought it could probably be a contract issue. If the contracts are only going to Indians and they are not employing African Guyanese then it is the kind of messages they are sending out.

Commissioner Mc Doom

Thank you for coming all the way from Linden to represent your people's interest. I have studied in my time what you call demonization of groups and I can tell you that my experience tells me that this will be around in the mainstream international media like the BBC, CNN and so on until you and I and all our grandchildren and great grandchildren die. It would still be there. There is only one answer in my view for any group that is demonized, is to give your children the confidence from within the home, to make certain decisions, to withstand this assault which I think will continue until judgment day. It is not going to end. You cannot do it. I cannot do it. The government cannot do it. These international mainstream media are controlled by very wealthy people and they own and control all the television and radio stations and newspapers. In England they have companies round and round like musical chairs—buying it all up. You will never be able to stop it. Our main defense is to teach our children to be proud of themselves and their identity; to be educated; to think of the future all the time; to build themselves, so that they can withstand and rise above it. And when they have representation they may be able to make some sort of in road into this thing.

As you were saying even the language that we use, that language is designed, perhaps deliberately, to talk about black sheep and black beast and Africanized bees and so on. Everything black is derogatory. Even when you are angry—so there is only one answer, because you have to use language and the answer is that we have to make certain that we instill in our children, pride, dignity and ambition.

I thank you for coming today and am very interested in everything you had to say but you will also find that racism is never only confined to one group. There is racism from within, and without. You have Africans, Indians and whites who are racist—and you will always have them. The important thing here is to get representation in areas of gifts and power for your people, for they are the ones who will decide what you get. That is what you have to struggle for, in all the institutions of power and gift.

Chairman

From your whole 27 years of teaching, have you seen these subliminal messages that you referred to in your documentation, affecting the psyche of students of African descent?

Mr. Daniels

I think they are so consumed by what is happening around them that they are not conscious of it because a lot of it is happening on the subconscious level.

Chairman

You were talking about the depiction of Africans in pictures. Were you referring to the women being pictured with big breasts, nakedness and so on?

Mr. Daniels

I do not think that their images, facial and so on, that the artists have done justice to their beauty.

Chairman

Those are in our text books?

Mr. Daniels

In the Agricultural Science text and from the little research that I have done. The other day I noticed a picture of a portly African man and even this is was not bad, but I think they could have done better.

Commissioner Mc Doom

Is there any technical college these children could go to after secondary school to learn carpentry, plumbing, etc? And are there any apprenticeship programmes whereby they could get a chance to practice their skills? For instance, some colleges would have a list of graduates, and this list is usually sent out to building/electrical contractors, for possible recruitment of some of these graduates.

Mr. Daniels

It happened at the Bauxite Mining Company when it was nationally owned. There was a link between the Company and the Institute.

Commissioner Mc Doom

What about Nationally? What about Government Technical Institute (GTI) in Georgetown, does it have a register? I know for a fact that technicians make a lot of money in this country. In England for instance, to get a plumber to come to your home is £60. Efforts should be made to link all these technical schools to people/companies who are in the trade business.

Chairman

Mr. Daniels I must tell you that your presentation has given us food for thought and I think after studying the documents, the Commission might want to recall you at a later time for further discussion on the matter. If, as you put in your case, that education is used as a tool or a vehicle to promote racism then there might be a serious need to look at our entire curriculum. Especially those who have been developing curriculum overtime, to see whether there is some subtle, diabolical plot to introduce thinking into our system to damage the psyche of a particular group of people. We need to look at this in a very objective manner. I think the time and effort spent to get your presentation together is commendable. You should be considered as an outstanding Guyanese, that you have taken the time to bring your views to the place where it matters. People discuss these things at rum shops and cocktails but you can never get them to bring it to a forum where it matters. I thank you once again and as I said we will probably recall you at a later date.

Mr. Daniels

Thank you.

Hearing adjourned to November 16, 2006

NB

Ms. Rudy Durcell and Mr. Ralph Perters matters were adjudged by the Commission to be in the nature of complaints and therefore, were so recorded.

DAY FOUR
Friday, November 16, 2007

ATTENDEES:

ERC: Chairman Bishop Juan Egill	–	Christian Community
Commissioner Carvil Duncan	-	Trades Union Congress
Commissioner Cheryl Sampson	-	Women’s Organization
Commissioner Shahabudeen Mc Doom	-	Muslim Community
Commissioner L. John P. Willems	-	Private Sector Commission

PRESENTERS:

Mr. MARK BRITTON
MR. KIDACKIE AMSTERDAM
MR. NOAH YAHSHUARUN

OTHERS:

Members of the public

FIRST PRESENTER:

**MARK BRITTON – BUSINESSMAN
292 Church Street, Queenstown**

Chairman

Mr. Mark Britton, welcome to this special consultation with Afro-Guyanese Community.

Mr. Britton

Thank you for having me. First of all I have already shown clearly and logically that knowledge as the world views it, is nothing but stupidity. People are told that they have to follow certain things. For example, you must follow multiparty. You cannot have a one party state. This is the world's view. This counters against one-party state, against socialism instead of capitalism, where you have to follow capitalism. It goes to even our cultural world—what we smoke or do not smoke—and the legality of it.

The Bigamy Law determines how many wives we could have. The Narcotics and Bigamy laws are directly related to the African people.

The thing about the world-view stupidity is that this was enshrined in colonial occupation of other people's countries to the detriment of 'the' other people. There has been no proper investigative analysis of why these laws were made. Most people follow laws without checking to see why the laws were instituted in the first place. Others, including myself have investigated the laws and found that you are allowed to smoke cigarette and drink alcohol but not allowed to smoke "ganja". The people of North America experiment on lots of drugs which are not necessarily herbal in nature.

The issues of ancient and modern are just terminologies distorted by the world-view which I emphasis to be nothing but stupidity.

China does not follow the world-view. It has a one-party state and they would not change it unless they have a good reason to do so. Everyone knows what to expect from

a one-party state—in opposed to a multi-party state, where you have to deal with different groups.

Everyone is supposed to be one and the terminology is Guyanese or Chinese but yet they have instituted rules against other people's welfare. To say that it is okay for me to drink alcohol and smoke cigarette when these things are not good for my body—and illegalized marijuana, where there is no proof that it destroys people's intellect and the morals of Society—which is really caused by alcohol, child abusers, etc. The whole thing, this world-view stupidity, comes from the colonial era. The Africans did not institute these laws but they were made to follow them to the detriment of the people.

In Guyana, you should not have waited until Mark Benschop was released from prison before you started to talk about over crowding in jail. This was the case long before Benschop was incarcerated. Before now, about 60 percent of the inmates of the prison were there for possession of marijuana. Whereas now, many of the inmates are there for cocaine use, shipment, etc. This is where quick money is made. Marijuana does not make users do anyone harm or make them sell their possessions.

The main reasons for these laws are the colonialist. The Europeans were anti African, racist, exploitative, etc. And this still exists today because this is racism and regardless of what people say, white people will always be racial. It suits them to maintain superiority. It was not like that 400 to 500 years ago. But after you are conquered and people could gain from your bondage, it rose from a small scale slave trade to multi-billion dollars corporation and these same people, slave traders are running countries and having presidents overthrown and so on.

After being destroyed you had to get out some where. And they offered a kind of opportunity but it is not real. It is just another form of control. This is why Governments who take the Socialist path forget about them. Is either you come up by yourself, or not. It is like cutting your nose to spoil your face when you try to follow them.

This is why the whole of Africa which was going socialist after they came out of colonial rule was forced to go back to multi-party states. Now there is only war there because everybody is forming their own party and having their own group. Instead, you should be forced to form a one-party state where everybody has to come together because after all the destruction, you have to come together. This is ignorance. That is why I say that the world-view is stupidity.

The other issue concerns the African Guyanese representation in Guyana. Neither the ERC nor the government can organize African Guyanese. How would they know whose ideas to go along with? African Guyanese have to follow rules and guidelines that are not really suited to them and Africans, who should have represented Africans as one people, have not done so. We need representation on these issues and the government will have to play its part in helping the situation. That is all I have to say.

Chairman

You are dealing with two issues: (1) The world-view stupidity has led to the implementation of laws that have affected African people. We have legalized alcohol, tobacco, and so on but we have criminalized marijuana which members of the African Guyanese community want to smoke. As a result, many people are in prison for possession of marijuana.

Mr. Britton

Yes. Sometimes they are in prison for three (3) years causing wives and children to suffer hardship.

Chairman

So you are saying that the Narcotics Act has been a means of oppressing segments of the African Guyanese society? This, law, you claimed, is based on the world-view stupidity of Colonialism?

Mr. Britton

Yes. They are allowed to control everything.

Chairman

So what is it you are asking for?

Mr. Britton

I am asking for the repeal of the Bigamy and Narcotics Laws.

Chairman

Tell us a little more on why you want a repeal of the Bigamy Law.

Mr. Britton

A man should be allowed to marry more than one woman. I m allowed to have two houses; ten cars; ten farms, many servants – but why I am only allowed to have one wife? The thing about it, this used to be social means of orderly society, whereby no woman was allowed to remain unmarried or feel neglected or look to other women’s husbands; or become prostitutes; or produce children out of wedlock—and generally have a hard life.

Polygamy is built on marriage. Whereas, we still have many people with several “child mothers” and “child fathers”. So the legislation is totally destructive because we still end up with lots of children born out of wedlock. In our society, sex is marriage. Not the ring. Not the paper. When you have sexual intercourse with someone, you are married to that person. The ancient laws are the real laws.

Chairman

The second thing you are asking for concerns African Guyanese representation where the government has to play a part. How do they engage the African Guyanese community?

Mr. Britton

I think they should have a meeting with all the members of the African Guyanese Community at the same time.

Chairman

In the last four years I have tried to meet with all the African Guyanese groups at the same time. I advertised it on the television, radio, newspaper and wrote letters—to meet with all African Guyanese groups and representatives at the same time. Every time you end up with the same thing: They say that we are not coming there; they looking to see who is coming; they are calling for a boycott, etc. I need to say that the ERC is not acting on behalf of the government. The ERC is a state mechanism that is provided for in the Constitution to promote this kind of understanding and harmony in the society. That is why we are all sitting here listening to your concerns.

These African Guyanese consultations that we are having is an attempt to get the various views from every segment of the African Guyanese community—whether it is culture, religion, politics, humanitarian, social, economic, whatever the view. If there is division within a tribe, no one, including the Government or the ERC could cause that division to heal over night. And we have to admit it, the tribe has problems.

Mr. Britton

We need to speak with the political people in one forum and speak to the cultural people on another forum. The problem comes from the political aspect, which has invaded every aspect of life. Most people in politics are into modernity where money and political power dominate—which is separate from culture and that is what I am here about.

Chairman

Politics is a game of numbers and wherever those numbers could be had whether it is religion, culture, labour and elsewhere, it is getting these numbers on your side.

Commissioner Mc Doom

You talked about the repeal of the Bigamy Law and you said that despite having a Bigamy Law men and women still have multiple partners and many children are born out of wedlock. Most men do not take responsibility for the women such as marrying them and one of the reasons for marrying several women, is that it prevents them from living a 'loose' life in society. I want to say to you that you have a world view that is not uncommon. The world is still in the throes of the white-man government and it is becoming harder and harder to break free because of the Information Technology which allows them into your home via Fox News, CNN, BBC World and so on—without even your permission. However, all groups have to be organized or you as an individual will not be able to get anywhere.

As the chairman said, we are a constituted body that has been placed here to ensure that no group is discriminated against. We have called so many times for brothers and sisters of the African community to come, as we have been doing these last two weeks, but the main stream political and cultural representatives have not come. They should have come even if they disagree with the Commission. There is no other avenue available for them to express their views in such a way. But they choose to boycott it. What do you think about that?

Mr. Britton

I have been speaking to them for the past three and a half (3½) years and they do not understand the strength of a nation. They do not understand how destructive it would be for people who are not able to celebrate their culture freely. Most of them are politically driven and it is a situation where culture is separated from politics and where there is too much political control of the intellect in Black society.

In the ancient Black society that many people do not know of, and which has to do with the fact that everything was beaten out of the African people by the colonials. While the Indians came with Diwali and Phagwah and were allowed to celebrate their culture. we

on the other hand, could not have played our drums; we could not have practiced our African culture. Even the Jordon Knights were banned.

People of African descent have this fear that they will encounter problems if they follow their culture. People of African descent feel that the European is superior because of his intellect but the fact is, one is not conquered, unless he is conquered physically.

People are still fearful of the Europeans. Musharraf of Pakistan, revealed years after the September 11 attacks that he was told by the FBI or CIA that if Pakistan do not support the US in the fight against terror, Pakistan will have to face the consequences. I was wondering about the reason for Musharraf jumping behind America like that and attacking his own people in the process, and such like.

Commissioner Mc Doom

Should not someone ask the mainstream political and cultural representatives through the media why did they not come to promote their people at this forum? It would appear as if they are not interested in promoting their people, and are only interested in themselves.

Mr. Britton

They are only interested in the economics of the situation. I am very controversial. I have invited people to come on my television programs—to call in or write letters but no one has ever responded to those calls. I have even criticized them. I said publicly that the greatest tragedy in the African Guyanese community is that the PNC/R has allowed the Black side of Burnham to disappear, for Burnham had three sides: The Guyana side, the international side and the Black side. The Black side was promoting of African culture, supporting Africans specifically. This did not have anything to do with the international arena or with the Non-Align Movement—this was supporting Africa, particularly. There are so many Africans who have come here - Gowan, Nyere, Kaunda—quite a few of them. The PNC does not have anything to do with them anymore and that is the problem I have with the PNC.

Chairman

Mr. Britton I thank you for your candid presentation and strong views. Most notably, is that there needs to be a review of the Narcotics and Bigamy Laws which should not be controlled by the world-view stupidity. Your second point has to do with Africans representation or lack thereof. You are also asking that there be a clear separation between what is culture, and what is politics. You said that politics deals with just the monetary rewards that an individual enjoys and which lead to the abandonment of his culture in the process. And somewhere along the line when Institution like ours engage African people we must be more concerned with the culture rather than people who are getting the monetary rewards. Is that correct?

Mr. Britton

Yes.

Chairman

Thank you very much.

SECOND PRESENTER:

MR. KIDACKIE AMSTERDAM - (EDUCATOR)

Kersaint Park, LBI, East Coast Demerara

Presenting on behalf of Personal Capacity.

Mr. Amsterdam

My presentation is on education, and the perceived disadvantages at which African Guyanese children are placed. When it comes to education, African Guyanese have been underperforming and the question that is usually asked, is why? I want to point directly to what exist in the community, and society as a whole with respect to education.

It is very noticeable, the amount of educational institutions or structures being erected but the requisite educators are sadly lacking in supply in these structures. The majority of Community High Schools are in the African Guyanese communities which are now being converted to Secondary Schools with no particular change in the modus operandi with respect to the people who control these institutions.

The Community High School as I know it was designed to help communities to produce the skills necessary for development. If we were to visit these schools now, what we will find is that students are just running in, and around the buildings—with hardly any work being done.

On the other hand, in some schools where teachers and students are willing to work, there is an absence of the necessary resources. Most of these schools do not have, for example, an Industrial Arts Training department—equipment with which to train the students.

These schools are also overcrowded. There are between 40 to 60 students assigned to one class—and thus, one teacher. Even if this teacher is given a 90-minutes session to conduct one lesson, this period would be inadequate to deal with 60 students. Therefore, the slow learners are left behind. Unfortunately, many African Guyanese students fall in that group; and are seen as failures. Because of the system that is at work, as soon as a student fails the SSEE and is sent to a Community High School, he/she is already deemed a failure.

It is my view that this education system that we have presently is failing African Guyanese children. Bear in mind, it is not only African Guyanese students who fail, they fall in the majority.

If you were to examine or investigate the Level 6 Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) assessment results you will observe that the majority of the students who performed well, their parents had the resources to outsource their education and, not depending solely on the school system.

By extension, a large section of our African Guyanese brothers and sisters are employed in the Public Service where wage increases are always below the rate of inflation and because of this, every year these brothers and sisters sink deeper and deeper into poverty. Therefore, it is almost impossible for African Guyanese families to outsource their children's education and as it is, they are caught in the cycle of poverty and lack of education.

The question is, how can this situation be remedied?

I also wish to point to the fact that many of our students who do the Level 6 Examination are allocated schools based on their performance which is assessed from the Levels—Levels 2,4 and 6. At the end of the day it is the Level 6 that carries the weight. Therefore, the “Highfliers” are sent to the top schools while the “many” others go to the Junior Secondary Schools. In addition, all the learning and teaching resources are allocated to the top schools and hardly any to the lower schools – but yet, the students in the lower schools have to work with the same curriculum as their counterparts in the top schools. The Ministry of Education produces one curriculum for all secondary schools. In other words, they expect the “slow learners” to perform like the “Highfliers” at the Secondary level. This system places a larger number of students at a disadvantage.

Ideally, what they should have done, were to design a different curriculum for the lower level Secondary Schools. I think that all these lower level Secondary Schools focus on remedial Education; which I heard the Hon. Minister speaking about only recently. But the evidence of that has not manifested, in terms of the allocation of resources to deal with remedial studies which is a prevalent need in African Guyanese communities.

That is the basis of my presentation.

Commissioner Mc Doom

Could you please tell us a little more about how African Guyanese children are discriminated against, by the Education System?

Mr. Amsterdam

The majority of Community High Schools are located in African Guyanese communities such as Buxton, Betterverwagting, Anns Grove, Plaisance, Lodge, etc., and the intention behind these schools was to help the community to produce skilled students. Buxton for instance, is historically a farming community. Therefore, the main focus of the Community High School in Buxton should have been towards promoting Agricultural skills. Its focus should have been on Agriculture Science and Industrial Arts.

However, for sometime now, no resources have been allocated to these schools to ensure that skills training of this nature are continuing. In additions, there is no longer in Guyana the concept of the Community High School. These have become the neighbourhood secondary schools—a term constantly used by representatives of the Ministry of Education.

Commission Duncan

The lack of resources you are talking about, is it financial or human?

Mr. Amsterdam

Both. The school's time table might have Industrial Arts/Wood Working sessions but there are no tools available for practical demonstrations. Beterverwagting for instance, has the human resource but no tools to work with.

Commissioner Mc Doom

Has your research shown that this is also the case in other areas where there is a heavy concentration of other groups? This is with respect to the areas where there are these lower secondary schools.

Chairman

What would happen in areas where there are predominantly Indians—on the Essequibo Coast or, Corentyne, for instance?

Mr. Amsterdam

I need to say that my foremost concern here is not what is happening in other areas, because if it does happen in other places, it would not make it right. My focus here is on African Guyanese communities. I must say that I came here with the feeling that these hearings are being held at the wrong place. They should have been held within the communities themselves where you could have gotten more contributions and a stronger 'feel' of what is happening. You might have also been able to see it for yourself.

Continuing on the issue, I believe that in East Indian communities, the resources are apportioned differently. Annandale Secondary School for instance, is well secured in contrast to the school in Buxton, where there is absolutely no security.

Chairman

Let us discuss the classroom issue of these schools. Do they follow the same curriculum?

Mr. Amsterdam

As far as I know, yes.

Chairman

Are there teachers in Annandale and not in Buxton?

Mr. Amsterdam

Buxton hardly has teachers.

Chairman

Does this have to do with the allocation process or just the attitude of teachers?

Mr. Amsterdam

Teachers are allocated but never the full complement. Secondly, even if there are teachers, the necessary teaching resources are not available.

Chairman

Would they have these resources in Annandale?

Mr. Amsterdam

Mostly.

Chairman

Is that your perception or is it a known fact?

Mr. Amsterdam

A known fact.

Chairman

Give us some examples. You have been using a broad brush so just narrow it down for us a little—for example, there is no Industrial Arts Department in Buxton, but there is one in Annandale.

Mr. Amsterdam

I cannot do that. But what I do know is that Annandale has a well equipped Information Technology Laboratory, whereas, Buxton does not.

Chairman

Was the Lab provided by the government?

Mr. Amsterdam

I do not know who provided the computers but I do know that the Lab was provided by the government.

Chairman

That is what I am saying, you need to pin point the issues because a broad brush would not help.

Mr. Amsterdam

As I said, had you gone into the communities, the teachers of those communities would have been able to relate exactly the situation as it is.

Chairman

For the last four years the ERC has been to Buxton, Friendship, Annandale, Paradise, Melanie and so many other areas. Sometimes when we go to these communities, the same people who invited us in the first place, never show up at the meetings. We announced our meetings using loud hailers—flyers at each door—advertisements on Channel 67 because everyone on the East Coast would be able to see it—on State television—Channel 9 because we believe more African Guyanese look at this Channel—and every means possible. But when we turn up for the meetings there is hardly any interest shown by the community. So it has nothing to do with the location.

Mr. Amsterdam

I am not too sure that the time you usually visit these communities, is convenient to the residents.

Chairman

We go to these places in the mornings, afternoons and evenings. We will be visiting Paradise next week at 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

Mr. Amsterdam

I can tell you straight away that 5 o'clock would not be a good time because many of the villagers work outside the community and usually leave work at 4:30 p.m. Therefore, they would not be able to attend the meeting.

Chairman

What happens when the meeting is fixed for 7 o'clock?

Mr. Amsterdam

That is when they reach home.

Chairman

So what time would be convenient, 8 o'clock at night?

Mr. Amsterdam

That is the issue. A Saturday or a Sunday might be better.

Chairman

Time and venue for meetings are not fixed by the Commission; they are always fixed in conjunction with the NDC, RDC and leaders of the community. They tell us what time is convenient and they are the elected representatives of the people.

Mr. Amsterdam

These people you mentioned are politicians and far as I know they will give you what they perceived to be the necessary information but they will not do the work to ascertain this. And secondly, they do not really care whether the people have a say or not. So the fact that the people do not have a say, empowers “them” (elected officials). I argue that our people are kept in ignorance because if you are ignorant, then you cannot make the right decisions when it comes to your livelihood. Therefore, anyone with devious purposes could lead you.

Chairman

I hear you Sir. A very strong point indeed.

Another question is, why did we have most of the Community High Schools in African Guyanese communities, particularly? Was it because a majority of African Guyanese children fall into the category of slow learners? I also noticed in your analysis that you said that many African Guyanese are wage earners in the Public Service and therefore, they have limited resources to extend on the outsourcing of their children’s education to advance their success; so they are left to take what ever is handed out to them and this results in them lagging continually behind. This of course, is in contrast to the African Guyanese who could afford to outsource their children’s education and who were met with success. So why did we have those Community High Schools? Was it a reshaping of the education policies to meet certain needs?

Mr. Amsterdam

Yes. As far as I know.

Chairman

The same children of these communities want these programmes?

Mr. Amsterdam

Yes.

Chairman

It is said that Beterverwagting was a heavy farming community but 90 percent or more of the people from this area do not go the land anymore. It is like a dormitory, like we have been told at this forum.

Mr. Amsterdam

Yes. As you said 90 percent of the people from Beterverwagting do not go to the land anymore—95 percent from Buxton also do not go to the land—and it is the same with many other African Guyanese communities—50 to 60 percent of these people do not go to the land because the land which was originally suitable for farming, is no longer suitable for that purpose because of the lack of proper drainage, etc. At one time, one used to be able to drink the water of Company Canal because it was always clean and black but now it is unhygienic and no doubt full of diseases. This is due to the fact that the drainage system in these communities has been destroyed.

Company Canal was dredged some years ago and instead of dredging it to assist the flow, that is, from back to front, it was done in the opposite direction.

Chairman

Was this a deliberate act?

Mr. Amsterdam

God knows, I do not. You can see the face of man but not his mind.

Chairman

Any grandfather in the village would know about the dredging issue, right?

Mr. Amsterdam

And any engineer who is worth his salt would know it too. Even a freshman at the University of Guyana would know that. So I am asking Mr. Chairman, is that bad engineering or a deliberate act?

Chairman

I am not God! I worship God but I am not God.

Mr. Amsterdam

I would also like to mention at this point a problem students are experiencing at the University of Guyana. I am doing a Communications programme and I am required to finish a course in six weeks which was supposed to have concluded since last September, and the majority of students who are doing this programme look like me. We are in this position because the Administration did not see it necessary to provide the requisite lecturers so that the programme could have been completed in time. This has left the educational aspect of our lives in limbo because none of us can proceed to the degree and other programmes without completing the diploma. To my mind this issue is also pointing to some amount of disadvantage.

Commissioner Willems

With respect to our community meetings, what time do you think would be good for us to visit these communities.

Mr. Amsterdam

Unfortunately, since I now live at LBI, I would not be able to say what time would be best to visit those communities.

Commissioner Willems

But you said that we should not depend on the political representatives to determine the time. So we need to hear from you, what would be the most suited time.

Mr. Amsterdam

Here, we might be setting up ourselves, because a time that might be suitable to an East Indian community might not be suitable for an African Guyanese community, and other ethnic groups.

Commissioner Willems

We are talking about the African Guyanese communities and we want to hear from you. We want to set a time that is convenient to you. Maybe we should not use Buxton as an example because nobody currently wants to go to Buxton and I am not discriminating against Buxton, but we all know the situation.

Mr. Amsterdam

Am I to assume that the people of Buxton would not be able to have their say on these issues?

Chairman

The people of Buxton always have their say. As a matter of fact, more people of Buxton have attended these meetings compared to other areas.

Mr. Amsterdam

I was just about to say, that when the ERC visited Buxton a few years ago, I had made a presentation at the Community High School. I know for a fact that the people always attend these meetings. I cannot speak for Anns Grove and so on. But I know Anns Grove is a farming community and 5:00 p.m. will not be a good time to hold a meeting because that is probably when the farmers are returning from their farms.

Chairman

Chief, I must interrupt here to say this. If the people want to protest about water or roads and there is 2 o'clock Parliament in session, they will not care, they will do so. The point is, if the issue affects you sufficiently, it does not matter what the time is, you will be

there. That is a known fact throughout Guyana and it has nothing to do with East Indians or African Guyanese. That is nature of the Guyanese man.

The issue here is that we have always considered the convenience of the people. I am a Biblical man and the scripture says that if you consider the wind, you will never sow, because you will think that your seeds will be blown away.

Mr. Amsterdam

I agree, but let me not go to it Biblically. The fact is, if it bothers you enough, you will find time to deal with it. I think that within the community many people have decided we have to live with the problem whatever it is, or we have to try to get around it.

Chairman

That is what we are trying to change and you must be commended for coming to this Commission and making some very strong points. Whatever you have said this afternoon, would be heard where it matters. Every Legislator will hear what you have said today about the Community High School programme; Allocations of funds—and remember that next year National Budget is coming up soon so the Opposition Benches will have an opportunity to challenge the government on the allocation of funds. For instances, what is being allocated to the Primary, Secondary, the Neighbour Schools and so on. They would be able to comprehensively analyze the budget to determine whether there is disparity in the allocation of funds to schools. They will be able to discuss the policies regarding the remedial issue.

Commissioner Willems

I do not want you to misinterpret what I say but the point I am trying to make is that if we write them about Anns Grove, and use that school's environment it would be far more powerful than going to parliament and say that the problem concerns Buxton. It would be good if you were to pin point another African Guyanese village.

Mr. Amsterdam

The last time I saw the Community High School at Victoria, it was in a dilapidated condition. The school at BV is also in need of repairs. With respect to the issue of convenient timings to hold meeting, in this case you will need to speak with the ordinary residents of the various communities. A wild shot, would be Saturday afternoons and Sundays.

Chairman

That is the time when they are having weddings and fairs. During the one hundred and sixty something multi-stakeholders meetings held last year across the country, we had a number of meetings held on Saturdays and Sundays. Sometimes straight after church service I am heading to Linden to hold Sunday afternoon meetings. On the East Coast of Demerara, Soesdyke and various other places during Sunday afternoons—to do exactly what you are asking. Sometimes we barely get 10 and 7 people. And do you know how we mobilize? The ERC staff went out in groups of twos with letters and fliers to every church, businessman, mandir, politician, teacher, Justice of Peace, Opinion Leader, Village Elder and so on.

Mr. Amsterdam

Was that done before setting the time for the meeting?

Chairman

They helped to set the time. But the same people, when an issue affect them enough – the time is not an issue. I was in Berbice last week, when protesters blocked the road. That protest started since 5:30 a.m.

Mr. Amsterdam

I want to end with a very controversial issue. Ordinary African Guyanese persons do not see the ERC as a body that can help them out of their plight and I think that might be a contributing factor to the low turn out at meetings.

Chairman

And who told you that? The politicians?

Mr. Amsterdam

What did I tell you about them?

Commissioner Sampson

I would like to make a comment here with respect to the underperformance of African Guyanese children as you mentioned earlier. I am saying that we as parents have got to take the responsibility of pulling our children up—we should not leave it all to the school. We have got to help ourselves because God helps those who help themselves. Apart from what you said that the Community High Schools were set up to provide skills for the village. You might be too young to remember this but there was a time when there were not very many Secondary Schools like we have today and after the usual examination/scholarship, some children would go to the various Private and non private Secondary schools. But then there were many who were left behind because of their parents' financial constraints—who could not have paid for their children to attend a private school. So these children were kept in primary schools, where they got old but were not going further. I think this is what caused Mr. Burnham to institute the Community High School as a means for those who would have “missed it”, to develop an alternative skill. These were deemed more technically inclined, so they were given an opportunity to go to a Community High School where they were also taught academic subjects but the emphasis was on Technical Skills. By third form, depending on their performance, some of these were inducted into a normal secondary school. The others more technical inclined went to GTI, GITC and even GNS. Then with the advent of the

SSRP, the Community High Schools were converted to the regular Secondary Schools, so the students who remained from the Community High Schools were channeled into the Practical Institution Centre (PIC) programme. But I imagine even there, they seem not to have the equipment. I know of someone who is a welder, and he is teaching welding only on the 'blackboard' because they do not have the practical stuff. As I said, we as parents have to help our children.

Mr. Amsterdam

I am educated at the tertiary level and I have an eleven-year-old son. I work three jobs and yet I find it difficult to maintain my family. How would those people who are not as blessed as I am, be able to do it? And I should say that they are the majority. Thank you.

THIRD PRESENTER:

MR. NOAH YAHSHUARUN – ETHRARCH

Lot 94, Railway Line, Buxton, East Coast Demerara

Representative of the Kingdom of Manumitted Africans

Chairman

Mr. Noah Yahshuarun, I heard that you have submitted written submissions and I am advised that you have a supplementary?

Mr. Yahshuarun

Yes, and I have already passed around the supplementary. (*Append. NY-1 to 5*). We have set out some factors here which we believe are a hindrance to racial cohesion. We are not only talking about discrimination although some aspects of it might be discriminatory. We are looking at the difference in arrival of the various ethnic groups and the manner in which they were treated. (*Presenter proceeded to read Append. NY-1; Factor 1*). The African built this country—they laid the infrastructure and in the process moved one million tons of earth, which they were not paid for. When our ancestors should have been working for us, they were forced to work for the Europeans and their off-springs.

Then the other races that came after enjoyed the benefits of the free African labour. We are asking for compensation for this. The Kingdom of Manumitted Africans did write the British Government requesting £20B as compensation for slavery. And we are asking the ERC to call upon the Guyana Government to support this application.

Chairman

You are asking for compensation not reparation?

Mr. Yahshuarun

It is the same thing. We made our application in 1999. I will give you a copy of that letter. We are asking you to make representation to the government to support our

renewed application for compensation—in our own name. We are in the process of establishing a Board of Trustees for that purpose.

In Cuffy's rebellion in 1763, 209 Manumitted Africans were executed. In 1823 in the East Coast Demerara rebellion another 309 were killed. On that occasion about 200 of them were shot at Bachelor's Adventure and many of their heads were chopped off and placed on poles from Plaisance to Mahaica. Each of those villages had two heads attached to poles. Many that escaped were recaptured and brought to the Parade Ground in Georgetown where for two consecutive weeks, the slaves were murdered and had their heads displayed on poles around the ground. The slaves experienced the cruelty of the Dutch and French and so on.

The point we are making is that the Africans alone bore the brunt of these cruelties. Therefore, they should be compensated. When slavery was abolished the Europeans/slave owners were compensated and the ex-slaves were not. This is discrimination. The slaves should have also been compensated.

The next issue I want to discuss relates to the structures and laws of the estates. Africans purchased over 100 estates and they had established Councils for these estates. I would like to read the laws which governed the estates. (*Append. NY-9 & 10 – Presenter read Laws No. 1 to 20*). These laws were formulated by the Africans themselves.

Chairman

When did this become an Order, in November 1839?

Mr. Yahshuarun

That was before 1839 but when the others bought estates, each adopted and drawn up his own. So, each managed his estate in accordance with the laws until the Plantocracy enacted Order No. 1 of 1866 which was an Ordinance to provide for the better management and sanitary superintendent of the villages. This led to the creation of a Board of Villages and the governor/chairman of this Board gave himself the power to

declare from time to time what areas should become villages by advertising them in the official gazette. But they did not do that to LBI, Enmore, Huston and where ever Bookers owned. This in fact, was very discriminating.

A village is part of the State or owned by the State and for instance, if there are parts of a country where people have house lots and the government decides to establish villages—it cannot make a man’s house lot, a village. If the man owns 10 houses, that cannot be a village. What I am saying is that the government cannot make my private property, a village. But this is what they did to the Africans. Of course, this was not done to Bookers because Bookers would have probably taken them to Court.

The effect of this led to the enforcement of other Ordinances. So the Africans had their private estates turned into villages owned by the State, and succeeding Councils dealt with the properties in the same way. The Africans were eventually ousted from the Council and this led to the 1866 uprising where the military was called up to quell this uprising.

Many Africans refused to pay taxes to the new Council to which they were told that if they did not, their properties would be put on sale. Many lost their properties as a result of not paying taxes.

The situation has not changed. The same usurper Council operates today which is a descendant from the older Council—and it is illegal.

What the Board should have done was to recognize that Buxton, Plaisance, Golden Grove and so on were private properties and could not by themselves become villages.

Now how do we correct the situation?

We are asking the ERC to make recommendations to Parliament that corrective legislations be put in place to restore these estates which were deemed villages, to the

Manumitted Africans pursuant to Ordinance No. 1 of 1866 and all other related Ordinances and Decisions of the then Board of Villages, to the original status of private estates. We want Buxton, Plaisance, Golden Grove and others to be recognized as private estates just like Ogle, Huston, LBI and Lusignan estates—not villages.

We are asking that assistance be given to the Manumitted Africans of these estates to restore the estates Council because the Council was ousted and the descendants of the former estate owners to be reinstated to the Council. We are also asking that legislations be enacted for the estates to pay, en bloc, to the their Council. For instance, Friendship on the East Bank is an estate and they pay maybe \$5,000.00 per year for the entire place. Whereas, individuals from Plaisance, Buxton, etc., have to pay individually to this current usurper Council—exorbitant charges which they should have been paying to the African Council.

The main reason why the Governor and his boys invaded and did what they did was because they saw that the Africans were receiving rates and taxes. They were maintaining the roads, kokers, bridges and everything, so the Governor said that we cannot allow this to happen and so they converted the estates into villages.

We are also asking that you cause legislation to be enacted which would authorize the estates' Council to receive rates and taxes and to develop the estates as they used to do.

We are also asking that the government pay damages to us for what happened to our estates since 1866 to present. We all could see the degradation of these estates.

We would also like you to cause all lands in the estates held by the present village councils, to be restored to the Manumitted Africans. There are some sections of Plaisance, Buxton and so on which are said to be owned by the Village Council, but these lands really belong to the Manumitted Africans. We also are asking you to assist in having those lands restored to us. And we ask that you cause the government to give land else where in Guyana to the Manumitted Africans—to the tune of 200 times the size of

Victoria—about 200,000 acres of land. We would also like for the government to stop the distribution of land to foreigners until these matters involving the Manumitted Africans are resolved.

My next point deals with Burden Bearers. Despite all the things Africans have done we still have to bear equal burden with the other races, in terms of paying electricity, telephone, water and hospital bills. We are asking that special treatment be put in place so that we would only be required to pay half of the charges for these services.

Chairman

You want African Guyanese to pay only half of what every body else is paying?

Mr. Yahshuarun

Yes, based on our history—because of what happened. We have been here for 180 years.

Chairman

How would you be able to differentiate between a Manumitted African and a “quack”?

Mr. Yahshuarun

We will know because of the names on the Register.

Chairman

What about me? How would you know?

Mr. Yahshuarun

You have passed the test already.

Commissioner Willems

I also have African blood in me, so what about me?

Mr. Yahshuarun

Your issue could be easily determined by DNA technology. The next issue is about the army and police. The Special Forces are discriminating against our people.

Chairman

Tell me how they are discriminating against your people? You are saying the army, police and judicial system?

Mr. Yahshuarun

All of them. They are not working in accordance with their laws. The Constitution of Guyana undermines our right to liberty. The Judges' Rules are violated. The Police Act Section 3, is violated.

Chairman

Give us some examples of these violations.

Mr. Yahshuarun

The Police Act, Sections 3 & 17. For instance, the Special Forces would go into Buxton and say, "Hey come, come", and the police would take our people into the vehicle and proceeded to search them, then they would be taken away to Eve Leary and Brickdam. That is not the way to arrest someone, according to the Police Act. In addition to keeping them in custody for three to four days, they are photographed and finger prints are taken from them—but they not told what offence they have committed.

Chairman

Are the army and Police doing that?

Mr. Yahshuarun

Yes.

Chairman

What about the judicial system?

Mr. Yahshuarun

The judicial system violates the rules in terms of Bail. There are some bailable offences—but our people in most cases are refused Bail.

Chairman

What about the Prison System?

Mr. Yahshuarun

It is atrocious, with respect to meals and the lock-up system in general. It is not in keeping with the Prison Act.

We also have an issue with the Hindustani Avenue. Every Diwali since 2004, the people would paint up this Avenue (in Camp Street) and we have to walk there. Suppose we put up some voodoo symbols? They would not like it. They put up their decorations over head and you have to walk under it. Even if they put it there when they are ready to hold their ceremony, and then take it down, that would not be a problem. But they cannot have it there for days and have the Christians, Muslim and Rastafarians to walk under it. They also have the Swastika and other signs painted on the Avenue. These are Hindu witch crafts. To get where you are going, people have to walk around and risk getting hit down by a vehicle. We cannot have that.

I also ask that you look into the destruction of the records in the Archives of the Lands and Survey Department, the Courts, etc. We cannot get our Transports for the villages. They are not keeping proper records. If we want to find the Transport for Buxton, they would tell us that they cannot find it because it is in some vault somewhere. That is not proper record keeping. The only Transport we have so far, is the one for Friendship on the East Bank of Demerara and we have been able to claim a substantial portion of land

based on that transport. We need the Transports for the other estates purchased by the Manumitted Africans.

Thank you very much gentlemen, that is the basis of my presentation. I now avail myself for questioning.

Commissioner Sampson

I noticed that they are teaching in school some of what you have said—for History.

Chairman

You have raised a number of issues that need further research and so we reserve the right to recall you at some point in time for further discussions. We do not consider the conversation this afternoon as closed. Some of the things you are calling on us to ask for, I am not sure that we can do that without the necessary research, information and advice. I have gone through your submissions but I do not want to ask any questions now because there are things we need to look at.

Mr. Yahshuarun

I will certainly avail myself to you.

Commissioner Mc Doom

I endorse what the Chairman said. However, the money you asked the British government for, is it for the Guyanese Africans?

Mr. Yahshuarun

The Manumitted Africans.

Commissioner Mc Doom

What about the other Africans?

Mr. Yahshuarun

They are making their own application.

Commissioner Mc Doom

I think you have a point there when you say that your people have been in Guyana the longest, and contributed more than any other race to the building of this country and the Constitution prevents you from getting preferential treatment like the Amerindians. Therefore, we probably need to look at changing the Constitution. I must say that you have a very good argument there and I certainly wish you the best of luck.

Chairman

Thank you very much Mr. Yahshuarun, you will definitely hear from us.

The Public Consultations formally ended on that note.

APPENDICES

LK – 1 to 17

RG – 1 to 7

GD – 1 to 15

NY – 1 to 11