

Report on the Inter/Intra Community Dialogue

The Ethnic Relations Commission is a Constitutional body established by Constitution (Amendment) (No. 2) Act 11 of 2000. Its functions set out in Article 212 of the Constitution are all embracing and divided into twenty-four (24) categories which can be further grouped under Conflict Resolution, Legal and Investigative, Education and Public Awareness and Research and Development.

Since the launching of its work programme in 2004, the ERC has been assiduously promoting harmony and good relations among Guyanese through consultations with political parties, civil society, youth, women's organisations, religious leaders and other stakeholders.

This was evident during January and February, 2008 after the Lusignan and Bartica massacres which left 11 and 12 persons respectively brutally slaughtered. The ERC intervened in response to those incidents, to avoid any escalation of potential ethnic tension and insecurities. In a proactive approach, the Commission visited the affected areas and lend support and guidance to residents in the form of conflict management and conflict transformation.

The ERC at that time felt that there was need to introduce an effective process to help guard against the stereotypical perceptions that were engulfing the minds of members within and outside both communities. A project to utilize this process was launched and titled **Inter/Intra Community Dialogue** under the theme "**Building Trust through Dialogue**"

The Inter/Intra Community Dialogue was essentially aimed at improving ethnic relations among Guyanese at the local community level. It was expected that the

dialogue would promote better understanding and tolerance among the ethnic groups through discussion and exchange of ideas.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the Inter/Intra Community Dialogue were:

- √ To encourage the understanding, acceptance and tolerance of the diversities among the ethnic groups through dialogue in a harmonious and safe environment.
- √ To forge solidarity among the ethnic groups particularly between the African and Indians in affected areas.
- √ To create a sense of ethnic security among the ethnic groups by examining stereotypical perceptions.
- √ To harness recommendations and suggestions for policy and behavioral changes for the fostering of harmonious relationships among the ethnic groups.

Funding to the tune of two million, four hundred and one thousand (\$2,401,000) dollars was provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the Inter/Intra Community Dialogue Project.

The Inter/Intra Community Dialogue commenced on June 16, 2008 at the Beterverwagting Primary School with twenty five (25) persons in attendance. Subsequent meetings were planned and executed on the East Coast of Demerara but because of low turnout, meetings had to be put on hold until the Commission revisited its organising strategy.

The Commission met and decided that it should target individual communities for Intra Community Dialogue instead of clusters of communities for Inter-Community Dialogue.

As the planning and organizing of meetings on the East Coast of Demerara were being reviewed, the focus of the Commission was redirected to Region 7, (Cuyuni/Mazaruni) for Inter/Intra Community Dialogue meetings. Ten (10) meetings were planned and executed between Friday, September 12 and Monday, September 15, 2008 with a total of over two hundred and fifty (250) participants in attendance. The meetings were facilitated by trained facilitators - Reverend Ronald Mc Garrell, Pandit Chrishna Persaud, Ms. Rajkumarie Singh and Ms. Lisa Thompson.

At each meeting, participants were shown two (2) video clips before discussion. The first video clip was "Dinner for Two", an animated film depicting differences, reluctance to share, disruption and ultimately mediation and agreement. The second video clip which was produced by the late Commissioner Shahabudin McDoom, focused on Guyana and the need for its people to co-operate and work together.

After viewing the films, participants were asked three specific questions by the facilitators.

The first question was, "*What kind of Guyana do you desire*"?, and the most common responses were:

- Loving
- Peaceful
- Co-operative

- United
- Harmonious

When asked the question, "*What are the obstacles to the Guyana you desire*", the common responses were:

- Lack of communication
- Racism
- Poverty
- Lack of job opportunities
- Teenage pregnancy and child labour
- Too many single parents
- Lack of unity/ co-operation within communities
- Poor education system
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Indiscipline among youths
- Persons who want to farm cannot acquire land
- High cost of transportation
- Lack of morals
- Need for electricity in certain communities
- Need for public washroom facilities
- Need for more potable water

- Need for a police outpost in certain communities

Participants were asked a final question, “*What can be done to overcome these obstacles*”?, the most common responses were:

- Live a respectable life
- Create jobs that people feel comfortable doing and also jobs for the uneducated
- Better law enforcement required
- Closure of all illegal rum shops
- The PTAs can educate both students and parents on the issue of race
- Awareness of who we are and a need to love each other as Guyanese
- More involvement with the church is required

A youth workshop was also held in Region 7 and approximately forty -five (45) youths from nine communities in and around Bartica attended. Young people had the opportunity to speak with each other about racism in the context of promoting harmony and peace within and outside their respective communities.

Set out overleaf is a table which reflects the meetings held in Region 7.

MEETINGS HELD IN REGION 7

Date	Venue	Particulars	Time	No. Of Participants
Friday, September 12, 2008	Byderabo Community Annex	Byderabo	16:30hrs	30
	Live call-in Television Program	Persons were encouraged to call in to air their views	17:30hrs	
Saturday, September 13, 2008	Kartabo Multi Purpose Building	Kartabo and Batavia	9:00hrs	27
	Karrau Primary School	Karrau	13:00hrs	23
	Peter Ramnauth Square, Bartica	Bartica	17:00hrs	30
	Bartica Community Centre	Outlying areas	09:30hrs	44
Sunday, September 14, 2008	Itaballi Multi Purpose Building	Itaballi	11:00hrs	38
	Two Miles Primary School	1-5 Miles	13:00hrs	30
	Agatash Primary School	Dag Point and Agatash	16:30hrs	18
Monday, September 15, 2008	Riversview Community Centre	Riversview, Fowl Mouth and Goshen	13:00hrs	23
	Regional Boardroom- Region # 7	Regional Councillors, Heads of Dept. etc.	13:00hrs	25

The East Coast Demerara meetings recommenced immediately after the meetings in Region 7. These were as follows:

MEETINGS HELD ON THE EAST COAST OF DEMERARA

Dates	Venues	Communities	Time	No. Of Participants
Tuesday 16 September, 2008	Helena Primary School	Mahaica	14:15 hrs	109
Thursday 18 September, 2008	Lusignan Primary school	Lusignan	14:45hrs	30
Thursday 18 September, 2008	Dublin Double D. Club	Non Pariel/Melanie Damishana	17:00hrs	37
Sunday 21 September, 2008	Success Mandir	Success	09:00hrs	40
	Annandale Mandir	Annandale	09:15hrs	36
	Annandale Arya Samaj Mandir	Annandale	10:15hrs	38
	Hope West Mandir, Enmore	Enmore	13:00hrs	9
	Anns Grove Primary School	Anns Grove	16:00hrs	24
	Clonbrook Primary School	Anns Grove/Clonbrook	16:00hrs	34
	Clonbrook Mosque	Anns Grove/Clonbrook	16:00hrs	22
Sunday 21 September, 2008	Clonbrook Hindu Temple	Anns Grove/Clonbrook	16:00hrs	36
Sunday 21 September, 2008	Ebenezer Congregational Church	Anns Grove/Clonbrook	16:00hrs	24

Monday 22 September, 2008	Golden Grove Primary School	Golden Grove	14:45hrs	200
	Friendship Primary School	Buxton/Friendship	17:00hrs	35
Tuesday 23 September, 2008	Annandale Secondary School	Parents of Annandale Secondary School	13:15hrs	250
Wednesday 24 September, 2008	Centre Point Building, Nabaclis	Golden Grove/Nabaclis/ Haslington	17:30hrs	30
Thursday 25 th September, 2008	Victoria Primary	Victoria	17:30hrs	24
Sunday 28 September, 2008	Unity Gibson Primary School	Unity, Lancaster and Mahaica	13:30hrs	13
Sunday 4 October, 2008	Plaisance Primary	Plaisance	16:00hrs	29
Sunday 4 October, 2008	Enterprise Primary	Enterprise	17:00hrs	30
Tuesday 7, October 2008	NDC Compound, Enmore	Enmore	17:00hrs	28
Wednesday 8, October 2008	BV Community High	Beterverwagting	17:00hrs	5

Wednesday 8, October 2008	Mr. Tekchand's Residence	Triumph	17:00hrs	20
Wednesday 8, October 2008	Pentecostal Holy Ghost Church, Paradise	Bachelor's Adventure/Paradise	18:00hrs	Aborted (Power Failure)
Tuesday 14, October 2008	Cove & John Primary	Cove & John	14:00hrs	35
Wednesday 15, October 2008	Cummings Lodge Secondary School	Industry/Cummings Lodge	17:00hrs	19
Wednesday 15, October 2008	Apex Education, Montrose	Better Hope/Vryheid's Lust	17:00hrs	33
Thursday 16, October 2008	Seventh-Day Adventist Church	L.B.I	18:30hrs	21
Saturday 18, October 2008	St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Chateau Margot	Chateau Margot/Lusignan	09:30hrs	26
Tuesday 21, October 2008	Inter Community Meeting	Representatives from the Community Meeting	14:00hrs	86

The Commission successfully completed the Inter/Intra Community Dialogue on Tuesday October 21, 2008 with a meeting (of representatives of the Intra Community Dialogue meetings held earlier on the ECD) at the Annandale Secondary School, Annandale, East Coast Demerara. Between June and October, 2008, twenty nine (29) Intra Community Dialogue meetings were held, and over one thousand, two hundred (1,200) persons participated. Participants at those meetings ventilated their views and gave valuable recommendations for achieving harmony in Guyana.

Facilitators utilized the same process used in Bartica with the video clips and questions throughout the entire project.

In term of the first question, **“What kind of Guyana do you desire?”**, throughout the twenty-nine (29) communities, the common responses were:

- ❖ United
- ❖ Cooperative
- ❖ Peaceful
- ❖ Togetherness
- ❖ Harmonious
- ❖ Loving
- ❖ Beautiful
- ❖ A Guyana without racism
- ❖ Progressive
- ❖ Crime-free society

In response to **“What are the obstacles to the Guyana we desire?”**, the most common responses were as follows:-

- ❖ Youths are not properly educated

- ❖ Racial animosity
- ❖ Discrimination based on race and religion
- ❖ Fighting among the political parties is a major component that hinders progress in Guyana and as such, this will affect Guyana from being a united/peaceful country
- ❖ Marginalization of Afro Guyanese
- ❖ We do not appreciate each other
- ❖ There is inequality in accessing government services due to the race problem
- ❖ Parents teaching children to be racist
- ❖ Poverty
- ❖ Drugs and alcohol abuse
- ❖ The environment influences stereotypical behaviour
- ❖ Lack of jobs for females
- ❖ Lack of strong leadership and good role models

On the final question, **“What can be done to overcome these obstacles?”**, the following recommendations were made:-

- ❖ The need for more social and sports facilities since sport can be an avenue to bridge racial disunity
- ❖ There must be improved communication among all the races in Guyana
- ❖ There must be equal access/ opportunities of resources to all Guyanese
- ❖ People must be educated about each other’s culture and religious beliefs
- ❖ Parents should not teach racism to their children
- ❖ The need for communities to be integrated
- ❖ The fear/mistrust/stereotypical perceptions must be eradicated in homes, place of worship, schools and the media to lend support in this area
- ❖ Cooperation among all Guyanese to ensure a Guyana we all desire

- ❖ Politicians must keep “their word” / promises
- ❖ Removal of “Indo” and “Afro” when identifying the two major ethnic groups
- ❖ Politicians should set good examples regarding racial issues; they contribute to the division among the people
- ❖ People must put all prejudice aside and start living together
- ❖ Use of racist language must be eradicated
- ❖ Laws should be implemented to prevent media personnel from promoting racism

The methodology utilized to inform communities about the meetings was by the distribution of flyers through post offices on the East Coast which were then hand-delivered by postal employees on a house-to-house basis. Letters were also dispatched to community leaders, religious organizations, women’s groups, youth groups, schools and business entities requesting their participation as well as assistance in mobilising residents for the meetings. Those who attended the meetings were community leaders, pastors, priests, Hajjis, women and youth as well businesspersons. Some meetings were attended by all male, while some had a heavy representation by women. They all felt that their participation in the meetings was very important.

The purpose of the Inter-Community Dialogue meeting held on Tuesday October 21, 2008 was for participants to review the recommendations proposed by them at the previously held twenty-nine (29) dialogue meetings, since it was their responsibility to suggest practical strategies to deal with the challenges identified. Participants were divided into three groups to discuss and suggest ways in which the said recommendations could be implemented and sustained.

Listed overleaf are the suggestions of the three Groups:

SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS - GROUP 1

- ❖ People need to let go of racial hatred. The television should be a medium to deal with racial issues.
- ❖ Guyanese must work together.
- ❖ There should be equitable distribution of land.
- ❖ More job opportunities should be available to youths.
- ❖ Political Leaders should project unity and not use the “race card” on public platforms.
- ❖ Domestic violence and truancy among school aged children should be addressed by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security and Members of the Police Force should be trained to deal with issues of domestic violence.
- ❖ Religious Leaders should worship together to show unity and work towards promoting a Guyana we all desire.
- ❖ Policemen need to show more respect for the law. We should rid the country of corrupt police officers.
- ❖ Decent citizens should be awarded with national honours.
- ❖ Need for more public campaigns and television advertisement to promote the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic.
- ❖ There must be non-racial leaders in CDCs and NDCs.
- ❖ Need for a Truth and Reconciliation Committee to be set up for Politicians.
- ❖ Business agencies should live up to promises (GT&T, GPL, GWI, etc).
- ❖ Make lease land available to the people.
- ❖ Enterprise farmers should be compensated for loss of farmlands.
- ❖ Government should build more sporting facilities for youth. Sports should be used as a medium for village integration.

- ❖ Welfare officers should be appointed in schools throughout the country to re-inforce career guidance and address disciplinary problems.
- ❖ More activities must be planned and executed to sensitise communities on racial issues through the schools P.T.A.
- ❖ Meetings like the Inter Community Dialogue should be held on a regular basis.
- ❖ Literary programs should be implemented for school dropouts and young adults.
- ❖ Let go of “Burnham and Jagan”. Move beyond and look for new leaders.
- ❖ Lands should be made available to various religious bodies for the purpose of building places of worship.
- ❖ Employers should create a safe space for employees to vent their feelings – especially at elections time.
- ❖ Teaching Service Commission (TSC) should decide who gets duty free concession instead of the Guyana Teachers Union (G.T.U).
- ❖ We are Guyanese not ‘Afro’ or ‘Indo’ Guyanese.
- ❖ Let us live as we used to in the past.
- ❖ A fine should be implemented for people who use racist remarks.
- ❖ Remove insane people off the streets.
- ❖ Court cases take too long – people should not be remanded for lengthy periods for simple larceny.
- ❖ Seriously address “drug trafficking” at port of entries.
- ❖ There must be fairness in the distribution of developmental works in the communities. Workforce on construction sites must be balanced.
- ❖ Lie detectors should be used on all public officers, government ministers and religious leaders.
- ❖ Enhancement work in all communities should be pursued. Spending in communities must be made public.
- ❖ Persons who destroy public facilities should be imprisoned.

SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS - GROUP 2

- ❖ Parents should desist from making racist remarks.
- ❖ Government should make available statistics and information on the tendering process.
- ❖ We must have God in us.
- ❖ We must practice what we preach.
- ❖ We must have tolerance.
- ❖ We must learn to appreciate and respect each other.
- ❖ Eradicate selfish behavior.
- ❖ Need for more inter-religious dialogue at the community level.
- ❖ Teach religious education in schools.
- ❖ Politicians should be educated on racial issues
- ❖ Children should be educated on the contributions made to the development of Guyana by persons of each ethnic group.
- ❖ Children should be taught to love one another.
- ❖ Venues where sporting activities are held need to be rotated so as to encourage integration.
- ❖ Communities can promote sporting activities and invite other communities to attend.
- ❖ Each community must nominate leaders who can represent their respective communities and promote interaction.
- ❖ Skill training facilities and facilitators in the communities.
- ❖ Get involved in community projects that will bring relief to Guyanese of all ethnicity.
- ❖ Community leaders can start counseling sessions/programs that can benefit people regardless of race.
- ❖ Government must cooperate with community organizations to help build love and trust.

- ❖ Persons in authority must be true to their words.
- ❖ Complaints against persons in authority must be investigated in a fair and unbiased manner.
- ❖ Need to ensure that there are institutions on the East Coast of Demerara to cater for the empowerment of school dropouts.
- ❖ Churches must play a greater role in teaching our children to love and respect each other.
- ❖ Drop the racial labels we place on our selves and each other.
- ❖ Instead of looking back at the negative, let's look forward with hope.

SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS-GROUP 3

- ❖ Encourage religious integration to foster trust, love and respect for each other.
- ❖ Inter-Religious Bodies can help to integrate religion and culture at the community level.
- ❖ Merge religious bodies at the inter-community level to plan national religious activities.
- ❖ Religion can bridge people of different ethnic backgrounds.
- ❖ Bring together the NDCs to plan inter-religious activities.
- ❖ Teachers should be trained at the training college level to have an appreciation for all religious cultures.
- ❖ Religious studies should be a part of the education curriculum.
- ❖ Use sports to foster togetherness.
- ❖ The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports should implement inter-community sporting activities.
- ❖ Media campaign needed to educate citizens on the need to eradicate racial discrimination and stigma.

- ❖ The need for more reciprocal inter-community social events (cook outs, playing of games etc).
- ❖ Economic imbalance between the two major ethnic races can cause envy and strife.
- ❖ Citizens need to have respect for each other's religion.
- ❖ Playing of English and Indian music can help to integrate the society.
- ❖ Emphasis should be placed on educating youths on racial harmony - people need to let go of their racial hatred and emotion.
- ❖ All citizens, at an individual level, has a part to play in building trust.
- ❖ ERC can play a part in fostering unity and inter-dependence for each other.
- ❖ The correct ethnic terms should be taught at home and at the primary school level.
- ❖ A national dress needs to be promoted.
- ❖ National events should be observed with social activities planned by all ethnic groups at the community level.
- ❖ Re-introduce national service countrywide.
- ❖ The present education curriculum needs to be revised to include compulsory subjects to harness Guyana's natural resources.
- ❖ Politicians should not encourage disrespect among their supporters.
- ❖ Guyanese must be patriotic.

The Inter/Intra Community Dialogue was a process developed by the Ethnic Relations Commission to reach out to communities, particularly those that were affected by the massacres during the early part of 2008. Its aim was to bring people of various ethnic groups together to share their hurts and to suggest ways for the improvement of ethnic relations in Guyana.

Several Intra Community Dialogue Meetings were held in Bartica and its neighbouring communities as well as in villages on the East Coast of Demerara, giving residents the opportunity to highlight the kind of Guyana they desire, obstacles that affect the development of the Guyana they wish for, and recommendations for overcoming those obstacles. Apart from recommendations made at those meetings, there were other recommendations/suggestions (included in this document) by residents at the final Inter Community Dialogue Meeting held on October 21, 2008.

It is hoped that through this report, members of Parliament will be more enlightened on the issues of concern to residents in the targeted areas, which can help in the formulation of social policies that can satisfy the needs of the people.