



66 Peter Rose and Anira Streets, Queenstown  
Georgetown, GUYANA  
Tel: 231-6265, 231-6479, 231-6281, 231-6473, Tel/Fax: 231-6246  
Email:ceo@ethnicrelations.org.gy

## **Our youths dream of a better Guyana**

The Ethnic Relations Commission hosted its National Youth Conversation at the National Cultural Centre on August 10, 2006, in collaboration with the UNDP Social Cohesion Programme.

There were 250 young people in attendance, drawn from around the country.

In opening remarks, ERC Chairman Bishop Juan Edghill assured his audience that dealing with young people was high on the Commission's agenda, and he informed them that there was a youth representative on the Commission.

Bishop Edghill said that at meetings countrywide, the Commission heard young people saying that they did not want to be used like a political football; and they want to be in place to express their concerns and have them addressed. They spoke of no future for them in the country if current tensions are not dispelled.

Bishop Edghill said young people across Guyana want access to land, to loans from banks to build their own homes and start their own businesses. "You have told me that you have a dream of a better country, a dream of a better Guyana," the Chairman said, "and the ERC is now providing a safe space for you to continue the conversation begun at neighbourhood and regional levels...You have the energy and the vision, and we are here to support you to have this dream come true," Bishop Edgill said.

Youth representative Darren Thorington, of the Volunteer Youth Corps, in his presentation observed that major problems facing our youth are unemployment and no access to finances.

He said young people need to realize that they have a future, for if they do not, then why make sacrifices today for a future that will never come. "For young people to wallow in despair is a sure recipe for disaster; and we don't want to be beneficiaries of the process, we want to be part of the process", he said.

Youthful businessman Anthony Snow, in his presentation, dealt with youth leadership, and assured the young people that they all have a chance to make a difference.

He told them that they tend to follow trends, and so they lose many opportunities.

He spoke of many resources being at hand, unrecognized by young people and so few are tapped into. And there's no use looking for quick solutions.

He advised that young people get together and forge a network of various skills, merging these and developing a wellspring of beneficial initiatives.

Later in the session, the young people got together in groups for discussions on various themes, and these were the results:

#### *Unemployment*

- There needs to be more institutions for skills training for school dropouts.
- A job register should be available with a list of skills need so unemployed youth can go after training in skills which are in demand.
- There should be career counsellors at secondary schools.
- National Service should be re-introduced.
- Retired persons should not be re-employed, and there needs to be more job opportunities in the regions.
- Stability on the local scene is necessary if foreign investment is to be encouraged.

#### *Education and skills training*

- There is a need to start education and discipline at home.
- There must be role models in our communities.
- Young people need help with counseling, scholarships, conflict resolutions in schools and the availability of libraries.
- Teachers must be offered more attractive remuneration packages if they are to stop seeking greener pastures overseas.

#### *Substance abuse*

- This is a result of a breakdown in moral values and peer pressure.
- Personal problems, no parental guidance and lack of education could also lead to substance abuse.
- Substance abuse leads to broken families, unemployment, crime, STD's, and dropping out of schools.
- Special television programmes and a counseling rehabilitation centre would be of tremendous help to those affected.

#### *Health*

- Health problems among young people include HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancies, malnutrition, inadequate health facilities and their affordability.
- Already in place are health centres, feeding programmes, sex education in schools and HIV programmes. What needs to be put in place are more specific messages from religious bodies and community groups, and more counselors.

#### *Culture and Recreation*

- Problems here include employment for artists, encouragement and financial support, exposure, training for singers, library of music and sports and art, and donations from businesses to promote artistic expressions.
- There is also the need for artists to raise their standards and level of performance.

### *Youth in leadership*

- This is inhibited by insufficient education, little personal development, lack of incentives and recognition, insufficient exposure, fear of criticism and poor role models. It can be encouraged by love of community and country, wanting to create change, good communication skills and a vision of purpose.
- A national youth platform, reinforcement of civic responsibilities among young people, a youth forum to discuss ideas and solutions, and sharp debating skills to promote conflict transformation are also needed.

### *Crime and violence*

- Contributing factors to crime are illiteracy, poverty, unjust laws, and insufficient education and opportunities.
- Factors to help reduce crime include:
  - Introducing more skills training in schools.
  - More outreach programmes by social organizations.
  - Reducing police harassment.
  - Implementing an effective witness protection programme
  - Put in place stiffer penalties for corrupt policemen.

### *Exploitation*

This group looked at exploitation of children, and recommended the following to discourage this:

- Media involvement in cases of exploitation.
- Disciplining children.
- Heavy penalties for those found guilty of this.
- Adequate supervision of children.

At the end of the session, the forum agreed that their findings be circulated widely in the media, that political leaders be approached by a committee selected from participants to let them know what the young people want and what is expected of them.

Thursday, August 17, 2006