NATIONAL CONVERSATION

As a follow up to the Multi-Stakeholder Fora (MSF), the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) hosted a National Conversation on 15 and 16 November, 2006 at the Guyana International Conference Center at Liliendaal, East Coast Demerara. The National Conversation was meant to culminate the MSF process which begun in April 2005 and sought to:

- (1) Gather people and groups who never seriously engaged each other.
- (2) Engender animated but respectful conversation.
- (3) Create commitment at the community level to use dialogue as a first response to problems in communities.
- (4) Not only discuss problems but to discover what discussants were willing to undertake to solve their problems.
- (5) Generate conversations within communities without the involvement of outsiders.
- (6) Increase public focus on development issues rather than that which divides.
- (7) Generate optimism and commitment towards a positive future.
- (8) Open communication lines across racial and other ethnic divides.¹

The purpose of the National Conversation was to afford Guyanese of all strata and regions of Guyana an opportunity to discuss their concerns within the framework of finding solutions and taking action. Two hundred and sixty-four (264) participants among whom were Regional Representatives; Representatives from the Private Sector, Religious Groups, Youth, Women, Labour, Political Parties as well as Parliamentarians were among the sector groupings represented at the Conversation. The allocation of space to the entities is at **Annex B**. Although four hundred and five (405) delegates were catered for initially, the list was amended because of the inability of some persons to attend. It must be noted however, each of the twenty-one (21) groups had representation at the Conversation.

Against a backdrop of finding solutions, discourse was guided by the theme "Enhancing Social Cohesion and Deepening Participatory Democracy through Dialogue". This section seeks to capture the essence of the "facilitated group discussions" since all participants were given opportunities to have their voices heard as well as listen to others. Optimal use was made of these instances and spirited discussions, ideas and initiatives resulted from the process.

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¹ See address by the Chairman of the ERC Bishop Juan Edghill at the Opening of the MSF National Conversation, 2006. (Annex A)

November 15, 2006 - Finding a Way Forward for Guyana

For the purpose of the two-day discussion, participants representing the various entities listed were placed into ten (10) colour coded groups to firstly consider recommendations under eight (8) themes emanating from the Community and Regional meetings that were grouped for that purpose, and decide how these could be implemented and by whom. In addition, any other concrete suggestions made pertaining to improving presented recommendations were noted.

| The themes were: |
|--|
| □ Access to Opportunities and Resources/Equity |
| □ Infrastructure/Economy & Market |
| □ Governance & Democracy/Public Administration |
| ☐ Crime/Law & Order |
| ☐ Morals & Values/Social Inclusion/Cohesion |
| □ Social Issues & Youth/Health & Education |
| ☐ Environment/Land Issues |
| ☐ Amerindian Bill |
| Please see document at (Annex C) which encapsulates the recommendations filtered from the Community and Regional meetings. |
| The groups were facilitated by UNDP trained conflict transformation personnel utilizing the circle process. Each group had a rapporteur who recorded and reported to the plenary on the issues discussed and recommendations made. |
| Coming out from the group discussions, was a call by participants for the following steps and initiatives to move Guyana forward: |
| ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES/EQUITY |
| Land |
| ☐ The establishment of a Comprehensive National Land Policy to facilitate |
| equity and fairness of the distribution of land. |
| ☐ Government should increase affordable house lots to control squatting. |
| ☐ Re-introduction of Regional Land Selection Committees that are inclusive |
| (comprising government and other stakeholders from the community) |

| | The criteria and procedures for acquiring land must be publicized at the community level, with notices placed in public spaces. | |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| | Land allocation must be made public at the community and regional levels | |
| | (records of land allocation, criteria and procedure to acquire land). | |
| | Environmental factors must be considered by the administration when | |
| | allocating land. | |
| | The criteria (two (2) or more children) for houselot entitlement should be | |
| _ | revisited by Government. | |
| | Infrastructural development should be addressed before allocating house lots. | |
| | More housing schemes need to be created. | |
| | Persons should be given land titles speedily. | |
| | The relevant Ministries and agencies should work in co-operation with | |
| | regional authority to sort out land problems; for example Ministries of | |
| | Agriculture and Housing and Water, Guyana Forestry Commission, Guyana | |
| | Geology and Mines Commission, Guyana Lands and Survey Commission. | |
| | In this regard, there is need for regional committees, to oversee distribution | |
| | of land in the regions; the need to fairly and equitably distribute land. | |
| | The need for a policy for all regions and a pricing system that is arrived at | |
| | through consultation with stakeholders, taking into account the small man. | |
| | More housing schemes need to be created to address specific needs in the various areas. | |
| | various areas. | |
| | | |
| Pricin | g Systems/Market Policies | |
| | Rural community farmers who are asked to continue farming believe that | |
| | there should be effective and stable pricing systems and market policies | |
| | for locally manufactured goods. | |
| | There is need for greater involvement of the New Guyana Marketing | |
| | Corporation. | |
| | | |
| Proje | | |
| | The need for a more vigorous system of oversight of all government funded | |
| | projects. A system of feedback from communities must be encouraged. | |
| | A system of feedback from communities must be encouraged. | |
| National Insurance Scheme (NIS) | | |
| | The need to update the pension/benefits system of the National Insurance | |
| | Scheme. | |

| | Introduction of outreach programmes to sensitise people of their rights and general NIS procedures. |
|-------|---|
| | The Parliamentary Standing Committee on social services to engage the NIS |
| | on its proposed reform, and make its findings public. |
| | NIS to update its record keeping system and investigate defaulting employers. |
| | An assessment should be done of the existing appeals mechanisms in order |
| | to address weaknesses in NIS system |
| | Improved coordination between NIS and GPOC was required. |
| Job O | pportunities |
| | The opening of interior regions for the utilization and development of Guyana's vast lands. |
| | Qualified Guyanese should first be considered before jobs are given to expatriates. |
| | Citizens should be sensitized about the National Employment Agency at the Ministry of Labour. |
| | A National Employment Commission should be established. Part of its work will be to conduct a survey to determine the demand for skilled jobs and "what skilled persons are on the job market". |
| | The National Employment Commission should also work closely with industries and service providers to anticipate their labour needs. |
| | There should also be a youth employment skills register. |
| | The regional administration must play an active role in facilitating youth employment. |
| | Contractors should give consideration to unemployed youths from within the communities where projects are being done. |
| | Implement the YES programme developed by the PNC R 1 Guyana, which includes: |
| | - Giving incentives to labor agencies; garment factories. |
| | - Refocusing training and education to relevant fields. |
| | - Establishing free or affordable skills upgrading centers. |
| | Allow or create room for foreign investment and/or from the diaspora community. |
| | Lower power or electricity costs; a cheaper source of energy is needed, for |
| | example the building of a Hydropower plant should take priority. |

| | Examine how services/ companies in the past functioned and progressed, for example national service, Bermine etc. Reintroduce some of these initiatives and introduce assembly plants as to create jobs for youth. |
|---------|--|
| | Government needs to do more to equip young people, men, women and those who may have lost opportunities in life, with skills and capacities. |
| | There needs to be some mechanism in place to help market skilled youth in sports |
| | Government should and must focus both on the short and long term; need to remodel plan for employment and youth development to provide lasting opportunities. |
| | Relevant courses should be offered by the University of Guyana to respond to specific needs outlined by our agreed National Development Strategy. |
| | Government working along with civil society should spearhead national youth development. |
| | There should be a clear policy outlined for national youth development backed up by legislation. |
| | |
| Banki | ng |
| | Banking sector should lend support to hinterland areas. A system for hinterland applicants to access loans should be established. |
| | Lower interest rates should be considered for persons with low incomes. Government and commercial banks should review the present interest rates system. |
| | Government and other authorities should revisit payment plan options on house lots for public servants |
| | Banks need to do more to help people; need to lessen interest rates for lending/ borrowing; longer periods for repaying money to banks etc. |
| Institu | ute of Private Enterprise Development (IPED) |
| | Examine how IPED penetrates hinterland communities; find out their capacity, resources and their un-lending programmes. Dialogue with IPED needs to be initiated to look at their outreach programmes; examining current capacity, programme, resources and if help is needed. |

| | The need for the establishment of IPED branches in hinterland and outlying areas. Government should engage IPED to further this recommendation and fast track the process. |
|--------|--|
| | IPED should team up with other agencies/programmes to strengthen their capacity to serve Guyanese. |
| Nation | nal Service |
| | Broaden national youth development plan to include everyone/ all stakeholders. For example broaden the President Youth Choice Initiative to include not just sports but other skills and capacities. Complement this programme with the YES plan and National Service. Take the good elements from all the programmes and combine it into something new. Call it by some other name, it doesn't matter, what is important is the ultimate goal which is better trained and prepared youth. |
| | The re-introduction of National Service on a voluntary basis. Government should involve private sector in a partnership to re-open National Service. |
| | Ministry of Education and Ministry of Youth and Culture in collaboration with Ministry of Labour, the Private sector and the GDF should use National Service as an avenue for youth empowerment. s issue was discussed also under Infrastructure/Economy/Market |
| | The need for the proper functioning of the Bureau of Standards Need to ensure that the Bureau of Standards functions better; some work is needed in this area and overnight contractors need to be checked. Also there needs to be a decentralization of quality control to local levels/ authorities, central control on standards are ineffective. |
| Schoo | I Placement |
| | The need to revisit the new policy on the placement children in schools according to catchment areas in which they reside. It marginalizes rural children from the better/ best schools. |
| | Relations Commission (ERC) ERC must call on mainstream society to recognise and give equal opportunities to the Guyana Rastafarian Society |

| Taxes | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| | Government/Guyana Revenue Authority must ensure that all foreign companies pay the required taxes. |
| | Government/GRA should establish a tax credit system for companies who pay their fair share of taxes. |
| | Before the implementation of any new national programme or policy there should be adequate public education/sensitization e.g. VAT |
| Local C | Government Reforms/Elections |
| | Local government reform process must be completed and local government elections held without further delay. |
| Neighb | ourhood Democratic/Regional Democratic Councils (NDC/RDC) |
|] [| Local bodies at the NDC and RDC levels should have greater decision making power, thereby promoting greater inclusion of those directly concerned and less governmental intervention. |
| (| There must be organized communication towards development of the country. This must be at all levels NDC, Amerindian Village Council, RDC and Central Government. |
| □ (| Government and other stakeholders should develop a criterion for fiscal transfers and invest in capacity building for NDCs. We recognize the work of the local government task force and recommend speedy action in this area. |
| INFRASTRUCTURE/ECONOMY/MARKET | |
| NDC/RI | DC |
| | There must be a master plan that involves collaboration between community residents and NDCs/RDCs in infrastructural development. |
| Projects | |
| | The need for developing the capacity for monitoring and effective evaluation of projects. Community feedback should be encouraged. |

| Agricu | ılture |
|------------|--|
| The nemust | eed to enhance the affordability of agricultural machinery for farmers. There |
| | Transportation for agricultural produce from production areas to marketing facilities to be provided. |
| | An environment must be created to encourage youths to invest in agriculture e.g. |
| | ✓ training and capacity building✓ recognition |
| | ✓ finance✓ marketing |
| Roads | s/Utilities |
| | Strategic long term planning for water and electricity supplies should be expedited. |
| | The need to plan and develop housing schemes infrastructure. |
| | Investigate and invest in alternative sources of energy for example the building of a Hydropower plant should be a priority. |
| | The re-introduction of the Moca Moca hydro plant plan. |
| | The Ministry of Public Works and other relevant agencies should monitor the construction of roads to ensure that they are strong and durable. This would avoid unsightly 'patch work.' Special emphasis should be on hinterland roads. |
| | Electricity and telecommunications services should be extended to hinterland communities. |
| Public | Administration |
| | The "National Trust" should ensure that all public buildings be maintained at |
| | the highest possible standard. |
| | Government should ensure that all traffic lights are fixed and maintained. Replacement of all kokers behind housing areas. Emphasis should be placed on all drainage and irrigation facilities. |

Environment

 $\hfill\square$ Importers of plastic/styrofoam items should invest in the recycling of such products.

☐ Government should use environmental tax to recycle plastic/styrofoam products or put systems in place to ensure their proper disposal.

| | Penalties should be imposed and enforced on persons guilty of littering. |
|---|---|
| Draina | Age Systems NDCs should be given adequate subventions to clear clogged drainage. There must be continuous maintenance of drainage systems through legislation to ensure agreed on procedures are being followed. |
| Trans | portation |
| | Transportation costs from hinterland areas to Georgetown to be examined. There should be a fixed fare structure and the government should oversee the practices of private operators in order to ensure the affordable provision of air and land transport services for hinterland residents. |
| | The Georgetown to Lethem road should be upgraded. |
| | Establishment of bus stops in coastal regions to control traffic hazards. Free public transport for senior citizens should be introduced and maintained. |
| | The need to replace the present minibus system with controlled transportation |
| | system for school children and commuters in general. |
| GOVERNMENT AND DEMOCRACY /PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION Accountability | |
| ACCUL | Greater sanctions should be instituted for breaking rules. Rules should be in |
| | effect and apply "across the board" to all those involved in public administration. |
| | An oversight body to institute and enforce meaningful sanctions with respect to issues regarding dishonesty, discrimination and favouritism should be |
| | established. Thorough auditing of accounts at the RDC level must be done. |
| | Criteria for jobs must be published in all media. |
| | Public officials found engaging in corrupt practices should be demoted, |
| | transferred or dismissed. |
| | Contractors/firms must pass a test of competence before being awarded |
| | contracts by Government. Every RDC should present budget in timely manner to Central Government. |
| | Regular audits should be conducted in all government institutions. |
| | The Auditor General's office should be independent of the government; it |
| | office should be removed from the present location. There is need for less government control; this will reflect greater accountability and transparency. |

| | Registration |
|-------------------|--|
| | Materials needed to facilitate birth registration should be readily available in |
| | every region. |
| | The system of birth registration must be improved. |
| Gove | rnance |
| | Need for shared governance. Government should make provisions for shared governance |
| | There is need for the decentralization of authority. |
| | Officials should not wait until elections time to visit communities |
| | Government should recognize district Touchau councils. They should ensure systems are in place and functioning properly four years leading up to elections, and |
| | should not wait until close to elections to address problems of communities. |
| | The system of central governance should be changed; there should be more decentralization. |
| CRIME/LAW & ORDER | |
| The P | olice |
| | A greater police presence must be established in the hinterland areas. |
| | More police officers are needed to effectively function in the field. |
| · | word police officers are needed to effectively function in the field. |
| | Police outposts must be better equipped. |
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| The Law |
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| Laws against corruption and bribery to be enforced. |
| □ The backlog of civil and criminal court cases to be expedited |
| ☐ The need for effective gun license control. |
| □ The need for the creation of mediation centres countrywide. |
| □ The implementation of family court must be speeded up. |
| ☐ The implementation of laws and heavier penalties on perpetrators of domestic violence |
| Judicial system should be freed from political interference. |
| Judicial rulings be honoured by all irrespective of status |
| The passage and implementation of copyright laws to address the piracy of music and other intellectual property. |
| Illegal Weapons |
| □ Penalties for illegal weapons must be increased. |
| □ A special court for gun crimes must be established. |
| Facilities |
| □ A new remand center for women should be established. |
| □ Establishment of new penal facilities. |
| □ Facilities need more and better-trained staff |
| □ A proper juvenile facility with trained resource personnel should be |
| established. |
| Drivers' Licence |
| ☐ An autonomous body to issue drivers' licenses should be established. |
| □ Persons should be given an oral test to acquire a driver's license |
| |
| Truth and Dights Commission |
| Truth and Rights Commission ☐ The need for the establishment of a Truth and Rights Commission. |
| |
| MORAL AND VALUES/SOCIAL INCLUSION/COHESION |
| Corneral Dunichment |
| Corporal Punishment |
| Corporal punishment should be administered in a controlled way. Corporal punishment should be abolished in schools. |
| □ Cuipuiai puilisiiitetii siluulu be abulisteu III sciluuis. |

| Domestic violence |
|--|
| □ The need for more training and awareness on domestic violence countrywide □ Ministry of Human Services and Social Security should establish more rehabilitation centres for substance users and socially disadvantaged groups |
| Shared Governance |
| There was need for the concept of shared governance to be explored. Participants suggested the need for a process that mirrored that leading to the Multi-stakeholder Fora so that all views can be taken and analysed. |
| Projects |
| The implementation of infrastructural projects to be monitored. ERC and Public Procurement Agency should ensure that the tender processes are transparent. |
| Public Officials |
| The Office of the Ombudsman should be strengthened and citizens should be made aware of its functions. |
| The Director of Public Prosecutions should ensure prosecution of public officials who engage in corrupt practices. |
| Security personnel must be trained to respect all citizens regardless of perceived socio-economic status. |
| The Public Service Ministry should revisit the code of ethics for all public officers. |
| Politics |
| ☐ Guyana's leaders (political/religious/civic) should exhibit greater levels of tolerance. |
| Racism |
| Inter-religious organizations should be more proactive to help promote racial harmony/tolerance love and unity |
| □ Avoid the use of terms or phrases to describe people, that are offensive. |
| ☐ The use of the term "Guyanese" should be encouraged. Whenever there is need to differentiate identity, the use of the place of origin should be used rather than colour. |
| Music/Media/Culture |
| ☐ The singing of patriotic songs in schools should be resuscitated. |

| | More Rastafarian/culture music should be taught in schools The need to develop a schools' curriculum to engender a better |
|--------|--|
| | understanding of Guyanese cultural diversity. |
| | The need to develop student exchange programs across Guyana and promote inter-cultural communication through television, radio, newspapers, internet, etc. |
| Health | 1 |
| | Need for better health services in the hinterland and outlying areas. |
| | Doctors should be employed at health centres. |
| | |
| Water | |
| | Water ambulances should be considered for hinterland communities |
| Comn | nunity Members |
| | Provision should be made to co-opt community members in the regional sub |
| | committees. |
| | Community members should be the first source of labour for employers |
| | The need to include community members in decision-making. |
| HIV/A | IDS |
| | The need for programs to equip Touchaus, Police, and Justice of Peace to |
| | interact with people living with HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS testing centres should be placed in every region. |
| | Dissemination of information on issues such as domestic violence and |
| | HIV/AIDS should be made available to far flung communities. |
| | There must be a policy to ensure the employment of persons with HIV/AIDS. |
| | |
| SOCIA | AL ISSUES/YOUTH/HEALTH AND EDUCATION |
| | p. |
| Educa | The promotion of sex education in schools, thereby promoting a level of |
| | preparedness for life. |
| | Ministry of Education should provide adequate amounts of textbooks. |
| | The need for a special curriculum to be designed with specialised teachers to |
| | teach moral education. |

| | A branch of the University of Guyana should be established on the Essequibo Coast. | | | | |
|-------|--|--|--|--|--|
| | There should be a reduction of the cost of tuition at the Critchlow Labour | | | | |
| | College. The University of Guyana and the Government should establish ongoing adult | | | | |
| | education programmes (academic and vocational). | | | | |
| | Ministry of Education should introduce Health and Family Life Program in schools. | | | | |
| Sc | hool Children | | | | |
| | School Welfare Officers should monitor truancy. | | | | |
| Alcoh | ol/Drugs | | | | |
| | Laws against the purchase of liquor and cigarette by children must be enforced. | | | | |
| | Liquor restaurants must be closed in keeping with the law. Drug rehabilitation programs should be available nationwide, through | | | | |
| | government and civil society organisations. | | | | |
| | There is need for a more aggressive approach by Law Enforcement Agencies. | | | | |
| | More raids should be conducted on suspected drug sellers. | | | | |
| | The Government should establish more drug rehabilitation centers. There is need to revisit the law on penalties imposed for possession of | | | | |
| | marijuana. | | | | |
| Teach | ers | | | | |
| | Teachers' salaries should be increased. | | | | |
| | The shortage of teachers needs to be addressed. | | | | |
| Youth | | | | | |
| | Government should establishment a National Youth Policy. | | | | |
| | Management Committee must be established to activate the dormant Youth Choice Initiative Projects. | | | | |
| Sexua | Il Abuse | | | | |
| | There must be stringent laws to deal with sexual abuse particularly on | | | | |
| | children. | | | | |

| ☐ A data base to register UG graduates (those who are unemployed and underemployed) should be established by the Ministry of Labour. |
|--|
| Social Workers Uolunteers should be trained as social workers and counselors. |
| Community Development □ Every community should have a playground. |
| Hinterland Areas ☐ Hinterland facilities should be upgraded to attract coastland teachers. ☐ Telecommunication facilities in hinterland areas to facilitate internet use should be upgraded. |
| Skills/Training Skills training must be specific to the trends/main economic activities in particular communities. |
| ENVIRONMENT/LAND ISSUES AND THE AMERINDIAN BILL |
| Garbage ☐ Garbage disposal sites should be located away from heavily populated areas. ☐ Severe penalties for littering must be instituted. ☐ More disposal sites should be established. ☐ Sewage must be treated before disposal into rivers and streams (Local Government and the Municipalities). ☐ Trucks must be covered during garbage collection. ☐ There must be timely collection of garbage. ☐ RDCs/NDCs should monitor the garbage disposal by businesses and industries. |
| Sea Defence A national programme for sea defence structures needs immediate attention The need for the maintenance of sea defences. There is need for the re-employment of rangers along the sea wall to check for cracks and leaks. The cutting of mangrove trees must cease. |

| River | Miners should be fined for river pollution. EPA should control and monitor river pollution in the outlying areas. | | | | |
|-------------|---|--|--|--|--|
| The E | Implementation of environmental protection tax for miners. Conditions of the Environmental Act must be enforced | | | | |
| Noise | Offenders Noise offenders should be penalized by Police. | | | | |
| Amerindians | | | | | |
| | Encourage the expeditious composition of the Indigenous Peoples Commission. | | | | |
| | Government should ensure that Amerindians are educated on the Amerindian bill. | | | | |
| | Amerindians must be treated with respect and make to feel a part of the Guyanese family. | | | | |
| | Meaningful consultation should be held in all Amerindian Reservations. | | | | |
| | The word 'indigenous' should be used instead of "Amerindian" when addressing their issues. | | | | |
| | The Amerindian Bill needs to be amended. | | | | |
| | The need for a revision of the Amerindian Bill with respect to land titles. | | | | |

November 16, 2006 – Vision for Guyana

On the second day of the National Conversation, Political Parties, the Private Sector, Labour, Women, Youth and Religious Representatives made presentations on their vision for Guyana along with their ideas and recommendations to abet social cohesion (**Annex D**).² Many of the presentations echoed sentiments of peace and stability but underscored that such could only be realised in an environment where all Guyanese citizens are assured employment, adequate food, clothing, and housing, hence an improved standard of living.

Most of the stakeholders expressed concern about the crime situation in the country and respect for 'rule of law. Despite the diversity of the groupings, it was striking to

 $^{^{\}rm 2}$ See Annex D for presentations made by AFC, GAP/ROAR, PNC, PPP, UF, Labour, Private Sector, Youth, Women and Religion

note that participants generally agreed with many elements of the various presentations. See (Annex E).

The offerings were followed by stakeholder discussions where participants focused on *areas where there was consensus* on issues, *where further deliberation* was needed, and noted *points of non-agreement. The matters highlighted under the three groupings are listed in the table below:*

| NO. | ISSUES OF CONSENSUS | ISSUES FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION | ISSUES OF NON-AGREEMENT |
|-----|---|---|--|
| 1. | A vision of a harmonious Guyana where the human rights of all citizens are respected. | The perceived politicization of the Ethnic Relations Commission | Shared governance/inclusive governance, its meaning, conceptualization and relevance to Guyana. It was put forward by some delegates that there should be a national referendum on the issue of shared governance. |
| 2. | To realize a stable and prosperous society, inclusivity, trust and transparency are imperative. | The lack of willingness to investigate citizens' complaints against state officials | The re-introduction of National Service |
| 3 | Tolerance, order and the rule of law must be present, while equity and justice must prevail irrespective of status | Eradication of corruption and fraud in the society. | The perceived governmental control of state media and endangerment of freedom of the press. |
| 4. | The promotion and creation of investment opportunities as well as the stimulation of local entrepreneurship | The apparent lack of maturity by political parties | |

| 5. | Gainful employment, economic prosperity and a reduction in poverty are critical, as well as improved health standards and public safety for all. | The continued reformation of the Local Government system. | |
|----|--|---|--|
| | The youth of Guyana hold the key to prosperity and have the potential to unlock Guyana's present circumstances. Education opportunities and employment of youth are of utmost importance | The management of the crime situation; the issue of extra judicial killings; whether a Truth and Reconciliation Commission is needed in Guyana. | |

Multi-Stakeholder Working Group

As stated by the Chairman of the Ethnic Relations Commission in his opening address:

"We are here to develop a course of action to address specific issues"... "we are here to commit our policy makers at all levels, to time frames when affirmative action can be taken". "We must develop strategies for implementing plans and policies in the short, intermediate and long term".

To this end a "working group was birthed from the MSF National Conversation process to take up the charge of ensuring that the process does not end. The working group consists of twenty-three (23) members who have taken the mandate of deciding the timeline for having the report of the MSF National Conversation presented in the Parliament as well as following up on agreed schedules for action.

Participant Observation

Participants felt more time was necessary for a conversation of this nature. Some were also concerned that although the ERC's intention was to communicate the findings of the MSF to Parliament, it did not necessarily mean action will be taken. Participants also expressed concern that ERC may be overstepping its mandate and should be exclusively concerned with ethnic relations and issues thereof. They opined that economic, political and social issues did not fall within the ambit of the ERC.

Conclusion

The National Conversation was a useful exercise, since it brought together people from various constituencies across Guyana to speak with each other on issues relative to our country's development. The space provided was a safe one for it allowed participants to speak openly on matters of concern and together explore ways in which there can be solutions. However, while the national conversation was not intended as a forum for rehashing issues or making new recommendations, many participants found it difficult to shift to the mode of talking about how recommended action should be realized, who had the responsibility and when the recommended action should be undertaken. This invariably meant that not enough work was done in the area of actual actions and accompanying schedules. With the establishment of a working group drawn from the Conversation, it is envisaged that follow-up work will be done in addressing the issues raised and ensuring that recommendations are implemented.

List of Annexed Documents

Annex A – Address by the Chairman of the ERC Bishop Juan Edghill at the Opening of the MSF National Conversation.

Annex B - Allocation of Space to Participants

Annex C – Themes from the Multi-Stakeholder Forums: Recommended Actions to be taken on Issues Discussed.

Annex D – Presentations:

- Alliance for Change
- GAP/ROAR Sharing a Vision for Guyana
- Statement of the PNC/R to the Multi-Stakeholder National Conversation
- PPPs Vision Statement on the Way Forward for Guyana
- United Force
- Labour's Perspective
- Private Sector Commission
- Youth
- Women
- Religion

Annex E- Document on Presentations by Political Parties and other Interest Groups.