

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2015-2016) OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

41ST Sitting

Thursday, 4th August, 2016

The Assembly convened at 2.10 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Leave from Sitting

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, leave has been granted today for the Hon. Member Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha to be absent.

Birthday greetings

Mr. Speaker: It has been drawn to my attention that congratulations are in order for one of our Members who has attained another milestone. I speak of the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, whose birthday it is today. [*Applause*]

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following reports were laid:

- (1) Financial Paper No. 1/2016 – Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) – Advances made from the Contingencies Fund totalling \$931,018,292 for the period 1st January, 2016 to 28th July, 2016.
- (2) Financial Paper No. 2/2016 – Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling \$2,089,699,085 for the period 1st January, 2016 to 31st December, 2016.

- (3) The Petroleum (Exploration and Production) (Tax Laws) (Esso Exploration and Production Limited, CNOOCNexen Petroleum Guyana Limited and Hess Guyana Exploration Limited) Order 2016 – No. 10/2016.
- (4) The Excise Tax (Amendment) Regulations 2016 – No. 4/2016.
- (5) Dollar Credit Line Agreement dated March 16, 2016 between the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the Export-Import Bank of India for US\$50,000,000.00 for the East Bank-East Coast Road Linkage Project.
- (6) First Amendatory Dollar Credit Line Agreement dated March 16, 2016 between the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the Export-Import Bank of India for US\$2,991,147.00 for acquiring, installing and commissioning of fixed and mobile irrigation pumps. [*Minister of Finance*]
- (7) The Technical Audit Report on the Kato Secondary School Complex by Rodrigues Architects Ltd. [*Minister of Public Infrastructure*]

Minister of Public Infrastructure [Mr. Patterson]: Mr. Speaker, while I am standing please allow me to make five brief points on the report?

Sir, this school, as you would know, is located in Region 8. The genesis behind the construction of the school was that, when completed, it would serve about 500 students from areas such as Monkey Mountain, Kuraparu, Kopinang, *et cetera*. The report was done on behalf of the Ministry of Education. All parties involved in the report were given an opportunity to respond to the queries and the issues raised and I just want to highlight six points.

1. Both the contractor and the consultant, in their defence of the matters that I am going to raise, claimed that they were pressured by members of the previous Administration to complete the work expeditiously and timely because of the elections period and that is written in the report.
2. On the structures, it was found that the quality of the reinforced concrete and other elements were substandard. Fifty per cent of the concrete testing failed. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you are presenting the report on the Kato Secondary School.

Mr. Patterson: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Then I would ask you to let the report be as concise as possible, as is the normal treatment of reports. Please proceed.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you Sir. With your guidance, I will surmise to say that the report highlighted several deficiencies and they are all written in the report. I also want to say that we are committed to having the Kato Secondary School completed. I do not want to go into each and every detail but this Government will complete the school. I will shorten my presentation to say that this was a project that was poorly executed and will, obviously, be a blue print for my Ministry on all projects, in that, when an audit is done, it will be laid in the National Assembly for public scrutiny.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Minister.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

The following report was laid:

- (1) Report of the Public Accounts Committee relating to the appointment of Members of the Public Procurement Commission. [*Mr. Irfaan Ali– Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee*]

ORAL QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

1. Data based information received from GECOM

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, there are two oral questions without notice which I believe stand in your name. Please proceed.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you Mr. Speaker. There are three questions without notice for Ministers standing in my name. They are all rather brief questions. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister of Social Protection, Ms. Volda Lawrence, whether she could inform this National Assembly what database information was sought and received from the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM). Could the Minister disclose in what way would the database information be used in the work of the Ministry?

Minister of Social Protection [Ms. Lawrence]: Mr. Speaker, with regards to the first question asked by the Hon. Member, let me at the outset indicate to this House that the request by the Ministry of Social Protection to the Guyana Elections Commission had absolutely no ulterior motive. The information which the Ministry sought was that which is on the GECOM's website. It is also in the public domain via the lists which were placed at the various medical centres, schools and other public buildings for the persons within the various communities to peruse.

Thirdly, this particular information was disseminated by GECOM to all political parties, prior to the elections. The information which we sought was basically for those persons who are 65 years and over.

Ms. Teixeira: Supplementary question: Could the Hon. Minister state whether the Ministry sought the National Register of Registrants (NRR) or the Final Voters' List (FVL). This is because the FVL is on a website and is downloadable and those are the lists that would be posted at the voting or registration centres for the purpose of elections. Are you saying that you had to seek permission from GECOM to get the voters' list? Is it the FVL or the NRR that you are using since the NRR is a completely different list?

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, to the Hon. Member, the information sought was that listed on the website and, as I said, the information was on the documents posted in the public domain. What the Ministry basically asked GECOM to do with that information was to disaggregate those persons who are 65 years and over as of 15th December.

With regards to the second part of the question, this information will be used by the Ministry of Social Protection to ensure that all of our pensioners receive their pensions.

Mr. Speaker: Is there a second and third question, please?

Ms. Teixeira: No, I will move to the next question for another Minister.

2. Data based information sought from GECOM

Ms. Teixeira: I wish to ask the Hon. Minister of Education, Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine, whether he can inform this National Assembly what database information is being sought from GECOM and disclose what uses the Ministry proposes to GECOM to explain this request?

Minister of Education [Dr. Roopnaraine]: Mr. Speaker, I regret to inform the Hon. Member that I have requested this information from my technical advisers and have not yet received it. As soon as I do receive the information I will ensure that it is circulated and provided for the Hon. Member.

Ms. Teixeira: Can I just clarify with the Hon. Minister whether the Ministry of Education did request the database information from GECOM or is it that he is asking his advisers to advise him if they had asked?

Dr. Roopnaraine: The answer is the latter. I am asking that the technical advisers to brief me in full in relation to the information they requested and why?

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you for your candidness. It is much appreciated as the request was made to GECOM by an officer within your Ministry and, therefore, I would like, when you are more prepared, to come back to the question, if you would like.

Mr. Speaker: Does that exhaust your questions now Hon. Member?

Ms. Teixeira: No, I have one more question.

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed.

2.25 p.m.

3. The New Global Human Order

Ms. Teixeira: This is a question to the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Greenidge. The 71st United Nations (UN) General Assembly this year will be discussing the UN Resolution 69/202, under the quote:

“The role of the United Nations in promoting a new global human order.”

Since, the New Global Human Order (NGHO) was initiated at the United Nations, by Guyana, in the mid-1990s by President Dr. Cheddi Jagan, could the Hon. Minister, Mr. Greenidge, inform this House whether Guyana will continue to support and continue its stewardship of the resolution at the upcoming UN General Assembly?

Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs [Mr. Greenidge]: I thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I would like to respond by first of all indicating to the distinguished Member, Mdm. Teixeira, that since Dr. Jagan held the International Conference on the NGHO in

Georgetown in 1996 and the introduction of the NGHO into the agenda of the United Nations a couple of things have happened. It is instructive, I think, to bear those in mind in order to understand where we could go, as it regards the future.

Over the years (2001–2014), since the 2000 introduction, the UN General Assembly has considered the issue consistently and has had plenary debates on the item several times. A high point in the consideration of this was the convening of an informal thematic debate on addressing inequalities. This was done by the President of the UN General Assembly in 2013 and I believe the Minister of Foreign Affairs, at that time, had participated.

In 2014, there was a resolution emphasising the need to accelerate efforts to promote human well-being and so forth. At this point in time, this perhaps, which turned out to be the most prominent initiative - that Guyana advanced in the UN in the last 20 odd years - has become an established item on the UN agenda. However, it was not taken in the Session 2015–2016 and at that time, there were several major agreements which will shape the development of the landscape up to the year 2030. These were able to garner wide support and included the Sendai Framework, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Paris Club Agreement. Therefore, I think there is the need to re-examine or update the NGHO's initiatives because many of these new developments recently agreed, touch on, overlap, concern, absorb, call it what you will, many of the areas that were raised by Dr. Jagan and the subsequent discussions.

So meaningful opportunities to further promote this NGHO within the UN framework, I think, would require that it be more closely linked to, for example, the 2030 Agenda which deals with developing the question of inequalities, especially within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 10, that is, reducing inequalities, pursuing efforts to build on the report and so forth. That report of the Secretary General (SG), which deals with these matters, is yet to be released; it is almost ready. So what I am saying is that the relevance of this particular item, as an initiative in its own, is now, if one likes, questionable.

In looking at it, at this point in time, we will find that it does not fit neatly into the prevailing global developmental preoccupation. There is a lack of any clearly delineated ideas and well-developed proportions in support of the initiative; there is limited space for competing proposals in the context of the new development agenda; there is an absence of clear political support or champions in the international arena; and there are specific concrete proposals to

which there were considered Opposition, such as Tobin Tax, these are amongst the things that are included in the proposal.

There is tacit support from many friendly countries without their true buy-in. These are issues which have to be taken into account. Additionally, the NGHO has not benefitted from sustained and robust political and intellectual consideration over the last 25 years. At this point in time, I think consideration could be given to consolidate the gains from the NGHO. Once the report of the SG is available, a major meeting of appropriate shareholders might be convened to take account of developments with respect to those areas in which it overlaps. So that is the situation at this point in time and I trust that the Member would understand the comments or agree with them rather.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, supplementary questions. What began as the New Global Humanitarian Order by resolution of this House on 27th June, 1994 and the comments by the Hon. Minister which pointed to what appears to be in his diplomatic language, that the Government will not be continuing its stewardship of the New Global Human Order, in fact by the Minister's own admission that the initiative...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you said you are making a supplementary question?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: I thought that you were asking a question.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. I will get to it.

Mr. Speaker: Well, please let us get to the question.

Ms. Teixeira: I thought the levity you give Minister Patterson, on the reports could be given to me too, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the levity is given to every Hon. Member.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you Sir. Could I ask that Hon. Minister, in relation to the New Global Human Order, the focus is on poverty eradication and equitable trade relations between countries - equal justice, is the Minister saying that when he said that the initiative, on its own, is questionable, is he saying that these global issues are no longer of importance? For example, the eradication of poverty, equal trade relations between large and small developing countries and also the issue of equality and justice?

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, I find it very intriguing that our Colleague, on the other side, could have come to that conclusion. I did not suggest that we would do nothing about it nor did I suggest that these issues were no longer relevant. I thought that I was extremely clear. The question, for example, of reducing global inequalities and the like, I do not want to list all of them again, forms part of the agenda of many of the items that I listed just now.

The question then is, if elements of the NGHO are already incorporated within the framework of other initiatives, the question of having a separate or pursuing a separate initiative then arises. I went through the trouble of listing the elements that are not incorporated in other initiatives and which elements the previous Government, in the last 20 odd years, has been unable to mobilised international support on. That is what I was saying. Those, for which international support could be mobilised, have already been incorporated with other initiatives.

The Sustainable Development Goals, for example, deal very clearly and explicitly with the matter of global inequalities and, therefore, my answer is, when we see the report of the Secretary General of the UN – that is what I said before - we will determine what additionally needs to be done. There is no question of us pursuing a separate and independent initiative as per the resolution that was passed in 1994.

I would just remind the Speaker and Colleagues, again, that this is an initiative which has remained without the kind of capacity to sustain itself separately, in spite of 20 odd years within the party that spawned it. So do not put it or cast it as though we are neglecting a great initiative that had been formulated.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member appears to be...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, is there another question that we are having now?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, Sir. This is a rather important issue. Is it not Sir?

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you Sir. Is the Minister, aware that the other agreements he refer to are not on this UN General Assembly Agenda? This resolution on the UN New Global Human Order is on the agenda of the 71st General Assembly. Therefore, what is the Government of Guyana's position with regards to this resolution, which has been the property and became

the property of no less than the Secretary General of the United Nations who has presented reports on this initiative of Guyana? Could you please answer, Sir?

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, if indeed this initiative has become the property of the Secretary General, then we have no problem. We do not need to do anything. But let me just say specifically in respect of the question posed by the distinguished Colleague, that this item is item 15 on the Provisional Agenda under A/71/150 of the upcoming 71st Session of the UN General Assembly. And as I have framed the problem now, we will deal with it in that context.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

For Written Replies

1. Encashing of old age pension vouchers for pensioners residing in Region No. 9

Mr. Charlie: Pensioners residing in Region No. 9 - North and South Rupununi have complained that, in the past, the Toshao in the Amerindian Villages were given the responsibility to encash their Old Age Pension (OAP) Vouchers at the Lethem Post Office. This is not the case at present.

The pensioners have to approach certain business persons in the sub-districts who have been identified to encash their vouchers. This arrangement has not been working well for the senior citizens. When they approach the business persons to encash their vouchers, the persons claim that they do not have money on hand to immediately encash the vouchers. Residents who travel from the riverine communities are mostly affected by this situation.

Is the Hon. Minister of Social Protection aware of the difficulties being experienced by Pensioners in Region 9 with respect to encashing old age pension vouchers? If so, could the Hon. Minister inform the National Assembly:-

- (i) Why the system was changed from the Toshao encashing the vouchers on behalf of the Pensioners at the Lethem Post Office?
- (ii) Since the current system in place is not working properly, is the Minister prepared to reverse her decision to reinstitute the previous system, which was, having the

Toshao encash the old age pension vouchers for the Pensioners at the Lethem Post Office?

Ms. Lawrence: There has been no change to the system of encashing of Old Age Pension Vouchers by Toshao. Listed below are the names of Toshao and villages for who have encashed OAP vouchers for the year 2016 to date.

North Rupununi

<u>Village</u>	<u>Toshao</u>
Apoteri	Nigel John
Rewa	Garner Edwards
Trash Water	Silas Thomas
Fair View	Lucy Marslow
Annai	Mark George
Aranaputa	Adon Jacobus
Yakarinta	John Benjamin
Massara	Lenny Moses
Toka	Delano Davis

Central Rupununi

<u>Village</u>	<u>Toshao</u>
Fly City	Russian Dorrick
Kaicumbay	Russian Dorrick
Yupukari	Russian Dorrick
Katoka	Desmond Michael
Semoni	Desmond Michael

Nappi	Walter Henrico
Parishara	Walter Henrico
Hiowa	Walter Henrico
Quarrie	Yusa Xavier
Kumu	Yusa Xavier
St Ignatius	Yusa Xavier
MocoMoco	James George
Parikwaruanu	Cyril Anthony

South Central Rupununi

Village

Toshao

Shlinab	Nicholas Fredericks
Quiko	Nicholas Fredericks
Meriwau	Nicholas Fredericks
Potarinau	Paulinaus Albert
Baitoon	Paulinaus Albert
Katuur	Paulinaus Albert
Shriri	Paulinaus Albert
Sand Creek	Dereck David
Rupunau	Laurentino Herman
Katoonarib	Marcus Alexander
Sawariwau	George Thomas
Shea	John Agustus-Deep South Rupununi

Maruranau	Patrick Gomes
Awarewaunau	Genevieve Thomas
Ishalton	Douglas Kasimero
Chirkidnau	Douglas Kasimero
Karauda	Ernest Thompson
Achawib	Leonard Johnson
Bashaizon	Leonard Johnson
Baba Bara	Ekufa Mewasha
Guns	Paul Phekema

2. Distribution of old age pension books for new pensioners residing in region No. 9

Mr. Charlie: Could the Hon. Minister of Social Protection say when new and eligible Pensioners who applied for old age pensions in January, 2016, will receive their pension books?

Ms. Lawrence: Applications processed for the Period January-June 2016 for Old Age Pensions for Region 9 are:

Month	Amount
January	265
February	395
March	423
April	611
May	194
June	836

Total	2,723
--------------	--------------

**REQUEST FOR LEAVE TO MOVE THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE ASSEMBLY
ON DEFINITE MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**Unlawful and undemocratic behaviour of APNU/AFC Councillors in the Regional
Democratic Council, Region No. 5**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I received a request on the 2nd August, 2016, by the way of a letter, from the Hon. Mr. Mohabir Nandlall. I now invite Mr. Nandlall to speak. Hon. Mr. Nandlall, you will be brief in your presentation, no doubt. Please proceed.

Mr. Nandlall: I will read the motion, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I beg your pardon.

Mr. Nandlall: I will read the motion.

Mr. Speaker: You would read the motion.

Mr. Nandlall: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Nandlall:

“WHEREAS the duly and democratically elected Regional Democratic Council of Administrative Region # 5, a local democratic organ, has been prevented from holding a Statutory Meeting for seven consecutive months;

AND WHEREAS the only known cause of this travesty is the relentless, disruptive, unconstitutional and unlawful behaviour of the APNU/AFC Councillors;

AND WHEREAS this situation has continued unabated despite many appeals to these APNU/AFC Coalition Councillors, and, with the knowledge of the Government and the subject Minister;

2.40 p.m.

AND WHEREAS this National Assembly approved the 2016 Budget for Region #5, this Regional Democratic Council has been prevented from exercising its constitutional/statutory responsibilities to the profound disadvantage and detriment of the best interests and welfare of all the Residents of Region # 5;

AND WHEREAS this untenable situation has led to public opinion outrage, as well as, motions of support being adopted by a number of other Regional Democratic Councils in opposition to this disruptive behaviour and undemocratic posture of these councillors and in support of the elected chairperson and elected Regional Democratic Council to function as provided for by the Guyana Constitution and the relevant statutes;

BE IT RESOLVED that this National Assembly upholds the Constitution and defends the right of the duly and democratically elected Regional Democratic Council # 5 to meet and execute its mandate and responsibilities;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this National Assembly calls upon the APNU/AFC Councillors to immediately cease and desist from this disruptive, unlawful and undemocratic behaviour.”

Sir, since I received, from the Clerk of the National Assembly, a letter which informed me as follows...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you wished to read and I have permitted you to read the notice. Although I felt that you would have indicated to the House that you wrote me and what you had included in your letter, but you have read that. Then I think you might want to leave the Speaker to indicate his response to that.

Mr. Nandlall: Very well, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Are you through with reading the motion?

Mr. Nandlall: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: And that is all you wish to say to this House, in relation to your communication with the Speaker?

Mr. Nandlall: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Very good, I thank you. Hon. Members, I received the motion and I requested the Clerk of the National Assembly to inform Mr. Nandlall that his motion was not allowed, but that it was disallowed in the context of the realities which existed at the time and subsequent to my receipt of his motion.

It is also true to say that, on its own, the motion would have also been disallowed, since it does not meet the requirements of urgency, given the fact that, in his very letter, Mr. Nandlall said that this situation existed for seven months. One has to ask if it existed for seven months without any attention from anyone, why it is suddenly urgent on the eighth month. Hon. Members, I think it is courteous for me to let the House know my thinking. It is not an invitation for the House to comment on the Speaker's ruling. The Speaker does not require that. I am not requiring it now either. That is the Speaker's reply on this matter. *[Applause]*

MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTINGS OF THE ASSEMBLY AND MOVED BY A MINISTER

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 104 (9)

BE IT RESOLVED:

That Standing Order No. 104(9) be suspended to enable the Assembly to proceed at its Sitting on Thursday, 04th August, 2016, with the adoption of the Report of the Public Accounts Committee relating to the appointment of Members of the Public Procurement Commission, which was presented to the Assembly at today's Sitting. *[First Vice-President and Prime Minister]*

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: It gives me honour to move that Standing Order No. 104 (9) be suspended.

Question put.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, we are a little confused by this suspension motion. Every time I get up here to respond to the Prime Minister's suspension motions, it is either number eight or number nine, and we are now at number 10, just to keep everybody in line as to how many suspension motions are taking place in this House.

What is very odd about the suspension motion is that, next to me is the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) who agreed to this motion and report. The Members of

the PAC did not ask for a suspension to rush this through. They had asked that the report and motion be tabled. Therefore, this is why I am little confused that the Chairman of the Committee does not know that there was a suspension motion and is unaware that there was a suspension motion being brought by the Hon. Prime Minister, for a Committee he is not a Member of.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, I am given to understand that this was included here on the basis of information provided.

Ms. Teixeira: I do not know who provided that information. The Chairman did not.

Mr. Speaker: If you are saying, and the Chairman is here and that the Chairman is unaware of this, please proceed with what you are saying.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, thank you Sir. The Members of the PAC are: The Chairman, Mr. Irfaan Ali, Bishop Edghill, Mr. Nigel Dharamlall, Ms. Pauline Sukhai, the Hon. Ms. Volda Lawrence, the Hon. Ms. Valerie Patterson, Mr. Jermaine Figueira and Mr. Audwin Rutherford. The understanding was that the report and motion would be tabled today, but what I am saying is that the Committee made no decision to rush this through or to request that the Prime Minister brought a suspension motion. They are slightly two different things.

We are meeting on 8th August and, therefore, that is not a long time. This is an Opposition day and we have issues. Again, it is happening during an Opposition day. The Prime Minister is bringing a suspension motion that will distract from what we are to deal with. The point is Sir, and maybe if Hon. Members are saying that I am not telling the truth, they can say, but I have consulted with the Chairman and Minister Lawrence, who I know has had a long association, and they were both unaware that there was a suspension motion. The report has been properly tabled in the House and it is on the Order Paper, but the suspension motion is the issue Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Teixeira and Hon. Members, it is not the usual thing that communication...

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

I am going to say to Hon. Members that sometimes thoughts which do not contribute to the discussion are probably best not uttered in the hearing of the Speaker. He might just hear those thoughts and be moved and see whether there are rules that could be applied. I am

asking Hon. Members to please assist me in that regard. I am loath to have to apply rules which are there only for our guidance, but Hon. Members would appreciate that the Speaker cannot be disturbed if he is trying to deal with something. Thank you.

It is not usual that we find ourselves in a situation where one part of a matter on which both sides of this House happily agreed that this particular report and its contents should attract the attention of this House as a whole. That is the one part that we agreed on. When should it have been made known and when should it have been presented to the House? I am given to understand that it was in consonance of a request understood to have been given by that Committee that the report should have been made known and should be presented to the House at the next Sitting.

Now, whether the next Sitting is intended to be other than this one or whether it was intended to be as it was interpreted, the one immediately after the end of that meeting, which is this one, I do not know. Clearly, there was an intention that said, at the next meeting and so that accounts for this. I would say, in my preparation for today's Sitting, I did specifically enquire...Hon. Members, this is a matter which I am trying to assist us all to come to some understanding, but Members would have to be part of it. In my preparation for this meeting, I enquired specifically about this. I asked what was the urgency and the answer or the result I was given was that the request from the Committee was that it should be done today. Now, whether that request is an interpretation of what was said at the Committee or was specifically in those words, I do not know.

So, I think that is important for the House to know, in the context of a request for a suspension. That is what I could say at this moment. As you have said, you have before you the motion. Is there any other speaker on this matter?

Mr. Ali: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The issue of the Public Procurement Commission (PPC) is one that took a very prominent place on the agenda of the PAC. On the conclusion of the matter at the last PAC, we had asked that this report be tabled at the next Sitting, which was done. I was late Mr. Speaker, but as far as I am aware the tabling of the report has been done. What we are not aware of, is the suspension motion that the Hon. Prime Minister has brought to proceed with the debate of the report that is being tabled.

2.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: The information, which that was given and you have confirmed that you wanted it to be laid at the next sitting, which is today, I believed, must have been something that translated into stating that it must be adopted at this sitting. There must have been something in the discussion which took place which was translated into that. I was not present, but it must be that something...There is going to be one other sitting before the recess is taken. Now, there is a motion on the floor and that motion could be stood down and then the debate or consideration of that matter be taken at the next sitting.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, this National Assembly is guided and governed by its own rules. The Standing Orders provide that a motion could be moved to proceed with any matter that required a day's notice. As the leader of Government business in the House, the motion has not been tabled and have not been placed on the Order Paper for today's sitting, I believed that invoking the rules of the House to waive or suspend the one-day notice that was required for the motion to be taken is quite in order. One cannot fault the Prime Minister for removing an impediment to take a motion that has been proposed after deliberation in the Special Select Committee and supported by Members of all sides of the House on a matter, which is required by the Constitution, that there shall be the establishment of a Public Procurement Commission. It is a matter that has been in the national domain for quite a long time and part of the advocacy of all the people of Guyana who want to say that there should be accountability and there should be the containment and or prevention of corrupt practices in the procurement process.

I say this that I have done no contravention of the rules of this House by moving this motion, and the motion has moved. I ask that it be put to the vote.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, it is if you would allow me.

Mr. Speaker: You have the floor madam. Go ahead.

Ms. Lawrence: Sir, the journey of the Public Procurement Commission is a very long one and we have just concluded on that process. We are asking that we do not take a vote on this motion, but, as the Committee Members, we would go forward with the motion as set to suspend the Standing Order and we would speak to this motion.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, one last lick, if you would allow me, having heard everybody

The issue is that this is the Opposition day. This is the second time, Sir, that we are having Private Member's day and there is a suspension that is going to throw our agenda out. The numbers of speakers - I do not know if you see the speakers on the matters of the motion of suicide and the motion on the report of the inquiry into Dr. Walter Rodney's death - the Government and the Opposition have 14 speakers in relation to motion on Mr. Walter Rodney's death and there is another ten for the motion on the suicide one. This is Opposition day, you suspend without any consultation with anybody, and then now where are we dealing with this issue. Are we going to suspend now the Opposition business to bring this up? I need guidance from you, Sir.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Kindly permit me, Sir. I am quite cognizant of the fact that today is Private Member's day and we do have a crowded list of speakers on the matters for today. Permit me kindly to say this, that I was under the impression that once the matter of the motion on the Public Procurement Commission is placed on the Order Paper, and it is a matter that has required the expeditious attention of this House, that I would be obligating the Members of the Special Select Committee to pave the way. It was my understanding that it was the intention of the Members of the Committee that the matter be brought on the agenda to be fast-forwarded today.

It is, of course, a matter that I agreed with my colleague, Hon. Minister Volda Lawrence, that has been in the pipeline for a long time, quite a lot of consideration and work has gone into it. And if the proceedings on a debate on the substantive motion today is going to create a problem in the consensus arrived at, then I would reconsider whether or not we put the motion to suspend the Standing Orders this time. As I said, it is an intention on my part that we should have this matter disposed of in accordance with the requirements of this House and the Constitution as quickly as we could, so that all is well that ends well. I want to say, here, that perhaps we take notice of the fact that this motion could be debated and voted upon at the next proximate sitting. *[Interruption from Opposition Members.]* I am trying here to make a compromise because I acted in good faith on the instructions that I have received, and not arbitrarily.

Mr. Speaker hit his Gavel.

Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Trotman]: May I be heard, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Trotman: Thank you Mr. Speaker. The honourable Chief Whip of the Opposition is correct, today is Private Member's day. The Standing Orders state that Members' business takes precedence over Government's business. It is proposed that the motion comes at the end of the Opposition business. If it is just two speakers who are to speak, the Chairman of the Committee and one other from the Government, we could dispose of it at the end of Opposition business, rather than having it interfere with or take precedence over Opposition business. That is proposed, at the end of Opposition business, it should not take more than 15 to 20 minutes. We would dispose of it at the end of this sitting today. That is proposed, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, we are having proposals. Are you are making another one now?

Mr. Ali: Yes. I want to respond, Mr Speaker. The Public Procurement Commission is a priority for us on this side of the House. We have worked tirelessly to have this commission established. We have worked cooperatively when we were in Government to the then Opposition. We have dialogue on this issue and we would like to see this issue concluded expeditiously also. I agree that after the conclusion of the Opposition day's business, once there is time, we proceed. There are two speakers on this motion, I gather, we proceed, if not, then we go with the Prime Minister's proposal for the next sitting.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I thank you for your interventions on this matter. I understand, from the Prime Minister's intervention, that the motion will not be taken at this point, but should be taken later. I observed that the order is in fact at the end of what has been, in a shorthand manner, called Opposition's business. In fact, all the business in the House is the House's business. We would not vote on the suspension at this time. I may add, by a way of aside, that I think that immediately after we are through with this item it is Private Members' Business. We have lost about half of an hour of Private Members' Business. I recalled a quote, "All are involved and all are consumed". I do not know if it is applicable here. We would therefore treat with this matter at the end of today.

INTRODUCTIONS OF BILLS

Presentation and First Reading

CYBERCRIME BILL 2016 - Bill No. 17/2016

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to combat cybercrime by creating offences of cybercrime; to provide for penalties, investigation and prosecution of the offences and related matters”. [*Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]

Bill referred to Special Select Committee.

Ms. Teixeira: Could I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker? We are pleased and delighted that a matter is going to a parliamentary Special Select Committee for the first time in 15 months. I am very delighted. However, I have a problem, Mr. Speaker and maybe you would help. The Bill is not here. The Hon. Attorney General is reading the entitlement or the long title of the Bill. However, we do not have a copy of the Bill and, therefore, it is rather unusual that the Bill should be read and there should be a gazetted version of it in the House. I do not want, in any way, dissuade the Hon. Member from changing his mind and reversing his proposal, but we are concerned that a Bill is being sent to a parliamentary Special Select Committee and it is not here. It is not on anybody's table.

3.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I believe that some of this will reoccur several times. The Bill has been circulated electronically through the new usage of things with the electronic method of transmission. Some Members may look at their instruments and some of them may not, but the Bill has been transmitted electronically to all Members. The Standing Order 54 (2) provides for a second reading of the Bill only after it has been circulated to Members. It states:

“No Bill shall be read a second time before the expiration of six (6) days from the date of its publication in the *Gazette* and until it has been printed and circulated to Members”.

Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, I am still addressing the House. It seems to me that there is no infraction in the Bill being presented to the House as it was and in the recommendation being made that it was. Since Hon. Members must have their copies physically with them - I did not say electronically alone but physically too - before they can sit in the Special Select Committee to do any work on the Bill. Ms. Teixeira, do you wish to speak?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, you know there was a debate in this House long years ago with Ms. Sheila Holder. We had done exactly the same thing, in a short time such as this. It was

sent the day before for tabling, electronically, and Ms. Holder was very peeved about this because, of course, not everyone's phone can be readable. I have a BlackBerry. I cannot open an attachment and access it. One, you are right, that we are in an electronic age. You are assuming, Sir, that everybody is connected at home or wherever this case was. Two, you are assuming that everyone's instrument is the same. A BlackBerry has difficulty opening large attachments such as this Bill, others do. To send it after 2 o' clock is not acceptable, if we are saying that it is circulated when we are sitting in this House.

Mr. Speaker, I love electronics and the information based technology age, but it cannot be used in a way that undermines what our Standing Order is. If we want to include these electronic things, let us create new Standing Orders that will say that electronic sharing must go on x hours before and in such a form that people can be able to read it. This has a cover letter saying that this is attached, but I cannot open the attachment on my phone. I cannot; it is a BlackBerry. [Mr. Williams: But Parliament gives you a phone.] The Parliament does not give me a phone, so *do not make your eyes to pass me*, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, if we proceed in this way, we are not going to achieve our objective this evening. I have been reminded of the matter to which you refer, invoking the memory of a late Member of this House, that occurred in respect to a second reading of a Bill when the document was not available. We have not yet reached that stage. All Members, I believe, can look forward to receiving hard copies of the document.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MOTIONS

CURBING THE RISE OF SUICIDE RATES IN 2016

WHEREAS the incidence of suicide has been consistently increasing in Guyana in 2016 with the younger members of the population taking or attempting to take their lives;

AND WHEREAS for the last decade a person takes his life every 1.8 to 2.4 days in Guyana; in the United States of America there is a suicide every 13 minutes and, sadly, there is a suicide every 30 seconds somewhere in the world. Suicide accounted for 1.4 per cent of all deaths worldwide in 2012, making it the 15th leading cause of death. Among the age group of 15 to 30, anywhere in the world, suicide is among the top 3 causes of deaths;

AND WHEREAS in Guyana's case suicide has ranked in the top 10 causes of death for the last several decades. In the age group 15 to 24, suicide ranks between 1 and 3 in terms of the top causes of deaths. In the 1980s, suicide deaths were about 200 to 250 per year. In the last decade it has been between 150 and 200 cases per year;

AND WHEREAS it is estimated that there are between 1500 to 2000 attempted suicide cases each year, or about one attempt every 5 hours in Guyana. Around the world, it is estimated that there is one suicide attempt almost every second;

AND WHEREAS while Guyana has done no such studies, it is estimated that suicide costs the Health Ministry conservatively about \$600M to \$900M annually excluding the loss of life, family income and emotional and psychological anguish for the surviving family Members;

AND WHEREAS the majority of suicides occur among people suffering mental health conditions and illness such as depression, bipolar disorders and schizophrenia, social issues such as alcohol abuse, poverty and unemployment also contribute to the growing number of suicide cases;

AND WHEREAS the current economic situation in the agricultural communities due to falling rice prices, loss of income and consequential foreclosures on loans in the banking sector coupled with the state of the sugar industry where jobs are under threat, and, the unemployment of thousands of people in the last 9 months in the public service and general society, are leading to a state of despair and hopelessness which are factors contributing to this rise;

AND WHEREAS whilst there are cultural, religious, class and other prejudices that inhibit people from seeking help for mental health problems, the mental health services are inadequate to meet the demand with only 3 full time psychiatrists (based in Georgetown and New Amsterdam), insufficient hospital beds and trained personnel in the National Psychiatric Hospital, and no day treatment or community residential facilities, and, inadequate numbers of counsellors, to help and treat patients;

AND WHEREAS there are insufficient counsellors in the educational system, both private and public, to provide support to students of all ages;

AND WHEREAS the availability and easy accessibility of poisons especially in rural agricultural communities contributes to making this the easiest method of committing suicide in Guyana;

AND WHEREAS suicide is still a crime in the statutes thereby posing serious challenges for social, health, law enforcement and prosecutorial services;

AND WHEREAS there is at present no infrastructure in place for follow-up for persons who have attempted suicides even though there is high risk of a reattempt unless treated;

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly calls on the Government to implement the comprehensive 2014 Mental Health Strategic Plan and the National Suicide Prevention Plan 2015 – 2020 which were crafted under the PPP government;

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly calls on the Government to ensure that funds are allocated to provide the financial, human, technical and physical infrastructure needed to treat mental health and level of suicides as a national health priority;

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly calls on the Ministry of Public Health to resuscitate the National Suicide Prevention and Control Committee with regional committees, comprising both professionals from health, education, academics, law enforcement and broad-based representation from civil society including the religious community to update the National Strategy to Prevent and Control Suicide within 3 months of its appointment, monitor and evaluate the data on suicide, lead a national education and awareness campaign to help individuals and their families to seek help, and make recommendations to government;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly agrees that a nondenominational national education and intervention campaign be crafted with the technical support of PAHO/WHO with emphasis on the value of life, self-esteem and practical approaches to problem solving and coping mechanisms, anger management, and depression to be introduced into the schools, workplaces and communities;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly calls on the Ministry of Public Health to train health care providers – GMOs, nurses, medex, Community Health Workers as first responders at the primary health care level, emergency rooms, etc., to use the Depression Suspicion Index in recognising and diagnosing depression and to refer the individuals to GMOs and psychiatrist for further evaluation;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly calls on the Government to urgently establish a special scholarship programme to fast track training of 100 health care providers and counsellors in mental health over the next 5 years to improve the availability of properly trained personnel to address suicides and other mental health issues;

That the Ministry of Public Health re-establishes a 24-hour Mental Health Hotline with health care providers manning it and referring individuals to appropriate facilities;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly calls on the Ministry of Public Health to resuscitate community support through partnership with Faith-based and Community-based Organisations, experienced Non-governmental organisations in the Gatekeepers,

Alcohol and Substance Abuse Programmes and Pesticide Safety Programmes;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly reviews and amends legislation to decriminalise suicide;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Government submits a Report to the National Assembly by August 2016 with regards to the actions taken.” [Dr. Persaud]

Dr. Persaud: I rise to move the motion “Curbing the Rise of Suicide Rates in 2016”, standing in my name today. I am aware and cognizant that suicide continues to rock communities, continues to devastate families and continues to deprive communities and families of loved ones. This motion has a number of “BE IT RESOLVED” clauses which I

am sure will find favour in this House as it gives us an opportunity to work together collectively so that we can find solutions to curb the rise of suicide in 2016.

It seems that we have all been exposed to this culture in our country and it seems that it may be some by some as epidemic or endemic. However, because of that perception, we should never be allowed into complacency only to be jolted out of that complacency by sporadic rises in the instances of suicide. Rather, we must all be consistently driven to encourage people to value life and encourage them to live on.

The alarming escalation of loss of young lives in 2016, very early in 2016, has brought home forcibly the need for this august Assembly to be collectively engaged in the fight to curb the numbers of suicides in Guyana through measures which can always have significant impact on a population that continues to be traumatised, again and again, by one suicide or another. As I move this motion, I seek the support of the Members of both sides of this House to decriminalise suicide as we fight this terrible battle to stem the tide of lost lives.

Before we head to recess later in the month, we have this opportunity for once, in this sitting, to agree to come to consensus and to demonstrate to all of Guyana that we are committed to their well-being, their welfare and ultimately to saving and preserving lives. Inherent in that is that we must strive to alleviate the conditions that factor into persons wishing to take their lives or even considering the thought of suicide. I am sure that today's motion will resonate with all the Members, none of whom can say that they have been untouched by the ravages of suicide.

The escalation in 2016 ensured that Guyana remained firmly ensconced in the top position in the world as it related to the rate *per capita* in instances of suicide. It is ranked seventh of the ten major causes of death in this country. It is the leading cause of death among young people ages 15 to 24 and third leading cause of death among ages 25 to 44 years. If we compare the rates between Guyana, Latin America and the Caribbean, ours is at 44.2 out of a 100,000 and theirs is at 6.2. I am sure that that those figure will propel us, will motivate us or should motivate us to see this as a reoccurring national crisis which we must intervene in.

In January of this year, there were over 15 cases of suicide. In fact, when the year had begun, it seemed as if there was one every day. In the last two or three weeks, there were over five cases across the country – fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, daughters and sons. We continue to read about them taking their lives as our nation grapples with an age-old problem with

many new dimensions. No doubt the reasons advanced for suicides have been diverse over the years. Yes, Guyana has its own peculiarities when it comes to the suicide demographics. Undoubtedly, there is room for more studies, more research to be done to ascertain definitively the cause, the solution and to enable us to have a comprehensive grasp as to where we are in terms of stemming the rise.

I know when this motion came many people thought that it was not, perhaps, as exciting as others, but I think that it is necessary.

We cannot deny that the impact of daily hardship, fuelled by a stagnant economy, the curse of unemployment, especially among youths in rural communities, the shameful, hurtful indiscriminate firing or laying off of person whose families depend on their livelihood and their employment, notably sugar workers and those who work in the public sector - many a time too it is without notice or justification - the poor state of the rice industry. The impact of all these negatives is manifest in the spate of suicides that threw this nation asunder when the year 2016 began. Even now, it is as if the sword of Damocles hangs over the man or woman in the agricultural sector, public sector and the general society because they have a precarious and tenuous future, as even their ability to maintain their family is compromised.

Merciless taxation, the foray into shenanigans to impose parking meters which will cause the average citizen more than half of their monthly salaries per week, the despairing thought that there will be foreclosure on loans or those lands will be repossessed due to inability to complete payments after significant investments, all of these contribute to the sense of hopeless which is pervasive in Guyana of today. We cannot deny that some of these have driven persons to that fatal and final step of suicide to escape the punishing realities. Suicide is never a way out and should never be seen as an alternative, an option but the harsh reality is that suicides have happened and continue to happen. The reason I highlight all of these contributing factors to the rise and the incidences of suicide. It is because of all of these instances, all of us, we in the Parliament, the Hon. Members in the Government, have the capacity to change the circumstances I mentioned.

3.25 p.m.

While we cannot fix every situation we can certainly devise mechanisms to mitigate the onslaught of a hardship that currently confronts my Guyanese brothers and sisters. Our decisions here, born out of our dialogues and debates, should not add to misery of the

ordinary man, the average citizen; rather, we must step back from invidious political agendas for the benefit of every citizen of Guyana.

We, the country, need the collective productivity of every citizen. It is their time invested, their labour, their sweat, even their disposable income and their belief in us that contribute to the strength of our economy and, by extension, the country.

If our citizens continue to feel brotherless because of a lack of vision, then many may succumb to the quagmire of depression. We all know that depression is the leading cause of suicide.

The Ministry of Public Health loses approximately \$900 million annually due to suicides, excluding the loss of life, family income, emotional and psychological anguish borne by surviving members. In light of the staggering costs to the coffers, there should be no delay in the implementation of the Comprehensive Mental Health Strategic Plan 2014 and the National Suicide Prevention Plan 2015-2020, crafted under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government.

Developed over the last five years by some of the foremost minds in mental health and complimented by excellent external expertise, the plans recognise the formidable array of mental health disorders which contribute heavily to the number of suicides, notably depression.

Current data has revealed that 10% to 15% of Guyanese suffer from a mental disorder while 3% to 5% have chronic mental health disorders, including depression, Schizophrenia and Bipolar disease. To achieve positive outcomes of which I speak, there must be prudent budgeting to provide for resources needed to treat these mental health disorders and, ultimately, to curb the level of suicide.

Prevention of suicides can only become a national health priority with adequate finances, human resources and physical infrastructure. In Guyana, a Report of September, 2010, indicated that more than 5,000 persons lost their lives to suicide in the previous 25 years. Several steps were taken by the then PPP/C Government, including the formation of a National Committee for Suicide Prevention under the Chairmanship of the Minister of Home Affairs. The Committee's objectives were to: reduce premature deaths due to suicide; lower the rate of suicidal behaviour; decrease the harmful aftermath and stigma associated with suicidal behaviour, the traumatic effects of suicide on families and friends; promote

awareness that suicide is preventable; and train more persons in recognising mental health problems.

These objectives resulted in training of diverse personnel, including police, religious persons, members of Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Those who were trained continue to provide limited services across the country.

The recent establishment of the National Suicide Hotline is commendable. Planning and work on this commenced three years ago through the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Guyana Police Force. The current Commissioner was involved as were I and other Members of Faith-Based Organisations through the Cops and Faith Community Network (CFCN).

We should evaluate the impact of this national hotline service. Because of the escalation of mental health disorders, we need to expand this service to cater for other mental health disorders if we are to stem the rise of suicide in 2016. When I say expand, what do I mean? I mean we need to provide health providers at the desks to answer the phones. There should be physical intervention, if possible, through first responders so that persons will not only hear the disembodied voice at the end of the phone line but they can actually have physical contact with the person to prevent them from taking their lives.

There is an existing infrastructure. What I am suggesting is that we utilise this existing Network in a cost-effective way by expanding its service and providing more to people who suffer from mental health disorders today. If we do this, it will widen the safety net in a cost-effective manner. We also need to allow the involvement of professionals, the religious network and broader civil society through the resuscitation of the National Suicide Prevention and Control Committee, as this can propel work on the National Strategy to Prevent and Control Suicides.

Regional Committees comprising professionals from health, education, academics, law enforcement and broad-based representation from civil society, including the religious community, should be involved in updating the National Strategy to Prevent and Control Suicides.

They should be instrumental in the monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes as well as the data that comes out on suicide and should be in the forefront of the campaign which is gearing us for national education and awareness on the various dimensions of

suicide with the thrust of encouraging families to get their loved ones to help and to encourage survivors to also have that support structure that is so necessary.

The wide involvement of stakeholders in curbing this rise of suicide is vital as it provides a far-reaching network of human resources, which we have. It is just a matter of harnessing and channelling those human resources. Perhaps, the delay in the implementation of the plans mentioned is due to the dearth of specialists or trained persons to execute specific aspects of these plans.

In our country, every two to three days, a person not only considers taking his or her life but may even attempt to take his or her life. As legislators we ought to have a deep-seated concern for all citizens, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, belief or persuasion, to ensure that there is adequacy of counselling services at every level.

In Guyana, roughly 142,000 to 179,500 individuals require mental health services. Contrary to belief, we are not a nation of mad people but mental health is a serious issue and many times it is under-diagnosed. As such, many people sink into deep depression and, before we know it, they consider taking their lives.

Our current situation of few psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors, insufficient hospital beds and trained personnel must prompt us, as this motion seeks to do, to alleviate sufferings of the wider public through advocacy for modern mental health training and care programmes.

The thrust, these days, is to de-institutionalise and this requires day treatments and, where necessary, community residential facilities. There are many prohibitive factors which may preclude persons from seeking counselling or seeking medical intervention. However, this does not mean that the necessary services must not be there. We understand that there are universal cash limitations but the challenge is for us to find cost-effective, practical solutions to deal with this problem that seems to be getting totally out of control.

A practical approach, aside from the obvious increase in funding towards this is to supplement the number of counsellors by increasing training to existing healthcare workers in the public and private citizens systems, teaching them to be familiar with indexes to recognise, diagnose and, if necessary, to refer.

We should have a five-year projection to improve the adequacy of trained personnel with regard to the training and establishment of a programme as well as work towards increasing the human resource capacity. At present, local training is inadequate. The Psychiatry Programme, which was slated to commence a few years ago, has been put on hold. The quota of students in the Social Work programme should be increased both at the Turkeyen Campus and at the Berbice Campus. There must be revision of the curriculum to cater for counselling in suicide, pre and post intervention, with emphasis placed on follow-up care for those who are survivors. As we well know, once there was an attempt, the risk of a re-attempt is very high. The infrastructure in place for follow-up and support systems is deficient and we – we must do this together - need to work in ensuring that adequate systems are in place for families, survivors and those who suffer from mental health disorders.

There is a paucity of counsellors in schools. I firmly believe that every school should have at least two counsellors. We might ask: how is this even possible? But we do know that a number of teachers have First Degrees in Social Work. A good step might be to get those teachers involved; offer them remuneration; utilise their Social Work Degree; and, if necessary, give them training to enhance the skill that they already have. They are in the system. Let us utilise what is there. This is a practical step and a practical way of narrowing the chasm between what we have and what we do not have.

I would like to see specialised scholarship programmes for students who are interested in mental health disorders. I would also like to see more social workers, who are properly trained to address suicides, coming forward. If we increase the capacity of human resource and personnel in this, then we can properly populate the educational and the healthcare systems to effectively deliver the mental healthcare that is required and that will be a big part of curbing the rise of suicide that we are experiencing.

Many of the youths who otherwise fall through the cracks - and we know many of them do because we have seen the figures... This year, more young people are taking their lives. We need to get them into programmes that teach about self-esteem, confidence, how to strengthen their coping mechanisms and how to develop resilience in the face of vicissitudes.

In the area of information, education and communication, a framework can be developed to provide messages that go out to the public on suicide. Social media is an effective tool for dialogue, consultation and, in many cases, even therapy. There is great linking with the

utilisation of new applications (apps) in the modern world that allow virtual diagnosis, treatment and referral. We should not lose sight of that capability.

The classroom is a good environment to introduce mental health so that people become more aware of what the flags and the indicators are as it relates to suicide: what you should be looking for, who is at risk and what you should do. Because of the number of young people, I say it is not too early to start in school.

There is the expertise of the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) that should not be underutilised. We have utilised those resources in the past and they can help us to deliver and develop templates so that we can foster stronger coping mechanisms, especially for youths. A non-denominational, national education and intervention campaign is warranted to provide a multipronged approach, relying on the technical support of all those entities that I mentioned.

There are approximately 1,500 to 2,000 attempted suicide cases every year and, believe it or not, one in every five hours. Have we stopped to consider how many people actually attempt to take their lives? I do believe that the figures are perhaps more than this. You do know that there is under-reporting when it comes to attempts. Because there is a high risk of re-attempts of suicide, we should not dismiss these attempts of taking lives. While the data is not as it should be, there are enough studies to reveal to us which areas require urgent intervention.

3.40 p.m.

Data provided by the Mibicuri Community Developers revealed that 66% of suicides in Guyana involved consumption of poisons; 17.2% involved hanging; 8.2% involved setting one's self on fire; 3.4% involved overdosing on pharmaceuticals; and 1.3% was by drowning. We do know that there is easy access to poisonous substances; we tend to think only of the agricultural sector and how easily available those pesticides and chemicals are. But what about the very common and very cheap rat poison that is sold anywhere and is bought by anyone? The thing about that is, while it is cheap and easy and simple to get, the effects of someone taking that is absolutely devastating because the survival rate is very low.

Perhaps, I feel passionately about this because I have spent many years of my life in hospitals speaking to people who have tried to take their lives, talking to survivors, and working at the grass roots in communities, as of recent as this year and as recent as three weeks ago, counselling them and telling them that it is important to put value on life and live on; that no

problem is too daunting and no problem is insurmountable; you must have the will. But we sit in a House where we have the capacity to make the changes so that people feel a sense of hope and optimism. We have the capacity to do those things for the people of Guyana.

If we want to have effective programmes and policies, we need effective monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the impact of what was and what needs to be done. That cannot be underscored. We need to look at more stringent mechanisms and put them in place if they are not there and, if they are there, make sure that they are enforced so that access to poisons can be monitored carefully. It is a good idea to create Poison Management Centres in communities so people can have a go-to spot where they can learn about how to deal with poisons if someone ingests, what do to and how to react. That is expanding the ambit of dealing with suicide.

Guyana continues to be plagued by a lot of social ills, including alcohol abuse, poverty and unemployment and these, of course, impact heavily on suicide. The study conducted by Dr. Kenrick Danns of the Centre for Economic and Social Research reported that those who committed suicide were likely to be poorly educated, employed in low income occupations and resided in the same community all their lives.

My stance on alcohol abuse is widely known and I reiterate, in this House, that alcohol abuse has a destructive impact in the lives of families and wider society and, if enough attention is not given to that, we will bear the brunt of the consequences. Families and the country all bear the brunt when we lose lives and, if we continue to lose lives at the rate at which we are losing lives to put us on the top of so many lists when it relates to suicide... On interesting note, when I was doing some research on this, we always seem to have that Jones Town tragedy following us because of the whole suicide thing. I would like to see us come down the ladder; I would like to see us get a grip on these numbers and I would like to see more of our people having a reason to live.

If we continue to lose lives, the country will continue to spend millions to grapple with the wake of negatives the loss of life leaves. It is crucial, as such, to develop programmes to deal with alcohol related mental health issues and to urge people to not see the bottle as liquid salvation. Life has always been and will always be the most precious commodity that we possess. And when someone gets to that point where he or she sees life as other than priceless, maybe he or she sees life as worthless to consider suicide as an alternative, a

salvation or a permanent solution to a persistent problem, then we must realise that there is the inadequacy of safety nets and work collectively to correct it.

Suicide has been concentrated, in this year as in the other years, in specific geographic locations. We knew that Berbice was the area where suicide had a high incidence. This has remained but added to that are Pomeroon Supenaam, Essequibo Islands, Mahaica Demerara, Mahaica Berbice and we know of the suicide cluster that was identified in Black Bush Polder with 52 % of all Guyanese suicides occurring in that region. The concentration of deaths in these geographical areas brings to mind the Werther concept which speaks about an increase in suicide by emulation or copycat mechanism. In essence, if we look at 2016 when everyday there was a suicide early in the year, we would notice there seems to be a commonality; the Werther Effect explains that and this is termed contagion. One sees something happening and copies it because he or she sees it as a viable solution for him or her - in this case suicide.

One of the ways to deal with this is to engage the media. The media is critical in reporting the cases of suicide. The sensitivity of that information in terms of how it was done, where, and photographs are all things that must be dealt with very sensitively so that we do not have a persistence of the Werther Effect or the copycat syndrome or every single day one person follows another and feels that it is okay to take his or her life. I want to suggest that the media become pivotal in reporting these instances and not only reporting them, but also giving information on how people could effectively deal with cases of depression in their homes, how they can get to help, how they could recognise red flags and how they can intervene in cases that are suspect. It is because this is taking a negative incident and creating a positive tailspin.

As we seek to curb the rise of suicide, our strategies must be structured and collaborative with timeline and comprehensive action plans. Consistent surveillance in research on all the dimensions of suicide is a valuable tool in developing effective solutions and recommendations. This must be coupled with frequent review and revision of policies, programmes and, yes, legislation if we want to achieve a reduction in suicide. The reality that there might be few resources might still pose a challenge to us. However, we sit in this House; we make decisions all the time and, as such, we must look at all of these avenues when going forward.

In an ideal world, no situation or circumstance should ever drive a person to take his or her life, to hurt himself or herself, to attempt to take his or her life or to even foster that notion of

taking his or her life. The frightening intensification of suicide early in this year reminded us that people still do; they are still taking their lives.

No one should be immune to the effect of suicide nor should anyone, as I have so often heard in Guyana, place suicide squarely as the problem of one ethnic or religious group. No religion advocates suicide and no community or religious group would delight in the loss of life. Suicide affects us all directly or indirectly and should be of concern to every citizen and of greater concern to people like us, in whose hands the wellbeing and the lives of the citizens reside.

Statistics may discourage us and we might feel sad that necessary care is lacking. Even those persons living in wealthier countries than Guyana have these issues. We cannot underemphasise or dismiss the whole issue of stress. Everyone is stressed and even a Disc Jockey's (DJ) name is 'Stress'. It is there all around us but we need not let that fact that is so prevalent be something that precludes us from finding solutions and coming up with recommendations. It is as the prayer of serenity says; do what you can; do it in the best way that you can and effect the things that you want to happen.

In the modern world of today where much emphasis has been placed on mental health and where treatment and facilities are becoming more and more modern, I strongly believe, in Guyana, we have a lot of catching up to do. There is still stigma attached to mental health disorders, many of which lead to suicides and, worse than that, suicide is still a criminal offence in Guyana. While a person who has completed the act of suicide is beyond the reach of the law, there can still be legal consequences in cases of treatment of the corpse or the fate of the person's property or family members. The associated matters of assisting suicide or attempting suicide must also engage our attention as we look at legislation. Persons who choose these paths are screaming for help and may be sufferers of mental health disorders. How can we penalise them by criminalising the act of suicide? And has that criminalisation of suicide acted as a deterrent to the rise in suicide? Many people consider and even attempt to take their life or do so because they feel a sense of hopelessness. They think that is the only way out. If we punish them by law, are we, in effect, helping them? Would it not be more humane, compassionate and logical to offer them what the modern advances of medicine have – counselling, rehabilitation, therapy and, where necessary, medication? Is it not better rather than to punish someone severely by legislation that we instead save his or her life? I

think the answer is there for everyone to see. It is time to offer more compassionate and rehabilitative approach which can have a more positive impact on saving lives.

There are about 60 countries in the world that have decriminalised suicide. I would like Guyana to join that list. On that list are the United Kingdom and Ireland. India is working on it. We looked at Africa and Iran and those are countries that do not criminalise suicide. However, many of the countries still frown on assisted suicide, what was termed euthanasia. And that also will come up when we consider legislation on suicide.

If we look at Guyana's situation, suicide is a punishable offence under Chapter 8:01, Section 96 of the Criminal Law (Offences) Act and has a maximum penalty of two years imprisonment but that has not deterred anyone. I understand that decriminalising suicide does not fix the root causes but punishing those who attempted because of their states of hopelessness with prosecution or even imprisonment is not the answer either. In the world of today, with so many modern solutions and advances, we must not fail to address the root cause of suicide. Provide the advances and the advantages that we have at our disposal. To ignore all of these that we have at our readiness is to fail and to keep failing.

If there is one thing I would like to achieve today, in memory of those who have lost their lives at their hands, is to offer hope to those whose lives hang by a fragile thread. I would like us to unanimously agree today to save lives; save every life. There must be comprehensive review and amendment of the legislation to decriminalise suicide. Our focus must never be to punish those who have lost hope to the extent that they feel they cannot cope and they see suicide as an alternative or a permanent solution for that matter. We must, in this august House, offer hope by instituting polices, programmes and initiatives which offer a lifeline to those out there who depend on us to make decisions which impact positively on their lives.

3.55 p.m.

We need to help them, and I coin this: 'to value life, live on'. Discussing suicide legislation is sensitive because suicide is very polarising, and there are many views, but, as legislators, we must understand that this move might go a long way in reducing the stigma attached to mental health disorders and suicides. People will not feel the need to hide their suicidal thoughts and will be encouraged to talk to others about it, seek professional help and live. It is as blatant as that, as bald as that. There is need for comprehensive health programmes to reduce its incidents. Stigma attached to suicide will only recede if the Government and the

social sector take a proactive role in spreading anti-suicide awareness. As I sit on that Committee in Parliament, I would like to see us taking a more active role, together, on that in this country.

Government needs to put forth a major effort to enhance the overall mental health scenario in the country and help to reduce the burden of suicide and mental health. Law can never be the entire answer. There is need to build political will not only on this, but on many other things, but, let us start with this. To implement these laws, it must be noted that suicide is a multi-dimensional problem having legal, social and psychological implications and that committed team work is required to assess and to tackle this problem. I have been hearing, "If you think so, why was this not done all the time?" I agree; suicide is not new but I do not think any Hon. Member in this House would make me think less of him or her by such a callous response. Instead, I sincerely believe that every Member, whether you sit on that side of the House or this side of the House, should grasp this as an opportunity to work together to bring relief to persons who are contemplating suicide. The Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha has been doing work, tirelessly too, and starting it first. In fact, in this House, on this side, we have seen it fit to bring this motion to this House for debate. We have seen it fit to bring this motion here for us to consider. The shoe is also on the other foot. If you saw this as a problem, why did you not bring it?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have five minutes more.

Dr. Persaud: Mr. Speaker, I am wrapping up, if I am allowed to, in a very peaceful way. This is a serious matter and I would like to believe that political acrimony and invidious politics should not mar this. The lives of people are important; every life is important. Suicide should not be seen as something to be dismissed or something to just pontificate on without tangible solutions and recommendations.

The motion brought by me in this House brings the recommendations and resolutions which I hope will have unhesitating support. It is imperative that we, as Members of Parliament, alleviate the burden carried by many who suffer from the barrage of mental health disorders, those who comprise the majority of suicide cases. Equally so, it is vital that we recognise the other group of persons whose choice to live is impacted by our decisions, the economic environment which impacts their livelihood and their day-to-day lives. These things are in our hands. It requires us to be honest and to take a look to see how, together, we can work to achieve the things for the benefit of all the people of Guyana. Loss of lives could be curtailed

if these important issues receive the attention they warrant, especially at this decision-making forum where we are well positioned to legislate, to effect and to make the difference and save every life out there. We must understand that everything affects everything, and we must understand too that no one wants to die.

Everybody can say they care but, I would like to think, a lot of us can care but do we care enough? We do not want it to be said after this, yes, a lot of you cared but just not enough. I sit here and I ask all my Colleagues in this honourable House to support the motion brought by me.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for her presentation. Hon. Members, we are at 4.00 p.m. I propose we take the recess now and return at 5.00 p.m. to continue our debate. Thank you.

Sitting Suspended at 4.02 p.m.

Sitting Resumed at 5.34 p.m.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to the motion, Curbing the Rise of Suicide Rates in 2016, tabled by the Hon. Member, Dr. Vindhya Persaud.

Let me, at the outset, indicate to the mover of this motion that I do disagree. I disagree with her view that persons have attempted to commit suicide or have committed suicide due to the implementation of parking metres and other frivolous things and saying that without any empirical data available to her or to anyone of us.

Mr. Trotman: Mr. Speaker, may I rise on a point of order? In times past, if there was a debate, the mover of the motion is in the House and there is respectfully courtesy that one extends to the other. In the midst of the debate, if there is going to be a response, at least the mover of the motion should be here. I just wish that point to be made. It was enforced in the Tenth Parliament very rigorously. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Minister for his observation. It is indeed an interesting point to observe. Please proceed, Minister.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you, however, I would like to say to the Hon. Member that I believe this matter is far too serious to be trivialised in such a manner.

However, I do agree with the Hon. Member that the incidents of suicide, as reported, have been on the increase for 2016 with younger members of the population taking or attempting to take their lives and, further, that suicide ranks in the top 10 causes of death in Guyana. I would like to point out to this honourable House that, since A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government's ascension to office, this issue has been on the agenda of several Government Ministries, and measures and strategies have been ongoing to deal with suicide.

The Hon. Member of the Opposition has outlined several clauses for consideration and is seeking to have a myriad of interventions undertaken, primarily by the Ministry of Public Health and other Government agencies, to curb the rise in attempted and actual causes of suicide.

I would like to focus on parts of a few clauses with direct relevance to the Ministry of Social Protection. I would like to respond to clauses 6, 7 and 8 respectively which state:

“...social issues such as alcohol abuse, poverty and unemployment also contribute to the growing number of suicide cases;

...the unemployment of thousands of people in the last 9 months in the public service and general society, are leading to a state of despair and hopelessness which are factors contributing to this rise;

...inadequate numbers of counsellors...”

The Hon. Member made reference to this with regard to public health, but I would like to speak to this in relation to the Ministry of Social Protection. Before I go there, I would like to note that the Hon. Member gave no evidence in terms of persons being unemployed over the last nine months, assuming that, in the last nine months, persons were sent off their jobs. She needs to produce the evidence for that to be given any consideration.

Let me inform not only the Hon. Member, but the House that the Men's Affairs Bureau, which falls under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Protection, has prioritised this issue of suicide and its findings. The National Suicide Prevention Plan of 2015-2020, which was launched by the Ministry of Public Health, revealed that male suicide is on the rise and that men are thrice at risk than women. The Plan also endorses, as contributory factors, those mentioned in the clauses, among others. In the wake of these findings, the Men's Affairs

Bureau has drafted a Suicide Prevention Strategy Action Plan with key focus on awareness, prevention, intervention and postvention. These are four areas of action, namely provision of targeted suicide prevention activities; improving wellbeing and resilience of individuals, families and communities; coordinating approaches to suicide prevention in the country; and improving information and dissemination in all regions. The Government is taking action; we are not asleep.

Time does not permit me to develop what is proposed in each action area, but I would like the honourable House to know that these actions cover a wide range of activities, some of which the Hon. Member is calling for in this motion.

5.41 p.m.

I want to underscore that these action areas envisage collaboration with all relevant Ministries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and religious organisations and youth groups. This is an issue that cannot be handled single-handedly, but needs the input of all to reach out in all of our communities and regions to support the efforts that are being made.

With regard to our youths and the question of unemployment, Sir, I would like this House to know that we have restructured the Board of Industrial Training (BIT) programmes. We have raised the entry age to 30 years old, which means that we would target a greater section of our population beyond our youth and provide training in areas where they would be readily employed. Further, we are presently embarking on finding jobs for our trainees. Last year at the graduation ceremonies several of those trainees did highlight that they were already employed. These are some of the initiatives which would minimise the stress, the very stress that the Hon. Member spoke of, that some youth experience in accessing employment.

I did intimate that I would apprise the House on the question of counsellors within the Ministry of Social Protection. We have initiated a plan, in which we have at present, of probation officers in all administrative regions, even in our subregions. We have established service officers who could meet persons who have issues and provide a first approach. We are also cognisant of the need for all of our communities to have a place where resource personnel would listen and respond professionally and confidentially to those personal issues. We all would have read in the newspapers of the attempts and also the execution of this plan by the Ministry of Education. We would have also seen in the newspapers the work that is being done with our youths with the relevant persons in charge of our youth programmes.

The Hon. Member Dr. Persaud stated in the “BE IT RESOLVED” clause (2) that the Government should allocate funds to provide human infrastructure. In response I would like to inform the House that the Ministry of Social Protection, through provision in the budget, did receive an increase in funds to address social issues. If you would permit me, Mr. Speaker, I would like to cite some of the initiatives that were undertaken with the allocation of these funds, to cushion and release some of the stress of our target groups.

- Maintenance and rehabilitation of the night shelter: It was felt that our vulnerable and distress could readily access a shelter.
- Rehabilitation of the Palms: The processing of applications is being done much faster and efforts to improve the quality of service are afoot. Once again, as it felt that the stress of caregivers in providing a home for the elderly could be alleviated with a less burdensome system. It is hoped that in time this institution would be transformed into a modern facility.
- Alternative sentencing for our youths: There is a plan to reintegrate them into learning institution, helping them to find jobs, empowering them so that we reduce their stress level and steer them away from despair, depression and the precursor of suicide.
- Teenage pregnancy prevention programme: Education programmes aim at preventing early pregnancy and collaboration with Women Across Differences (WAD). It is to target teenage mothers and to reintroduce them into the school systems and or provide them with a skill so that they could transform their lives.

The Government is taking action.

Much has been done in raising awareness on this issue, not only at the ministerial level, but at the level of the NGOs in the schools by the religious organisation, just to mention a few. We cannot discredit the outreach programmes and the work that our pandits, pastors and other groups are doing.

We know about Ms. Lisa Punch initiative, Prevention of Teenage Suicide (POTS), the programmes that were held in schools advocating a “yes to life”, the social media, the presenter on radio and television and the talk shows spreading the message about celebrating life.

Admittedly, this has to be an ongoing process and the relevant Ministries are well aware of this, however, as I started earlier, there has to be a common approach, a collaboration of all to make a difference in our society. Let us not put a religious, political or racial face to this issue. It concerns us all and need our support.

I, therefore, cannot support the motion in its present form. I feel that support for whatever has already started should be strengthened.

The Ministry of Social Protection has in its agenda a plan which aims at strengthening the family and rebuilding the family so that it could function effectively for all its family members. We have to build awareness that we need each other. We must learn to put aside our phones, tablets and computers and spend quality time together. We have to listen to each other voices and learn to be tolerant of each other's views. To my mind, it is these sessions through which we would be able to reach out, spot and save lives.

Let us save our families. Let us reach out to the ones who may be hurting, who need to be consoled so that we would curbed the rise of suicide from its core, the family.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks: I rise in support of the motion "Curbing the Rise of Suicide Rates in 2016". There should be no doubt in our minds, our heart, that we have a national issue - suicide. I think that on both sides of the House we all acknowledge that we have a problem. The high incidence of suicide has been consistently increasing in Guyana, therefore this matter should not be taken lightly or brushed aside.

We all should be our brother's keeper. What would cause one to commit suicide or what would cause one to take one's own life? It is simply that the person has given up hope of a bright future. Many reasons could cause hopelessness and I think we are facing... Many of our young people in this country just feel hopeless, there is no future or that is what they are thinking and that would cause them to commit suicide or want to take their own lives.

While some people are depressed or oppressed by poverty and financial problems, some feel rejected by their families, love ones, the husband feel rejected by his wife or wife feel rejected by her husband and the list could go on. There are so many reasons why people take their own lives.

I would like to say that the present situation would make one think that some members of the Guyanese population have no respect for life or do not value their lives or other life anymore. I am not a preacher, but what I would like to say that the present situation would make one believe that the devil is loosed in Guyana right now. We all need to be serious. As you know, I have listened and I have heard that “23 years you all have not done anything”, but what is happening now did not happen over the past 23 years. We have a situation where it seems as if life has no value.

Listening to the two presenters before me, where many facts were drawn out by Hon. Member Dr. Persaud and by the Hon. Member Volda Lawrence - a lot of facts were placed on the table - indeed we have a problem. How do we try to solve this problem? It is the responsibility of the Government to ensure that there is a healthy population. Here we are talking about mental health. Something is wrong with our people. It is they are too stressed out, there is poverty, they are so oppressed or depressed, but we have a problem. While there are probation officers and other officers in every region, the issue of suicide is still there.

This motion seeks to highlight the issue, make recommendation and resolution on how we could address the issue of suicide. This motion brings a number of resolutions. I want to bring to the attention of everyone clause (5) of the “BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED” resolution. I quote:

“That this National Assembly calls on the Ministry of Public Health to resuscitate community support through partnership with Faith-based and Community-based organisation...”

This is quite true. This is a time when we all join together to address this issue. I am calling on community based and faith-based partnership support. I want to say that when we say faith-based I want us to call not just our pastors or preachers, but everyone - our *Majie*, pandits, pastors, preachers, Bishops - even us in this House. As I said before, we must be our brother's keeper. I think it should start with every individual sitting here on both sides of the House.

When we talk about cohesion we should start here. What is missing in this whole debate... We could put everything in place. We could have all the money and place it where [*inaudible*], but we are missing two important things. We are missing more love with our fellow brothers and we are also missing spiritual intervention. That is what I want to say this

afternoon - “spiritual intervention”. This is where our spiritual and religious leaders come into play. With everything that we do, whether we called it Allah, whether we it Krishna, whether we say Jah or we say the Great Spirit or we say God, we need the intervention of the Great Spirit, I would say.

5.56 p.m.

Therefore I would not be long because, as I said before, both speakers before me brought out a lot of facts and a lot of information which I need not repeat. What I want to say is that we have a national problem. We have an issue and we need not pretend that it is not there. Our young people, particularly, are taking their own lives because they feel hopeless. As a people, we were elected to help the people to provide a healthy environment and a healthy population and this is our job. We need the intervention of the creator and we need to work together.

I rise in support of the motion and we need to seriously consider the motion. While things are being done, as was said by the Hon. Minister, enough is not being done because people continue to commit suicide. Our young people continue to take their lives. This tells us that enough is not being done and we need to do more. Therefore I support the motion as put forward by the honourable doctor. I call on this House, every Member of this House, to let this be a turning point in our lives and let us stand up and be there for the people who placed us in this House.

Thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Minister within the Ministry of Education [Ms. Henry]: I rise to speak to the motion on “Curbing the Rise of Suicide Rates in 2016”. This motion comes at a time when the Ministry of Public Health is already taking the lead in implementing a multi-sectoral approach in the prevention and reduction of suicide in Guyana.

In speaking to the motion, I would like to ask: What data source is being used to support the claim that there is an increase in suicide rates in 2016? The clauses presented for consideration in the motion certainly do not speak to a rise in suicide in Guyana for 2016 but rather provide guesstimates and estimates of the suicide situation in Guyana for the past decade. It is clear from the narrative provided that there is no exception given to 2016. At a minimum, any claim of an increase should be supported by data from a credible source saying how it is being increased and what it is being increased by, if it is been increased from 2015 or prior. This motion is based on anecdotal information, not fact and certainly not

empirical or real data. Having regard suicide as a major public health issue in this country, the Ministry of Public Health has begun the implementation of both the National Suicide Prevention Plan and the National Mental Health Strategy which encompasses many, if not all, of the strategies outlined in the motion.

This motion in its current form, as presented, does not seek to expand or improve what is currently being implemented or considered by the Ministry of Public Health. It offers no new ideas and it is largely duplicative of the efforts at this time. As the issue of counselling of patients with mental health issues, training of mental health workers, capacity building, advocacy and amendment of legislation are all well ventilated and articulated in the Ministry's strategic framework for 2015 to 2020. I believe that suicide is a serious issue and cannot be given a flippant response. All over the world, public health challenges are addressed by comprehensive integrated evidence based approaches using empirical data. This is what the Ministry of Public Health is currently implementing here in Guyana.

While I would be the first to admit that one life lost to suicide is one too many, regrettably I cannot support this motion in its current form since it does not expand the strategies, mechanisms, interventions and public health initiatives that are currently implemented and being considered by the Ministry of Public Health. I would hasten to say that we certainly do not need a motion, especially one that is duplicative to address any public health challenge. What we need are real committed people, real committed stakeholders, including the Hon. Members on the other side. We ask that they roll up their sleeves and that they work collaboratively and programmatically on the implementation of the National Suicide Prevention Plan and the National Mental Health Strategy which are currently being implemented by the Ministry of Public Health.

The previous speaker, on the other side, asked how we could address the issue. I urge you Hon. Member Pearson-Fredericks to work collaboratively on the implementation of the Ministry of Public Health work plan. There is a role for you as a stakeholder and that is what is needed to curb any rise in suicide, whether it is 2016 or beyond. I, therefore, cannot support this motion in its current form.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Dr. Mahadeo: I start off by saying that I wholeheartedly support the motion as proposed by my colleague, the Hon. Member Dr. Vindya Persaud.

Suicide is a global and national crisis, and we all recognise that. We all agree to that. Strangely, although suicide attempts are deemed a call for help, an action taken to draw attention to oneself, this phenomenon is also neglected and not given the necessary prominence. The last speaker, the Hon. Minister, asked where we did get information from pertaining to the increase in suicides in 2016. As I reported, there was a forum, I think at the Arthur Chung Convention Centre at which the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) representative spoke to the issue of suicide in Guyana. That is where he said that the first quarter of this year we had more suicides than half of the previous years. The common understanding is that there had to be an increase.

All medical practitioners, at least those who work in the public health system, can tell stories of lives saved just by advice, a life saved after the person attempted suicide. The paradox is that success in this case is failure. Every successful suicide results in a death. It is because of failure of the family structure, failure of the society, failure of religious organisations, failure of the school system, failure of the mental health unit, failure of the health system, failure of us all.

How have we been doing? For some years now, Guyana has had the bad name of the highest suicide rate in the Caribbean. However, at that same convention centre, the PAHO/World Health Organization (WHO) representative said that from the years 2000 to 2012 there was an 8.5% reduction in suicide rate, although that is not enough. For the last decade or so, a person ended his or her life every 1.8 to 2.4 days in Guyana. In Guyana's case, suicide has ranked in the top 10 causes of death, as we have heard already. In the age group 15 to 24, suicide ranks from one to three in terms of top causes of death. Recently we have noticed as mentioned again by the PAHO/WHO representative (PWR) that persons over the age of 50 are also committing suicide.

They are also becoming a noticeable group. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the number of suicides was between 200 and 250 cases per year. From 2001 to 2012, I mentioned that the statistics revealed that there was 8.5% drop in the country suicide rate. This, while laudable, still remains very high but is clearly a definite drop in suicide deaths. This reduced further in 2013 and 2014. There was a noticeable, significant and alarming rise in 2016. My colleague said that over the last few weeks there were four to five deaths in Guyana. I want to correct her. There were four deaths in Region 6 alone attributed to suicide. This begs a question: What changed? From a gradual decline, year after year, to a sudden increase, so much so that

one consultant pegged the deaths in the first quarter as more than half of what we normally get.

I dare say that the systems, which worked to cause a reduction in the numbers and percentages of persons dying as a result of self-harm, have been neglected or just stopped. I distinctly remember presenting our strategy in our programme to the new Minister of the new Ministry of Public Health when he visited our region. I presented him with a document and I mentioned in a power point presentation what we did to reduce the number of suicides. I also reminded him that Region 6 was considered previously, before 2012, to be the suicide capital of Guyana, Guyana being the capital of the world, of course. Black Bush Polder, followed by Crabwood Creek and Corriverton, had the highest rates in Region 6. The Hon. Member and his huge team were informed of the measure that were implemented targeting Black Bush Polder, in particular, and the Corriverton and Crabwood Creek areas because of their high rates.

Something had to have worked. The steps taken had an effect. We reviewed the data. I explained what we did. We collected all the data for five years previously on all those who attempted suicide, whether successful or otherwise. We established training; we had a brainstorming session. This session included professors from the University of Guyana, the faith-based organisations, the NGOs, youth groups, cricket clubs. We included all of those and we came up with a plan. The plan also included survivors' group support, collaborating with secondary schools, collaborating with the University of Guyana. We also pointed out that journalists and the press were literally sensationalising suicide, after which there are copycat suicides. We implemented steps, the gatekeeper programme was introduced, persons were trained as trainers of trainers to do further training.

Special attention was directed to very high risk areas, areas that already had a history of high rates of suicide. There was follow-up with those who attempted suicide because it is important. We know from research that once a person attempted suicide chances are more than likely that person is going to attempt and attempt until that person becomes "successful". Relatives are brought into the picture and in some cases the religious organisations - the churches, the mandirs and masjids that these people go to - were brought into the picture so that they can keep an eye. It is said that no one commits suicide without some form or way indicating that they are going to do this. They were taught as to what to identify, what to do.

6.11 p.m.

The first ever Psychiatric Patient Care Assistant programme was done in Region 6. Persons from all ethnic backgrounds and all religious persuasions were identified. After an impartial interview was done, they were trained. Twenty-one persons came out with special psychiatric skills at a lower level to help improve the mental health services. There was also a successful psychiatric nurse practitioner programme. This was a training done in collaboration with Dalhousie University for Professional Nurses. I must mention that this programme was done in the Board Room of the Berbice Regional Health Authority (BRHA) using both online training and local tutoring. Final exams were done and those persons graduated. This Programme was supported by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

In addition, each primary healthcare facility in Region 6 - and there were 26 of them - had at least one person trained by Dr. Ritu Chahil, a trained qualified Psychiatrist, in the identification and management of depression and anxiety. If they could not manage, they are so trained to know that they cannot manage and that they need to refer it to the Psychiatrist.

Sensitisation was done with the public via television call-in programmes. Information Collection (IC) materials were shared out; anti-suicide marches were held not by the health system, but by NGOs; cricket clubs; youth groups and FBOs.

Suicide management was included in the Service Level Agreements. People were given targets, that is, how many families they had to visit, which schools they had to visit and what lectures they had to conduct. I would like to say that the Service Level Agreement was a tool that was used by the Head of the Presidential Secretariat to keep us posted on what was happening in health. This is something that I highly recommend again.

Instead of taking these programmes, the Hon. Minister heard us present them and he saw the results. From mid last year, with the new people in charge of the now called BRHA, which was the Berbice Regional Health Services (BRHS), all of these Programmes were stopped.

Now Region 6 is, again, the capital of suicides in Guyana. I do not know what happened with the Programme. What I do know is that some of the people who were trained are still there in the system, whether they are functioning where they are supposed to. Most of them are no longer there.

The results of a total lack of attention to Working Programmes and initiatives, the shutting down of Programmes because they were initiated and implemented by the PPP/C or because of a lack of understanding of public health and health issues have contributed, I think, to this

upsurge in suicide. If you have Programmes in place, suicide will reduce; if no Programmes are there, suicide will rise. I am speaking about Region 6 and not about the entire country. I am speaking about what I know and about data that I have.

I add that, in Region 6, people over the age of 50 to 70 years are also committing suicide. We also had programmes that were specific to the elderly in Region 6. There was the home-based care targeting those who are incapacitated. There were the Geriatric Mega Clinics in each primary healthcare facility. None of these exist right now. I do not know the reason. Many conclusions can be drawn but I do not want to make any statements here that can cause problems.

We do not know what causes someone to want to commit suicide. I would like to quote from one of my Colleague's prepared speech. Mr. Speaker, His Excellency the President said, on 9th November, 2015:

“...we do not really know why people kill themselves”.

It continued. The President accepted that:

“The Government does not have a clue at the moment that may guide them in the direction of preventing suicides”.

I have heard from the Ministers that we have a direction in which we are going.

We know that we can and we did succeed in reducing suicide significantly. **[Hon. Member: Do you have the statistics?]** The Statistics Department at the Ministry of Health will justify what I said. I have the data and I have done studies up to 2014.

Mr. Speaker, suicide is preventable. Eight per cent, when converted to lives, even if it is one life, is very significant to us on our side of the House. Suicide is preventable whether we know for certain all or some of the causes and factors contributing to it. There was a definite decline in death due to self-harm, as it is called. What led to this decrease of over 8.5 % nationally? The following are some important elements, some of which were mentioned by my Colleague: national leadership, which is a critical element, so resuscitate the National Committee; and the Depression Suicide Index is an important component of the fight against suicide.

Dozens of training were conducted with healthcare providers, Government Medical Officers

(GMOs), nurses, medex, community health workers and organisations that are FBOs, NGOs and sports clubs.

The Depression Suspicion Index was developed to allow first responders like healthcare providers at health posts, health centres and district hospitals to suspect depression in individuals and refer them to doctors and psychiatrists for further evaluation.

We need to have again in each of our primary healthcare facility where most of our people make first contact, persons who are trained to identify depression and anxiety. If we can identify it there, we will be able to prevent a lot of suicides. It is not a hard task.

Stigma and discrimination are major drivers of suicide and we have to deal with that.

The Gatekeepers' Programme did not work only in Guyana, but in other countries so that is why it was introduced in Guyana. We need to re-implement it. I think we still have people who were trainers and who could continue the training.

My Colleague mentioned the taking control of alcohol and substance abuse. We need to be more aggressive with that.

The Pesticides Safety Programme is very important. In our BRHA Plan, we had proposed that the Minister of Agriculture or whichever Minister should bring to this Parliament legislation that states that safety caps must be on these bottles. In the case of suicide, in that moment of anger or that moment of total blindness, the person decides to take his or her life. If that safety cap is on – we who know about tablet bottles and the special caps know - it would be difficult for them to open if they are angry. We need to have legislation that would say: 'to control where the poisons are'. Most people use herbicides and pesticides to commit suicide.

We need to have safe storage. If you have a cupboard with two doors - an inner door with a lock and an outer door with another lock - where both partners have separate keys, it means that man, woman or children cannot get hold of the poison easily.

I agree and I want to strongly propose, as my Colleague said, that we need to research and to study and to get the statistics. This has nothing to do with whether you sit over there or over here. We need to see what is working and we need to make it work.

The Mental Health Hotline: We do not need this only in Georgetown. We need this in every Region where there are telephone systems. Here is my experience of how simple

interventions can help: a few nights ago, a young man, who works with the Health Department in Region 6, called me approximately 10.00 p.m. to express his frustration. He has not received a salary for two months. There is no problem with that because he was transferred from contractual arrangement to the public service establishment. He has a wife and a young child. He is being harassed and abused by his wife; he is not given food because he is not taking home money. Subsequently, his mother-in-law turned against him. He decided that he will end his life. But fortunately for him, he made a call to his cousin, who is a trained Counsellor. He was then reached out to. He was taken out of the situation that he was in. Today, he is alive and is still working in the health system. Because of timely intervention in the matter, he is still alive. Some persons would say that this is nothing but these little things, added to the hardships of everyday life, lead to suicide. Sir, how would you feel if you work honestly, diligently and conscientiously and do not get paid for months even though the salary is small?

There is another scenario where a young Doctor was publicly humiliated and physically assaulted. These are stressors that we should live without.

There is the rice farmer who was promised \$9,000 per bag and who invested in combine and tractor and subsequently received only \$1,000 per bag. We had a few of those who committed suicide.

There is the cane harvester who was told that the Estate will soon be closed. To add to that, he was encouraged to picket the Union that fought for him his entire life.

Only those who lived the life and who know these people will truly understand. But all is not lost. We can come back from the brink if we urgently take steps. There are tested and proven ways to fight against suicide by doing tangible things. There are still some people in the Ministry of Public Health who have some amount of experience: Dr. Shamdeo Persaud, Dr. Shanti Singh and Dr. Bhiro Harry. We can tap into their brains and into their experience. There are also community leaders who can provide support to enhance the fight: Swami Aksharananda, Desiree Edghill, Ravi Dev and my brother, Yog Mahadeo. There are groups like: Mibicuri Community Developers; Artistes in Direct Support (AIDS); the Dharmic Sabha; the Arya Samaj and many more organisations that we can tap into.

China was once the capital for suicide in the world. In a very short time, just a few years, China's suicide rate went down. If China did it, we can do it. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Minister within the Ministry of Public Health [Dr. Cummings]: I rise to speak to the motion captioned, Curbing the rise of Suicide Rates in 2016, which stands in the name of the Hon. Dr. Vindhya Persaud.

As 2016 began, suicide rates in Guyana escalated sharply. The frequency of suicide deaths was alarming. Such was a shocking rate at which suicides were occurring that His Excellency President David Arthur Granger summoned an urgent meeting in January, 2016, with several Government Ministers to chart a strategic course for combatting the scourge of suicide in Guyana.

After the meeting organised by His Excellency President Granger, an inter-ministerial forum was convened with involvement of some international partners out of which a National Task Force on Suicide was established. This Task Force met throughout the months of February and March to conscientiously establish a strategic framework for tackling suicide in Guyana, with the aim of reducing its rapid rate of occurrence.

During the deliberations of the Task Force, four strategic areas were identified as essential for dealing comprehensively with suicide in Guyana. These strategies are as follows: risk factors reduction, health promotion and prevention; reduction of access to the means of suicide; health systems response to suicide behaviour; and surveillance and research.

6.26 p.m.

Raising awareness and prevention through education is a vital component of our strategic plan of suicide reduction in which we at the Ministry of Public Health have already become involved. Moreover, at the Ministry of Public Health, there is a National Suicide Prevention Plan 2015 – 2020 which is integrated with the National Mental Health Action Plan 2015 – 2020. The National Suicide Prevention Plan will provide the necessary guidance to all sectors and stakeholders with an aim to effect positive change in the society. It also expected that, through strategic engagements with stakeholders from several Ministries and agencies, there can be a coordinated effort which will serve to reduce duplication resulting in activities that are well targeted and effective.

On 6th April, 2016, a National Stakeholders' Conference on Suicide Prevention was held at the Arthur Chung Convention Centre at which 300 persons, representing a myriad of organisations in Guyana, attended and participated. The working groups that were created from this Conference continue to collaborate, to design and to craft effective strategies that

would reduce the suicide rate that has escalated within the last decade. Immediately after this stakeholders' forum, the Ministry of Public Health, for the first time in the history of public health in Guyana, launched its Mental Health Unit. The Mental Health Unit of the Ministry of Public Health has a Director and a cadre of staff who are eminently qualified and experienced in various issues of mental ill.

Overview of the situation of suicide in Guyana: All of our efforts and activities discussed so far arose because of the national consciousness of this Government. The increase in the suicide rate did not happen overnight. It rose significantly over the last decade but nothing was done to tangibly address the issue. Plans were crafted but were not implemented by the previous Government. As a consequence, our beloved country achieved the unenviable position of being a country with the highest rate in the world. Again, let me haste not to say that this situation did not happen overnight, as I reiterate. What is important to note is that our President, the people's President, did not let this matter remain unresolved. The Coalition did not sleep on the scourge to our society.

Let us examine some data. Over the last five years, the data collected by the Ministry of Public Health indicates that most suicide cases are concentrated in the coastal areas of this country. According to a breakdown of suicide cases per region – Region 6 accounts for 30.9% of suicide deaths in Guyana. Region 3 is the second with 22%; Region 4, 19.7%; Region No. 2, 13.4% and Region 5, 8.8%. Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 accounted for just over 4% of the cases but recent evidence suggests that this may be higher. Region 4 has the largest population of attempted cases mounting to 36.8%, followed by Region 6 with 27.9%. Region 3 accounted for 25.6% of the cases of attempted suicide.

Now, let us look a little bit at the prevalence. Even though the largest burden of suicide rates with the regions rest with Regions 6, 3 and 4 the prevalence rates are highest in Region 2 with 158.1 per hundred thousand. Region 6 follows closely with 156.3 per hundred thousand population and region with 113.6 per hundred thousand population. Rates are lowest in Region 10 at 15.2 per hundred thousand. The hinterland regions – Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 - at 23 per hundred thousand population and Region 4 with 34.8 per hundred thousand population.

Guyanese of East Indian descent account for 80% of cases of suicide with males accounting for 66% of all cases. Persons of Mixed descent accounted for fewer than 10%, while Guyanese of African descent and those of the Amerindian descent accounted for 5% each.

Over the last five years, 62% of the people who committed suicide in Guyana poisoned themselves by consuming agricultural chemicals. A quarter of all suicides are conducted by hanging while 5% are from gunshot wounds and 3% from sharp object injury. Other less frequent methods are toxic substances and gases which amount to 2% and prescription medications 1%.

Several risk factors contribute to the high suicide rates in Guyana. One, the most common risk factors identified are acute emotional distress and depression. This factor accounts for 36.6% of all cases. Two, access to lethal substances such as herbicides and pesticides is 63.7% of cases. This is followed by alcohol and drug use which amount to 32%. Fourthly, family dysfunction, domestic violence and family history of suicide or previous suicide attempts all amount to 34.5%. Less common factors included aggressive tendencies and impulsiveness; presence of mental disorders; sexual preferences and rejection of or opposition to romantic partner. With that background all laid out, let us examine the motion presented to us by the Opposition.

In direct reference to line one, Clause one, of the motion, Curbing the Rise of Suicide Rates in 2016, it states:

“...suicide has been consistently increasing in Guyana, in 2016...”

Please note carefully that suicide rates in Guyana have been consistently increasing since early 2000 with 202 cases reported. In 2010, 205 cases were reported. Please note that, in 2015, 194 cases were reported.

Clause three, lines three and four, present extraordinary fiction as it relates to the number of suicide cases reported during the 1980s. It states:

“In the 1980s, suicide deaths were about 200 to 250 per year. In the last decade it has been 150 and 200 cases per year.”

This data is significantly erroneous. It is important to note that, in reality, the reported cases of suicide for 1981 were 103 and, in 1985, they were 124; in 1990, 124 suicide cases were reported to the Ministry of Health. The numbers reached 200 reported cases in the 1980s. In the last decade, rates increased to above 200 first in 2000 and the highest number being 205 in 2010. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), it estimates approximately 332

cases annually for the years 2008 – 2012. Now, that is the true state of affairs as it relates to suicide occurrence in Guyana.

In its Regional Report, *Suicide Mortality in the Americas 2014*, PAHO had the global age adjusted rate for suicide at 11.4 per hundred thousand population, while, for lower middle income countries of the Americas, the rate was 5.2. The age adjusted rate for Guyana was 16.04 which was 1.5 times that of the world and more than three times that for the low middle income countries in the Americas. Further, the age adjusted rate for Guyana was 22.4 per hundred thousand population, that is, 34.69 in males and 7.7 in females. That is in the PAHO 2014 Report. During the year 2015, the country supported by PAHO/WHO conducted several studies on mental health issues, including suicide in Guyana. PAHO/WHO also supported the participation of mental health professionals in the 59th Annual Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) Conference held in Grenada in June, 2015, with suicide as the theme.

Research presentations and some of the mental health studies conducted in Guyana were trends on suicide mortality in Guyana 2003 – 2013. Studies included *Characteristics of the Suicide Behaviours in Case Report at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) in 2014*; factors associated with suicide behaviours in Guyana. There was a study on *National Suicide Prevention Plan – A Guyanese Experience for a National Strategy*. There were studies on *Debunking Myths on Suicide*. Studies include *Diagnosis and Intervention of Suicide Behaviours in Amerindian Communities of Barometer*, November, 2015. *Psychological Factors Influencing Suicide Behaviour in Guyana* was another study; alcohol use among teenagers; the *Profile of Suicidal Behaviour in Guyana*, a retrospective study from 2010. PAHO/WHO also supports the participation of healthcare providers, including health workers from Barometer, Region 1, in the second Caribbean Regional Symposium on Suicide Prevention convened by the International Association on Suicide Prevention, which was held in Cayman Islands in December, 2015. Some of the research studies presented by the Ministry of Public Health staff at this Conference included *Factors Associated with Suicide Behaviour in Guyana* by Dr. Horay Balseiro, Dr. Meenawati Rajkumar, Dr. Bhiro Harry and others. Study presented included *Characteristics of Suicide Behaviours in cases at GPHC in 2014* by Dr. Nancy Senechal, Dr. Nehal Singh and others. *National Suicide Prevention Plan – A Guyanese Experience* was done by Dr. Bhiro Harry, Dr. Horay Balseiro, Dr. Meenawati Rajkumar and Ms. Karen Roberts.

The country office is currently supporting the finalisation of the research agenda for suicide prevention and control which will be implemented by stakeholders under the leadership of the Ministry of Public Health supported by PAHO/WHO and the University of Guyana. We recognise that mental health services are inadequate to meet the demand and have been the case for many years. With that said, the Ministry of Public Health has already commenced a process to conduct a human resources (HR) review that would lead to an HR strategic plan, after which the Ministry of Public Health and its partners will identify, train and allocate additional resources to boost the mental health services, particularly at the community level. It is noteworthy that PAHO/WHO is already assisting in granting fellowships.

The motion, in Clause 10, outlines:

“AND WHEREAS the availability and easy accessibility of poisons especially in rural agricultural communities contributes to making this the easiest method of committing suicide in Guyana;”

I would like this august Assembly to know that the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Agriculture’s Pesticide Board have developed and implemented a number of interventions to address and control the use of pesticides, especially in the farming communities. Storage cabinets with locks for pesticides were manufactured and distributed to farmers in the major farming communities in the country.

Education and awareness programmes have been ongoing and the Pesticide Board has been working with the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) to improve the monitoring of illegal trade and use of pesticides.

The motion continues in Clause 11:

“AND WHEREAS suicide is still a crime in the statutes thereby posing serious challenges for social, health, law enforcement and prosecutorial services;”

The care of the mentally ill is provided under the legislature framework of the Mental Health Ordinance of 1930 which is antiquated and fails to make provision for the protection of the rights of people with mental disorders. Notwithstanding this legal framework, Guyana has never prosecuted individuals who have attempted suicide. It is also important to note or to indicate that the suicide helpline is operated and managed by trained staff of the Guyana Police Force who respond to calls for intervention to address suicide and suicide attempts.

6.41 p.m.

Moreover, the Guyana Police Force has collaborated with the University of Guyana to train the staff, who operate the hotline, in guidance counselling and basic psychology to further equip them with skills to offer a better service. The individuals who call in are neither criminalised nor persecuted. With that said, it is time for us, as a country, to decriminalise suicide and suicide attempts.

Clause 12 of the motion reads:

“AND WHEREAS there is at present no infrastructure in place for follow-up for persons who have attempted suicides even though there is high risk of a reattempt unless treated;”

The Ministry of Public Health has developed a system of referral with the GPHC and its satellite centres to address issues of follow-up in cases of suicide attempts. The Ministry of Public Health has a proposal in its implementation plan to include more referral sites at the primary healthcare level throughout the country, which involves all sectors, faith-based organisations and civil society.

This motion seeks to instruct the Government through a number of resolutions, in some misguided wording that does not accurately reflect the reality of the work being done on suicide by the Ministry of Public Health.

The Be It Resolved Clause one reads:

“That this National Assembly calls on the Government to implement the comprehensive 2014 Mental Health Strategic Plan and the National Suicide Prevention Plan 2015-2020 which were crafted under the PPP government.”

Though the plan was crafted by the PPP Government, based on assessment done for costing of the National Mental Health Strategy, it was outlined that, prior to the costing in July, 2015, very minimal resources were budgeted for mental health prevention and control. Further, there was no specific budgetary allocation for suicide prevention and control. Based on the constantly changing epidemiologic profile and the multifaceted nature of suicide in Guyana, it has become necessary for the country to do a separate costing of the Suicide Prevention Strategy 2015-2020. The PAHO/WHO country office will support the Ministry of Public Health to complete this process in 2016.

Further, though, in 2014, the PPP Government wrote the Strategic Plan, it was never implemented. There was no viable functioning mental health unit. It will suffice to say that, under the APNU/AFC Coalition Government, a mental health unit has now been launched in 2016 and staff have been allocated for the implementation of the National Mental Health Strategy 2015-2020 and the Suicide Prevention and Control Strategy 2015-2020.

This motion continues, in Clause four of its resolutions:

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly calls on the Government to ensure that funds are allocated to provide the financial, human, technical and physical infrastructure needed to treat mental health and level of suicides as a national health priority.”

Let me reiterate that, though the PPP Government crafted the strategic documents, there was no real funding set aside, as I said before, for mental health services, including suicide. The issue has now been accorded high priority by the President of Guyana, His Excellency David Arthur Granger. Funding was allocated in the Budget for mental health for 2015 and currently in 2016.

The motion goes on to state, in Clause five of its resolutions:

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly calls on the Ministry of Public Health to resuscitate the National Suicide Prevention and Control Committee with regional committees, comprising both professionals from health, education, academics, law enforcement and broad-based representation from civil society including the religious community to update the National Strategy to Prevent and Control Suicide within 3 months of its appointment, monitor and evaluate the data on suicide, lead a national education and awareness campaign to help individuals and their families to seek help, and make recommendations to government.”

The Government has already commenced this process with the setting up of a National Task Force with four sub-committees to support the implementation of the four strategic lines of action in the national strategy. This Government did not need to be told what areas in the

public health sector have to be focused on. We are aware of the challenges and are putting measures in place to deal with these problems.

What is the response of the Ministry of Public Health to the suicide scourge in Guyana? It appears as though the Hon. Member on the Opposition's side, in drafting this motion, seemed to have awoken from a Rip Van Winkle-like slumber in order to attempt to direct this Government on how to deal with this crisis of suicide that was inherited from a previous government. That this motion was received on 21st April, 2016, five days after the National Stakeholders' Conference on Suicide Prevention was held at the Ocean View International Hotel, not only highlights the belated nature of the observations being made in the motion, but showcases the Government's proactive nature and readiness to deal condignly with suicide in Guyana.

The Government has decided that, in order to combat the scourge of suicide, a national effort is required and has, therefore, engaged a number of Ministries, international donor agencies, non-governmental organisations, faith based organisations and other concerned stakeholders to combine their efforts and to take affirmative action against suicide in Guyana.

The Ministry of Public Health has since embarked on a robust programme to comprehensively tackle suicide in Guyana. The following are some of our programmes and initiatives to be undertaken, some of which have already commenced, as I mentioned before, by the Ministry of Public Health in response to suicide behaviour. Some of our programmes include training for personnel in capacity building in health centres, for healthcare workers and for first responders, including the members of the Guyana Police Force; and developing a trainer of trainers' programme which would be expanded to the various regions.

The programme will commence with the following: identify priority high burden areas in Regions 2, 3 and 6 to begin a pilot programme in each of these Regions and then expand or scale up countrywide. We are going to revise the curriculum for doctors and nurses to include meaningful mental health components. We are going to approach PAHO and the United States (US) Peace Corps for a curriculum development consultant to help us revise current curriculum for doctors and nurses to include mental health components. We are going to improve health literacy through public awareness programmes using traditional and new media channels such as brochures, fliers, radio and television advertisements, the Ministry of Public Health's website as well as our Facebook page. The content of communication messages being disseminated through these media platforms will be aimed at de-stigmatising

mental health issues. We are also going to develop a protocol to provide guidance to primary healthcare workers on standard operating procedures for engaging persons with various mental health issues. We purpose to provide all health centres with a counsellor and a social worker who will conduct visits at least once weekly within the community in which they are placed. We plan to create a national network developing out of the trainer of trainers' programme where heads are accountable, supervise protocols and demand mandatory reporting. We plan to create screening tools such as patient health questionnaires to include a mental health component to identify high risk persons. We plan to identify and train more gatekeepers in communities. These should include community leaders and religious organisations. We are going to create a social net programme for vulnerable mental health patients. We are going to identify and train mental health workers to provide specialist care. We are going to refer patients to a multidisciplinary medical team. We are going to identify patient support needs, provide transport for patients and work with other sectors and stakeholders to create a crisis wellness centre. We are going to create group therapy sessions for survivors of suicide. *[Interruption]* Listen and learn. We are going to mobilise communities like yours and develop interventions to address the factors that influence the suicide risk.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have four minutes remaining.

Dr. Cummings: Lastly, we will work with other sectors and stakeholders to create youth friendly spaces.

The Ministry of Public Health has decided, as part of its suicide prevention programme, to carefully review the arrangements for a suicide hotline. The rationale behind this suggested review is that, because of its current setting at the Guyana Police Force along with the criminalisation of suicide, persons may be hesitant to utilise this particular resource to seek help.

As I conclude, at the Ministry of Public Health, we believe that suicide is preventable and that suicide prevention works. In order to accomplish our mission and goals, we will be using the public health model mentioned earlier along with media campaigns and education to raise awareness on suicide. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there is a Member in the back bench on a certain side of this House who is doing his best to be other than respectful to the rules of this House. The Speaker will not permit it any further.

Please proceed, Minister.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry of Public Health will be utilising a strong educational approach to dispel the myths about suicide and to let others know about the realities surrounding this national public health crisis. It is imperative that we roll out a holistic plan to deal with the national crisis. The work has begun and will continue until we are taken off the top of that particular register. It is important that we work assiduously, both Government and Opposition, to reduce and eventually eliminate suicide in Guyana as far as we possibly can. We must work collaboratively with all entities and organisations since no one institution can effectively solve this problem. Let us work together to take Guyana from the top of the list of the most suicides committed. Let us work assiduously to ensure that all our people live in a safe environment where such negative thoughts and actions do not have a breathing ground or space to grow.

Based on the erroneous nature of the motion, the Government will not support this motion in any way, shape or form.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, I rise to make my contribution to this motion on suicide. From the onset, let me say that I support my Colleague bringing this motion here because it is a very important motion. From the very onset, let me also express my total disappointment at the Government side because, on one hand, we are hearing echoes from the Government benches that they would like us to work collaboratively... When one looks at what this motion seeks to do, it is for us to work collaboratively on a national issue; yet, every single speaker on the other side sought to reject the initiatives that we are putting forward in this motion. How then can we work collaboratively when you are rejecting the initiatives and when presented with an opportunity to do collaborative work you have rejected it?

6.56 p.m.

The very last speaker just said that they have rejected it in every way, shape and form. Look at the positives in this motion. There are so many initiatives that are there. We did not just come here and said this and that should be done, we proposed solutions, yet, they are being rejected in every way, shape and form. Something must be wrong with our definition in this House or on that side of the House, of what we mean by “collaboration”.

Suicide is a very important global problem. Around the world there are about 800,000 suicides per year and that is according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Yes, when the report was done by the World Health Organization called *Preventing Suicide*, a global perspective came out in 2014. We were all alarmed by what that report had stated. It stated that, in the age standardised rates per 100,000, Guyana was ranked the top suicide country in the world because it had 44.4 per 100,000. The global average was 11.4.

When we looked at the rate at which men were committing suicide, globally, it was 15 men per 100,000, in Guyana, it was 70 per 100,000. When we looked at the rate for women, it was eight per 100,000, in Guyana, it was 22.1 per 100,000. It is extremely high and something needs to be done about it. What we are hearing and this is what the WHO has stated that, prior to that, it was higher. The records would show that, over the last decade, prior to that, the rate had decreased by 8.5%. The trend has been that the rate is dropping, but it is still too high. We are ranked at the top in the world and we need to bring that rank down.

What we have stated in the motion is that, in the first quarter of this year, there was an increase and that is factual. In January, if the newspapers reports are looked at, there were more than 15 cases. Obviously, whatever measures are being put in place and implemented are still not reaching the vulnerable people. **[Hon. Member: [Inaudible]]** I know and that is why we need to work on it together.

The Hon. Minister Lawrence, spoke about the programme her Ministry has which deals with teenage pregnancy. On the 7th January, 2016, there was a 14 years old girl, from Berbice, who had committed suicide. It was reported in the *Stabroek News*. She committed suicide because she was pregnant and both herself and partner, who was 20 years old, committed suicide. Obviously, whatever programme the Ministry of Social Protection has is not reaching out. All I am saying is that those programmes need to be expanded and extended because it is important.

The World Health Organization has stated to all of the countries in the world that they have by the year 2020 to reduce the amount of suicides by 10%. In the National Suicide Prevention Plan, our objective is to reduce suicide by 10% and maybe we can applaud ourselves for setting a good objective. Guyana is going to meet the WHO's requirement for 2020. That is not enough and it cannot be enough because we are ranked at the top in the world and if every country in the world reduces its suicide rates by 10% Guyana would still be top ranking. We, therefore, need to set ourselves even more aggressive targets and that is not contained even in the revised. The consultations that we heard about were supposed to revise the plan that we had in 2014. Even the revised version still has the target at 10% and that would not be enough to reduce suicide and bring us down from being a top ranking country for suicide in the world. [Mr. Ramjattan: *Inaudible*] ...issue advice.] I can do that. I can advise you. [Mr. Ramjattan: Fine.] No, the point is...

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will address your remarks to the Speaker.

Dr. Anthony: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It is not difficult to offer advice but we must also be invited to some of the sessions that are being held. We can bring not just the layman's perspective, but the technical inputs to strengthen the documents that are available. We can do that and it would be a far superior document and there would be far superior measures to actually tackle the problems that we are confronting. It is not hard to do that.

When the causative factors for suicide in Guyana are looked at; when who are affected are looked at; and when gender is talked about, males are four times more likely to commit suicide. When age is looked at, suicide is the second leading cause of death for people in Guyana between the ages of 10 to 24 years. When people between the ages of 15 and 44 years are looked at, suicide is among the top three causes of death in Guyana. Suicide is higher among the categories of persons who are mentally ill and depressed. Of course, my Colleagues would have mentioned substance abuse and alcohol abusers. There are many factors. There is also a higher rate of suicide for persons who have physical ailments, chronic illnesses, especially the ones that are painful. These are also factors.

It is a well-known fact and some of the Colleagues had also mentioned it, that stressful life events also play a major part in people making a decision to commit suicide. The loss of a job, the loss of income and the loss of a means of livelihood are things that can drive people

to committee suicide. If a person has a huge debt, suicide can drive that person to commit suicide. Living alone and becoming socially excluded or isolated can be factors that push a person to commit suicide. If a person has family breakups or breakdowns those can also lead that person to commit suicide. Family members who have mental health problems can cause co-dependency and can also push persons to commit suicide in those family circles.

Then there are the cultural factors. In some cases it has been shown by some of the studies mentioned by the Hon. Minister of Public Health. If we go to some of those studies they addressed cultural issues. In those cultural issues, in some cases, religion is a factor.

We know the connections, but are we using the findings that are available from the studies to craft the interventions that need to be crafted? That is not happening. When the causative factors that I have mentioned are looked at, one can actually delineate and see the high-risks groups and, therefore, have targeted interventions to these high-risk groups. For example, young people and middle-aged men, particularly Hindu men, would have to be focussed on; people who may have a physical illness or persons who were sexually abused also have higher incidences of wanting to commit suicide. People who have untreated depression must be dealt with also people with a history of self-harm, people who misuse and abuse drugs and alcohol, people who are vulnerable because of their socio-economic circumstances, the unemployed and persons who have job insecurities, a safety net has to be created to deal with them. Farmers have a high depression rate because of job stresses, the economic pressures, the social isolation and easy access to herbicides and pesticides. They are all vulnerable groups and something must be done about that.

If the Government is smart, it would prioritise the interventions to focus on these high-risk groups. It should also pay attention to the geographical locations of the problem. In the Government's plan, and these were the figures going back to the 2014 plan because the configuration has changed now, Region 2 had been identified as having the highest suicide rate of 52.7 per 100,000; followed by Region 6 at 50.1 per 100,000; then Region 3 at 37.3 per 100,000. Yet, when the plan is looked at and the interventions that are in that plan, there is a one size fits all situation. It does not take into consideration the specificities and the peculiarities in the regions and there is no regional plan. So there is a problem in Region 2, a problem in Region 6 and a problem in Region 3, yet the interventions are not going to affect what goes on in those regions because there simply is none. There is one intervention and that

is for the national level and it is not going to work. That needs to be fixed if a meaningful impact will be made on suicide in this country.

Some efforts have been made. The Minister of Public Health regaled us with the establishment of the Mental Health Unit. I want to congratulate the Government for setting up a Mental Health Unit. But where is this Mental Health Unit housed? It is housed in Quamina Street, behind the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs. The condition of the building - one has to really think about whether it is fit to house people. The persons there also have to share that building with a storage room with expired drugs that are there and there is also a school of autism that is located in that facility. The Minister within the Ministry of Public Health should talk to her staff and find out because the building has erratic electricity and, therefore, the three computers that are there can hardly work. Also the conditions the staff is working under, instead of the staff giving leadership to mental health in this country, they might end up having a mental health crisis. The unit needs to be fixed properly so that the staff can have a proper working environment. I understand that there are 22 persons who are working in the unit, which is very commendable, but most of the persons working in the unit have zero training in anything relating to mental health. While we can come here and speak about the Mental Health Unit, the question is whether the Mental Health Unit is equipped to deliver mental health services. I would like to say that the unit is not equipped to do that because the staff does not have the relevant training.

Again, where is the problem? The problem is in the regions. Where is the unit? The unit is in Georgetown, it is centrally located. There is no unit on the periphery to help the persons who need the services and that needs to be changed. If there will be an impact on the issue of suicide, then these services need to be integrated in the primary healthcare systems of the Ministry of Public Health and we are a far way from that. In the plan, not much has been catered for that type of integration.

7.11 p.m.

The other issue is that there is a real bothersome trend that suicide somehow is a medical problem; there is a medicalization of suicide. The Hon. Minister of Social Protection spoke about a more broadened approach and that is the right way to approach it. But this problem is not only a medical problem. We have to reach out, we have to include and we have to get a multisectoral approach. In similar public health problems, when we were confronted by these

challenges, we saw that a multisectoral approach really made a big difference and I would urge the Government to do the same.

We have called for the establishment of the National Suicide Prevention and Control Committee. We are told that there is a task force, but we are not told about the composition of the task force and who are the people who make up this task force. We are told about the establishment of four working committees and four groups, but we are not told whether or not they have established any regional plan to deal with the problems in the regions. Therefore, we need to do something to fix that.

There are many stakeholders who are independent of the Government. They see this problem, they know and they want to do something to help, but they are not being included. If you are going to exclude people from something like this, then something ought to be very wrong with your approach. Look at an organisation like the Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha, they do not get any funding from the Government, but they have been out there working in the community and doing suicide prevention programmes. There are many other organisations like that. There is another Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) called the Caribbean Voice, without any resource, they too have been out there doing work, advocating and trying to change the perspective on this problem. Yet, in many cases, they are not being included in anything that the Government has. This is not an issue where we have to exclude people. The more persons we could bring on board and be able to tackle this problem as a united front, the better it would be. But when one goes out and just pick here and there, it is not going to work and that is not the kind of collaboration we should be talking about.

The Government should establish ministerial committees in key ministries. We heard about an inter-ministerial committee, but they should be in every key ministry. Let us look at agriculture. Agriculture is pivotal. There was a model in Sri Lanka that was used called the Hazard Reduction Model and they were able, over a 10-year period, to prevent 19,500 deaths simply by implementing some basic measures. Things such as making sure pesticides were properly kept, locked up and only released on certain occasions. Also that, when persons use bottles that contain pesticides or herbicides they dispose of them properly. There are a whole slew of measures – simple things. We do not have to reinvent the wheel. It is in the Pesticide and Toxic Chemicals Act. All we have to do is to make sure that the Ministry of Agriculture implements what is already on the law books. If we are able to do that then we could see a substantial reduction.

For all the talk that I have heard about the Pesticide and Toxic Chemicals Control Board having distributed canisters to lock up poisons and all of that, in some of those rural communities, where it actually matters. I do not think that anything has been filtered down to them because we are out there in the fields and we know. The farmers in Essequibo do not have that; the farmers in Berbice do not have that, so I am hopeful that they too would get it because that is where it should go. When we look at the causes or the ways that people commit suicide, pesticides and herbicides would account for 63.7% of the deaths. So we need to actually do some work in this area.

The other issue that we have to look at is that many patients are lost when they go to the hospital and there is uncertainty about what type of poison they have ingested and also the availability of antidotes. So one of the things that we could do to improve the medical management of poisoning is that we need to set up, what I would call a National Poison Control Centre. Basically, what we would do there is to have a database of all the poisons and toxic chemicals that we have in the country. Everything that we are importing, we have to keep those on a database. Then we have to have the requisite antidotes and the ways how to treat each one of the poisons because the approaches might be a little different. We need to set that up so that when somebody comes into the hospital, if the doctor is uncertain about how to approach it, they could call in to this centre and that information could be provided. This centre must operate 24/7. In many other jurisdictions, such centres exist and they have played a very important role in reducing the amount of fatalities due to poisoning and we could do that. Many of these centres can house these antidotes or be able to access, when necessary, in a very rapid way, the antidotes that are required to treat these conditions. That is something we ought to implement here. It would make a huge difference if we have that.

Out on the periphery, in our primary care setting, a lot of times when someone comes to the health centre because they have ingested a poison, they are not properly treated there. They are sent on to maybe a district or regional hospital – very often a regional hospital and the time spent travelling from that locale to the regional hospital is time lost because the longer the poison would be in their system and it would create a lot of damage. If we are able to provide care and proper care at the primary level, we would see a lot of lives being saved. So if we are going to implement systems like these it could make a huge impact.

We also need to establish a database on suicide victims. One of the things that is done in other jurisdictions is that, after a suicide happens, for us to learn what exactly took place and

perhaps to use that knowledge to maybe change how we approach things in the future, there is something called a psychological autopsy that is usually done. What this means is that this special unit of trained people would go out and interview the family, relatives and friends, so that they are able to reconstruct this person's life to see what were the stressors, problems and what was affecting them. So we would be able to learn from that and then use it in future interventions.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have five minutes remaining.

Dr. Anthony: So that is something we need to do. We also need to look at attempted suicide. The National Prevention Plan speaks to attempted suicide, but we do not have a database of the persons who attempt suicide. Even the statistics that the Ministry is quoting from is probably a guesstimate because we do not know. What is recorded in the Ministry's document is what they are using from the 2014 World Health Organisation (WHO) study which states that for every case of suicide there are probably 25 cases of attempted suicide. That information was then extrapolated into our document. If we want to be more accurate, we need to set up a registry here and then investigate. As one of my Colleagues would have said, attempted suicide is one of the main predictors of suicide. Therefore, if we know this grouping of high-risk people who have attempted suicide, we could intervene with them, with measures, so as to prevent suicide from happening. That is a database we need to set up.

The other issue is that we need to repeal section 96 which also states that if a person has attempted suicide they could go to jail for two years. Most of the studies have shown that if persons are imprisoned it is not solving the problem. In fact, they get more depressed and they probably commit suicide in jail. What we need to do is to offer them treatment and that is the more enlightened view. Perhaps, where we got our laws from, the United Kingdom, in 1961 they had abolished attempted suicide. Then we look at other countries like Germany and others, since the 1700s they had abolished this issue about attempted suicide. So we need to bring ourselves in the more enlightened and modern world. Therefore, we should abolish this attempted suicide.

There are a lot of things that we could do. As I have said before, I am extremely disappointed that the Government has taken such a position. On one hand it is talking collaboration, but on the other hand, when presented with the opportunity for us to collaborate, it is spurning that opportunity. I do not know, if at the highest level this is the reaction we are getting from the Government, how then would we be able to work together to make sure and confront such a

serious public health challenge? How are we going to change this? It is not collaboration and we need to do better than this. We need to get real.

We have to stop talking about what we intend to do and what is in the plan and how much more we are going to do and what it is going to cost. In fact, when one looks at the current suicide prevention strategy, it was not costed. If the Minister could tell us how much money they have allocated to the prevention of suicide for this year that would be interesting because we do not know. We tried to get that number when we were debating the budget and we were unable to get it. I asked that question during those debates and we did not get anything.

So it is nice to talk, but if we are going to confront this problem in a very real way then we have to put our money there and make sure that we are able to put in the interventions that are necessary to change this problem.

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Vice-President and Minister of Public Security [Mr. Ramjattan]: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I would like to say very preliminarily that I am very disappointed at the last Speaker's comments in relation to what it is that we are doing in relation to suicide and the curbing of the rates here in Guyana.

We have, as excellently presented by Dr. Cummings, that programme, that plan and that strategy that was completed and had started some time in March this year – the task force. We did, as was mentioned, at least have what is called a unit set up...

7.26 p.m.

They never had a unit, but they have come here criticising us after six months in Government, creating the plan, refining it, fine-tuning it, having a unit and now they have come here to say that it is a very depressing unit that is going to cause depression to the people there. Well, indeed. We recognise Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member you will know that the form of reference is “Hon. Members.”

Mr. Ramjattan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, I apologise. The Members on the other side, honourable as they are, must realise that, indeed, we recognise that that might not be the most suitable place. Efforts have already been made to relocate that Mental Health Unit to the Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association (GRPA) building. That has already happened.

For the number of years, when suicide had gone up to 200 in the year 2000 and then 205 in the year 2010, all during the People's Progressive Party's (PPP's) Administration, they never saw it fit to talk to the pesticides unit and to do what that they are suggesting now, but they want to make this issue a political football. This motion came, just as was mentioned, four days after they realised the task force on suicide was set up. That is the little insidiousness or invidiousness about it that I feel is coming here. They want to steal the thunder of the Government, having gotten the unit and doing all these things. That is what they want to do with this motion. They have come here to pontificate and preach as if they are the genuine bishops and popes on the issue. They are not. The Hon. Members over there must not do that and that is what I am disappointed about.

We have done a number of things in the Government, including, being accommodating to a number of NGOs. Only yesterday, a group, led by a friend of mine Mr. Budhram and two representatives from Caribbean Voice - Ms. Hussein and Ms. Bibi, I have their numbers here, and they were saying that they wanted support for the budgeting of TCG vigils and public awareness for World Suicide Prevention Day on 10th September. My Ministry is going to help to support them in that village to bring awareness all across the country. They were also asking for 10 television programmes and they want the National Communications Network (NCN) to assist and we are going to make that happen.

So, to come here and say that we are not accommodating people and NGOs that have a track record of helping with this issue is not being very fair or honest to this august Assembly. It is something that is wrong. We feel that because of the fact that we have so many studies already done, and I am going to address a couple of them, they have indicated that, indeed, in Region 4 the most suicides occurred. That is why we want the unit in Georgetown... [Interruption] Not attempted suicide. We are talking about suicide and attempted suicide. This is because if one does his/her math, for every 25 suicides the Georgetown area got the most. This is because of its population.

Let me give the Hon. Members the statistics. This is an address that I made at the launch of the Guyana Police Force's inauguration of its help line: "1st January to 31st December, 2013, there were 129 reports across Guyana." Indeed 'A' Division had 20 suicides and 'B' Division had 40. We had in other divisions like in Region 5 and Region 4 ... [Mr. Ali: How many did Region 4 have in Georgetown?] Region 4 had 20, as I mentioned. I am saying this, because it is an area closer to two other regions, like West Demerara and, of course, East

Coast Demerara. The amount comes up to a lot and it is better that we deal with it here. Do you know what they are trying to say? They are trying to say that we must send the unit to Berbice. Those, on the other side, have a certain special relationship with Berbice. So, they want that unit to go there, but it will stay in Georgetown. We have to put the unit in a central area.

As the resources come we are going to have units in Berbice and Essequibo. Although Essequibo has the highest rate, which is 52 per 100,000... [Hon. Member from the Opposition: *Inaudible*] Do the Hon. Members want us to take the unit there? If it is the highest rate then we should take the unit to the Essequibo. The Hon. Members want to make a case as if they are now trying, through this public platform, to give Berbicians, but Berbicians could come to Georgetown as they have always done. This is where this motion is making the whole issue a very serious one - a political football. That is why I am very disappointed.

It is important that we understand the statistics, as mentioned by Dr. Karen Cummings, in relation to this very serious issue that we have at hand. We have to, indeed, do inter-ministerial work; we have to do that and we are doing that.

There is a task force that has a number of ministries and officials represented therein that are doing the work. According to a breakdown of suicide, over the last five years, Region 6 accounts for 30.9%; Region 3 is second with 22%; Region 4 with 20% and Region 2 with 13.4%. So, we do have the percentages which, as I have been saying, are far more in an area that is closer to Region 4, namely Region 3 and also in Region 2 that brings it up and that is the reason why.

Why is it that they are trying to give Berbice the special treatment to the extent of wanting the very first unit, which would normally start in Region 4, to be sent to Berbice? Members can consider that. They are giving the impression that we have to do a lot more in all these regions, rather than, our National Task Force plan only having something that is generalist. Indeed, we will be generalist in this introductory level, it is necessary. As I said, it is an issue all across this country but they want us to give special treatment. This is where they are making it, as I said, a political football.

I want to go, very specifically, to the other aspect, namely, how are we going to prevent this? A report that was produced by Michael Fallahay, who was a Peace Corps Response Volunteer in the Berbice Black Bush area in 2012 states very emphatically:

“What is the problem and what should be the primary preventions?”

This was since 2012, when he spoke to the PPP Government. This was handed to them and what were the primary preventions to be adopted? Restrict access to lethal means for killing one’s self specifically of toxic agricultural chemicals.

What did they do? We have done a number of things, especially talking to the Pesticide and Toxic Chemicals Control Board (PTCCB) and right now they are saying that we have a lot more to do. Well we have and we agree.

The reporter, Mr. Fallahay, made mention of the fact that it did have some political aspects to it, as maybe expected, “...restricting access to toxic, agriculture... presents numerous complex, political, moral and logistical considerations...” it would appear for that Government of the day. He stated that at page 23, “*Suicide in Black Bush Polder.*” I do not know what their problem was. It is the same problem. The Hon. Members over there, the previous Government, I do not know what was their problem. A brilliant piece of survey, that indeed, stated all of these things and what did they do? There was also item two, under the primary recommendations: “Promote spirituality as it is essential to nurturing human life and is the primary resolution to suicide.” It is stated, at the bottom paragraph of page 23. That again has to do with religious organisations. It has to do with school systems and recreational facilities, *et cetera*. This is because, as the reporter mentioned, and quoting from some other texts out of the United Nations, the World Health Organisation and from an intellectual by the name of Mr. Dinesh who talked about all those things in relation to Sri Lanka and what they did there in relation to lethal poisons, *et cetera*.

“There need to be spiritual concepts to be explored in family, parenthood, schools, work places and community gatherings...”

Again on page 24 of this report. Nothing was done.

Almost all of those recommendations in this report by Mr. Fallahay has been adopted as part of the task force’s recommendations as to how we move forward. So, starting from nothing,

we have arrived at something and that something is now being criticised by those who gave us nothing. What moral authority then do they have to make that kind of criticism?

We have the same report stating openly what the other primary one is, which would be about life and the cultural aspects of it, how parents and family members need to explain suicide to children and to encourage them to set healthy limits about not harming themselves or others. We are trying, as fast as possible, to get trainers to especially do this.

In the Ministry of Public Security, as part of the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme (CSSP) Phase 2, we are going to develop at least the very first stage. Twenty community leaders are going to get training in relation to this area. This is so that we can send them out to talk and to do exactly that kind of social work. The component is already cleared for disbursements and we are in the process of selecting those 20 community officers right now.

The other item is, of course, as mentioned by Dr. Frank Anthony, the reduce stigmatisation of mental illness and to encourage help seeking behaviour.

The fifth item is to make more readily available mental health substance abuse treatment services. Of course, that is a function of the state of revenue our country could use.

The sixth item is to make more readily available in the polders, like Black Bush Polder, youth education and recreational activities and places to keep them occupied positively.

In the Ministry of Public Security, there is an instruction out of my Ministry that all the Divisional Commanders and Sub-Divisional Superintendents there in charge must have youth groups. It is all over the place now. Mr. Hicken is doing it, Mr. Mansell, right down to Berbice – all of them. In any event, it is paying off.

7.41 p.m.

Again, only yesterday I met with the business community, Georgetown Chambers of Commerce and Industry and it indicated that it is going to help in whatever way because it realises that if these recreational facilities are not there, and so on, not necessarily suicide, but criminal activities could increase because of the fact that they are going to utilise time in relation to the trend that they have, to do idle things, and probably to commit suicide, and so on.

It is also important to understand too that there are secondary preventions that this report mentions. It is a very important prevention, because it was coming peculiarly to the Guyanese context what is sometime called intervention, that is secondary prevention. It involves taking preventative action early when risk factors for suicide is emerging to prevent the onset of this kind of behaviour. There are a lot of things here, all of which are incorporated into the task force work, establishing area network of educated compassionate gatekeepers who are sensitive to suicide warning signs and know how to assist suicidal persons to receive the help they need to prevent suicide. **[Mr. Hamilton: Where are they?]** It is page 26. That is why we are creating that unit asking the University of Guyana, the medical faculty, to get the training going on in relation to so many people. More daunting is the goal to make more readily available mental health and substance abuse treatment services. He mentioned that, Mr. Farragut.

Of course, one of the biggest recommendations in this report, which is the base report that was used, is to establish a fund, publicise widely and staff with people trained to help and refer callers, who may be suicidal, on a 24-hour seven-day a week national toll free hotline. The police force, as I said, has set up such a hotline. I am talking here about the Ministry of Public Security. On the 6th August, 2015, we inaugurated that helpline in which a number of people trained in the police force take the calls and do what is called a first responder programme and then go and indicate to, what was also set up by the police force, Cops and Faith Community Network, **[Ms. Manickchand: Rohee.]** Yes. It is Rohee who set it up. These ranks do the first responds of taking the calls, and so on. Do not even say that we are not doing anything. Ranks who were trained to deal with depressed persons are the ones who are doing this thing at the very first level

There are a lot going on presently because we know the problem. I do not want to repeat the statistics here because it is going to shame certain Hon. Members on the other side. Then you talk about the fact that it is something that is recently cropped up. **[Ms. Teixeira: You already said that.]** Well, as you know, that is what I feel that you were saying all along. You are giving the impression that nothing is being done, but lots and lots are being done. That is why it is very difficult to support the motion as it stands. It cannot, because, as I said, it is trying to steal the thunder of the work being done by the present administration in such a fast track manner and in such heavy laden effort manner. That is what we are talking about.

I want to make another point, because I think what Dr. Karen Cummings has done was rather forcing the point really to saturation point, as it were. She made all the points that were relevant. Preventing suicide, then necessary, and the WHO report of 2014, which is another major report that talks about Guyana with the highest rate, stated a number of things there. One is to restrict access to these hazarded substances. Additionally, communities must provide social support of vulnerable individuals and to fight stigma and ensure follow-up care.

We have to do many other things too, to ensure that we curbed suicide in Guyana. It takes on an educational, social and recreational content. It would take on that kind of content. In relation to the aspect of decriminalisation I must say that this is a very peculiar crime in which the perpetrator - attempt suicide that is - is the victim and that being so, we must not in any way seek to penalise the perpetrator coming out of the incident of attempting suicide. Indeed, on that occasion, 6th August, 2015, speaking there, I made it quite clear that this Government is going to urge a debate on the decriminalisation of attempting suicide.

Of course, the arguments mentioned to support it, the former Minister Dr. Frank Anthony stated them. People who survive suicide attempts need to be rehabilitated, not to be in prison. There is compelling evidence demonstrating that adequate prevention and treatment of depression, alcohol and substance abuse as well as the constant contact with survivors could reduce suicide rates. Internationally, and especially from the WHO, it is also saying that there are other techniques to help in that process of suicide prevention and it is non-penalisation. The international best practices have, of course, to decriminalise. That aspect of this motion, there are a lot of other aspects that I do not support, the statistical and so on, but in relation to the decriminalisation, I do support that.

The criminalisation too of attempted suicide acts causes a problem of suicide going underground, making it difficult for suicide persons to receive the necessary assistances. An individual who had attempted suicide and is open to receive assistance is more likely to tell someone else or report an incident, for instance, to the Ministry of Social Protection, the helpline and making himself or herself available for the receipt of psycho-social support. Through this, we are going to have improved and accurate statistics on attempted suicide because we have a culture here that whenever someone attempted suicide the parents and the close relatives would try to circle the wagon, as it were, and do not want to talk about it. The helpline people had mentioned to me; the Commissioner of Police has mentioned that; the

Cops and Faith Community Network has mentioned that. Indeed, that kind of thing would have to be of a past era.

Suicide behaviour is also a result of a host of factors, some of which are out of a person control. Technically it may not be considered as an offence against the state. On the contrary - I want to say this - the state, itself, may be indirectly responsible for the plight of the victim who is left with no other alternative but to attempt suicide.

We have a state to do a number of things and the charge was made by the President late last year. That charge, in a sense, is being implemented in this task force. Even if Hon. Members over there do not feel that we are accommodating enough, I want to let this opportunity be one in which... Let us have more accommodation on this issue. We would invite them to that task force. Please Dr. Karen Cummings, it is if you would have, especially, Dr. Vindhya Persaud and Dr. Frank Anthony. That would be wonderful. Of course, it would be for whosoever else, even Mr. Joseph Hamilton, so we could win the war against this surge that is damaging our society, that we would have the proper statistics, so that we would clinically make the correct intervention at the localities and within those communities that suffer from them. This is about that call.

I want to say, in relation to the motion, that I could not support it as it is, but I want to make the call that we must collaborate and ensure that it happened.

Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Dr. Persaud (replying): I listened with great interest and keenly to the arguments on both sides of the House. I was beginning to get worried when the last speaker began, but I think that he redeemed himself at the end of it when he said that he is willing to collaborate because suicide is not any one person's problem, especially after that, no way shape or form. I was disappointed to say the least by that comment.

We cannot, as a country, continue to ignore these problems that persist and affect everyone. To make arguments based simply on conflicting statistics, when among the four speakers, on that side of the House, they contradicted each other, completely, whether Region 2, Region 4 or Region 6, who is supporting and who is not. There seems to be not any discussion as to what they want to do, the Hon. Members on all the sides of the House.

I would like to thank my colleagues for their support of this motion. I want to recognise that they bring years of experience to this House in their support, having worked in the fields themselves, continuing to work, the Hon. Member Ms. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks in the Indigenous community, the Hon. Member Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo who spoke about the actual programmes that were instituted as a respond to many studies, surveys and assessments being done on the problem of suicide. Last, but not least, Dr. Frank Anthony, for letting you know what was done and what should be done.

I think we need to understand clearly that we need to do more. If we sink into complacency, thinking that what we are doing is enough, as I said before, we are doomed to failure. We have to do more and we have to get a grip on this thing.

When we talked about implementation of the plan, there must be funding for that implementation. There is no budgetary allocation for suicide in the budget. How are you going to implement it? When we talked about implementation, there must be enough or sufficient human resources. In a country such as ours, there is less than five psychiatrists to the entire country, how is that going to be filtered down to the communities that need it, the communities that have no access to these things? How are we tackling effectively? We do need psychiatrist. We do need trained people to craft policies, programmes and plans, bringing expertise and skill to the table. We cannot be happy with what we have. If we say we do not need it that is like putting yourself in a box and being unwilling to look out of that box. I do not believe in that. I believe in having a vision moving forward. I would like to see our human resource increase. That why I made the appeal. No one on this side of the House has ever said that nothing is being done. What we are saying, and saying clearly, is that more needs to be done and there has been an increase. Thank you Hon. Member Dr. Karen Cummings for saying, in the opening part of your speech, that there has been an alarming increase.

I also want to say that when there was a shortage of medication in Guyana what would have happened to those persons who were suffering from mental health disorders. If they started on psychiatric drugs they need to continue on those medications. Things are not sufficient. What was mentioned about not taking the service to Berbice or Essequibo, I am appalled at that. This is not a political football.

7.56 p.m.

This is not about who we like, or who we do not like, and who we are patronising or not. This is about where the priority areas are. It is a problem in Region 2 and Region 6, and we need to have centres there. It is a matter of prioritising. It is not stating to leave out anyone. If you want to fix something, any logical mind will look for where the problem is. One does not go to Timbuktu to fix a problem when it is in one's home. This is what we have to do - logic, structure and infrastructure.

I also want to mention unemployment. To say that there is no problem in this country with unemployment and that young people are not having challenges with their coping mechanisms because of that, it is very erroneous. Job losses at Wales Sugar Estate will be approximately 200 by October 2016. Seventeen hundred sugar workers, 972 Amerindians, our Indigenous people, lost jobs in July 2015, 500 persons lost jobs in the public service – state entities. These are real problems. These are the drivers of stress and stress can lead us to have mental health disorders. We cannot bury our head in the sand and resort to using you or me or who. The problem exists and we have to deal with it.

At the end of the day we want to save lives. That is what I am interested in. That is what this side of the House is interested in. When we stop to say it is you and who and fix it and deal with it, I think we are going down the wrong path. When we speak about collaboration, when we speak about working together, there must be genuine effort towards that if we are serious about saving lives in this country.

In all of the presentations, I have heard my colleagues say that “this was done”. Why is it not continuing? “This was started”. Why is it not continuing? I am very happy that the last presenter, the Hon. Member, said that work is still continuing, the Cops and Faith Community Network, because the work started there was instrumental, with the suicide hotline. These are things that are happening. I want to also say that if we want to tackle this problem of suicide effectively, we cannot dismiss a motion that speaks to key areas that require our attention. We have heard the Hon. Member Dr. Cummings said, “we are going to do this; we will do this”. I want to hear timelines: When are you going to do this? Where are you going to do this? Are you going to do this in the key areas? It is not enough to say that “*we gunna*” and “*we gunna*”, and we are going to generalise about it. It has to be specific and targeted measures.

When I brought this motion I thought very sincerely that here it was something that we could work together on. Here it was something that we can sincerely collaborate on; here it was

something that the Guyanese public would see and say that all the Members of Parliament are working in their best interest. I hope tonight that we can still find it in our hearts to support this motion that I have put forward here.

This motion has been deferred so often. There is an amendment that I would like to propose, and it is dealing with the last “BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED” clause, that, there should be a substitution of the date instead of the word “August” - because this motion was intended to be for earlier in the year in direct response to that spate, that unabated spate of suicide - we are now using the word “December” 2016. It is if we can amend it to read “December 2016” in the last “BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED” clause. If we want to be effective, it is important that we have an accurate report of what is being achieved and what is being done so that we can review, revise and implement other things if necessary.

Tonight, a lot has been said in this National Assembly. Some things do not bear repeating because it breaks my heart to think that we can callously dismiss the loss of life. I want to think that we consider everyone’s life important, whether they come from Region 6, Region 10, Region 2 or Region 4. As such, every effort must be made to decentralise services so that all the people, no matter where they are, from the hinterland to the rural communities, could have access to these services so that no life will be lost. I know that it is an ambitious goal to stop it completely, but Hon. Members, Mr. Speaker, I want to say let us curb the rise of suicide that started in 2016. I ask you, Hon. Members, Mr. Speaker, to please support this motion with the amendment as proposed.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the motion is proposed. Hon. Member, you may wish to propose your amendment now.

Dr. Persaud: I would like to move that the motion with the amendment of the last “BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED” clause be carried replacing the words “August 2016” with the words “December 2016”.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. Is there a seconder?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes Mr. Speaker. I would like to second the Hon. Member’s amendment.

Mr. Speaker: This amendment is intended to leave out words which are the words “August 2016”. First, you leave out and then you replace. The words proposed to be left out will be left out of the question.

Amendment put, and negatived.

Motion put, and negatived.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now take the suspension for half of an hour. We will return at 8.30.

Sitting suspended at 8.04 p.m.

Siting resumed at 8.43 p.m.

**RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY
ON THE DEATH IN AN EXPLOSION OF THE LATE DR. WALTER RODNEY**

WHEREAS the Report on “The Commission of Inquiry Appointed To Enquire and Report on the Circumstances Surrounding the Death in An Explosion of the Late Dr. Walter Rodney on Thirteenth Day of June, One Thousand, Nine Hundred and Eighty at Georgetown” was handed over to the Government of Guyana on February 10, 2016;

AND WHEREAS the Government laid Volume 1 of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry in the National Assembly on May 12, 2016;

AND WHEREAS the Commission in its Report presented its findings including “Critical Findings and Summary on Gregory Smith” and 11 significant recommendations,

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly adopts the Report and its findings;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly calls on the Government to take measures to implement the recommendations therein in order to ensure that the democratic architecture of the state is preserved and strengthened.” [Ms. Teixeira]

Ms. Teixeira: I rise to move the motion in my name, which has been circulated in the House with regard to the “Report on the Commission of Inquiry on the Death in an Explosion of the

late Dr. Walter Rodney”. As a mover of this motion, calling on this National Assembly to adopt the Report on the Commission of Inquiry on the Death in an Explosion of the late Dr. Walter Rodney” and his findings” and to call “on the Government to take measures to implement the recommendations therein in order to ensure that the democratic of the state is preserved and strengthened.” I cannot overemphasise the mixed and powerful emotions that this action evokes in me personally.

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Williams]: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General, do you rise on a Point of Order?

Mr. Williams: Yes, please. Sir, we had circulated an amendment to the motion.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Attorney General, but it is not a Point of Order but what I would say is that in due course the amendment will be brought to the House.

Mr. Williams: Thank you very much Sir.

Ms. Teixeira: As I said, I cannot overemphasise the mixed and powerful emotions that bringing this motion evokes in me personally. The tortuously long and winding road to reach this point in the National Assembly on this day Thursday, 4th August, 2016 is not only of historical importance, but is an affirmation that justice will be done and can never be suppressed forever. The fact that this report is before this House is a victory for transparency and accountability. Late as it is, delayed as it was, but the nevertheless it has presented to the House, and to the nation, an effort to come to terms with what was one of the most dastardly acts committed against a son of Guyana’s soil. The report of the commission of inquiry, which was finally formerly tabled in this House on Thursday, 12th May, 2016, came as a result of a motion to call in the submission to the National Assembly. Another motion tabled on Tuesday, 24th May, 2016 to have it debated and adopted has finally arrived several months later.

It is right and just that we do this as Guyanese legislators. It is morally and ethically beholden of us in this National Assembly on this day Thursday, 4th August 2016, to do this. The time is now for all of us in this House, to support this simple motion of great importance to our nation and people to right an injustice that was done to Dr. Walter Rodney, his family, his comrades and to the entire nation.

8.49 p.m.

There are those who have publicly challenged the intentions of the Commission of Inquiry; there are those who have challenged the integrity of the process and the integrity of the Commissioners; there are those who have cast aspersions on those who gave evidence and testimony; there are those who have felt vindicated by the Commission's findings; and there are those who have rejected the Commission's findings.

Despite the perseverance and courage of Mrs. Rodney, her family, those external to Guyana and those in Guyana who never gave up hope that justice would one day prevail and believed firmly that one day this day would come, I call on this National Assembly to stand together in this House and demonstrate that justice is upheld by all who are here in this House today.

When I tried to prepare my speech today, I anguished over how to open as the mover. My choices were many. As a young woman in my 20's in that era, my political perspective had been moulded and many other memories had fled back graphically when I read the Report and its findings. Many of those memories and emotions had overtaken me as I read the Report once, twice and thrice.

I was a participant and a witness to that era of the struggle for democracy and for equality. In the midst of the authoritarianism and paramountcy party, there was this wonderful outpouring of our people, their awakening encouraging strength to bring an end to rigged elections and restored democracy, an era that witnessed the coming together of unity amongst our people of all races and classes that was last seen in the late 1940's and early 1950's.

The Mirror Newspaper, Thursday, 5th January, 1978 - was the year of retrenchment.

The Mirror Newspaper, 18th March, 1978:

“The WPA backs National Front Proposals”.

The Mirror Newspaper, 14th March, 1978:

“Unity Parle - a Tremendous Success”.

The Mirror Newspaper, 25th April, 1978:

“Positive responses to unity call”

There were photographs of Dr. Rodney, Fr. Morrison and many others. These graphic

examples are neither fiction nor figments of imagination, but are chronicles, evidence and archival records of that era which we lived through.

I was, as were a number of persons who are still in this Chamber, a fighter in the struggle for democracy and was also a victim, as were all the Guyanese people.

While I read the Report, I relived these events and was overcome by the feeling of profound sadness and anger of the loss for our country and people by the assassination of a great son of Guyana. This loss meant not only in 1980, but what this dastardly and reprehensible act meant for our people and country, even today... One can conjecture and speculate that, had Dr. Rodney not been murdered for political purposes on 13th June, 1980, maybe the restoration of democracy would have come sooner than 5th October, 1992 and maybe the struggle to build national unity in our country across the races would not still be something that we are struggling with every day.

I was humbled by the courage of those who participated and contributed in that era and their actions and commitment which would eventually lead to the restoration of democracy - the first free and fair Elections on 5th October, 1992.

When the history and modern history of our country is written at some point in time, maybe we, as politicians, as people, as representatives of political parties and as Governments, will be able to recognise that golden opportunities were lost; opportunities were killed and many times hope was diminished.

The message of Dr. Rodney was about multiracial unity, opportunities for all, regardless of class, ethnicity, gender or geography, and an end to inequality and injustice.

The bond that brought Dr. Cheddi Jagan and Dr. Walter Rodney together was grounded in their beliefs and their common objectives for the betterment of all the people of Guyana. It was this collaboration and growing mass movement for an end to the dictatorship that had to be destroyed. Whilst this did not succeed in the end, despite the murder of Dr. Rodney, the struggle was not destroyed. Whilst the people won in the end, the movement was diminished and took many years to succeed.

We have come full circle. The entire youth of some of us on this side was ensnared in this terrible period of our country's history. Regrettably, we see the shadows of that era creeping back every day in this period.

This is not a Commission of Inquiry (CoI) on the assassination of one of Guyana's great sons of the soil, Dr. Walter Rodney, in its own being because that was the objective. When someone reads Volume I, it is a chronicle of the entire period of administrative dictatorship of the People's National Congress (PNC) in Government. It is the indictment of that party. For posterity, this Report needs to be examined by all Guyanese, especially the young generation and also all Members of Parliament (MPs) in order to ensure that this country does not go down that way again; that never again would we see our country go down the path of violation of human rights, rigged elections, political orchestrated violence against opponents, whether one is PPP, PNC, Working People's Alliance (WPA), APNU/AFC and whichever other party that makes up the coalition.

As Guyanese, we must stand for the preservation of democracy; we must stand for the protection and promotion of human rights. It is our obligation to be able to stand for the fundamental rights in our country, as difficult as it is. Sometimes, in a faulting way, we do it. It is our moral obligation to be able to stand by democracy in all its no answers, complexities and challenges. If there is anything that Dr. Rodney would have wanted, it would be that this generation, so many years after his death, would continue to keep that alive.

The Order signed by President Donald Ramotar on 8th February, 2014, that created the Commission, made it clear that this Commission of Inquiry was not about revenge and retribution. Anyone could come before the Commission without fear; they would not be charged or implicated in any actions that they were involved in during that period nor with the assassination of Dr. Rodney.

The Commission held 66 sessions in public from 28th April, 2014 to 2nd October, 2015 with the widest gap of no hearings due to the Election from 27th March to 27th July, 2015. There were 31 witnesses of which 29 were examined, in some cases, more than once. Two witnesses were heard in camera and two witnesses were incomplete. Their names were not reported.

It is regrettable and it will remain as a stain on our country that the Commission of Inquiry was unable to complete its work and that key persons were unable to come before the Commission.

Page two of a letter that the Commission of Inquiry wrote to President Granger on 8th February, 2016 (the first unnumbered letter in the Report), third paragraph, states:

“...in the end, the Commission did not hear from all the witnesses scheduled to testify

as the Government brought the Inquiry to a premature end.”

Page 7, paragraph 1.17 to 1.18 of the Report of the Commission states:

“...that the decision of the Executive would have implications for the thoroughness and completeness of the Report”.

This is to do with the effect of premature termination.

Insofar as there were 10 more witnesses to be heard and who will not be heard, some of the Terms of Reference not adequately supported by the testimony received will so remain. In addition, the fairness of the Report will be impacted. Some individuals who have been adversely criticised by witnesses in the course of the hearings have not been provided an opportunity to answer or comment on these criticisms. No adverse findings can, in the circumstances, be made against those individuals.

The hallmark of good political leadership is the magnanimity. Regrettably, the repeated request of the Commission of Inquiry for more time to complete the hearings was denied. The Commission was eventually given time to complete the compilation of the actual Report.

In the press, cost was given as a factor. Commissions of Inquiry are extremely expensive businesses. The Commission of Inquiry on the Linden disturbances costed over \$200 million, excluding the compensation for the victims.

The Supplementary Financial Papers, submitted and passed in the House, are evidence. I am sure that the several Commissions of Inquiry presently in train or have just concluded, such as those on the Public Service, the Prison, the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), those that have been completed and will be completed will probably cost over \$200 million. The issue of cost, especially when one wants an international inquiry...

On 29th June, 2005, I, as the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, brought a motion calling for an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of Dr. Walter Rodney. This motion was amended. This triggered the motion that was brought to the House in 2005, after many delays and attempts by the President and the Administration of Dr. Cheddi Jagan to have the French Government extradite Mr. Gregory Smith to Guyana in the early 1990's. Having failed those attempts because of the death penalty that exists on our law books, France does not extradite anyone to a country where the death penalty exists. These efforts failed in the 1990s with the French Government because Cayenne is an overseas department

to France.

We were then approached by Mrs. Rodney, through an interlocutor, and we then brought this motion to the House. To our surprise, in the course of the debate, the WPA representative, Mrs. Sheila Holder, radically amended the motion. The motion was passed. We abstained because we felt that important areas of the motion had been removed.

However, again, in 2012, we were approached by Mrs. Rodney and this is what finally led to an international Inquiry.

9.04 p.m.

In fact, the 2005 motion, which was passed in this House on the 26th June, resolved the following:

“That this National Assembly in paying tribute to the memory of this illustrious son of Guyana and on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his untimely and tragic death support an International Inquiry being conducted without delay into the circumstances surrounding the death of Dr. Walter Rodney.”

It was subsequently learnt that the interlocutor seemed to have misunderstood or misread the signals that he was getting from the Rodney family. In 2012, we were approached again, under President Ramotar, by Mrs. Rodney and her family, and President Ramotar decided to proceed with the Commission of Inquiry with three international jurists. The unavailability and disappearance of records after 34 years all revealed the efforts as recent as 1999 of an intentional cover up, and maybe even during the CoI itself about what happened on the 30th June, 1980 when Gregory Smith, who later became renamed Cyril Milton Johnson, was issued with another passport by the then Commissioner of Police, Mr. Laurie Lewis. In fact, it appeared, in 1982 and 1999, Gregory Smith entered Guyana and was issued new passports in the new name. In fact, the evidence in the Report shows that the 1999 document was riddled with inaccuracies and inconsistencies.

Mr. Speaker, I hear some mumbling over on the other side; it is regrettable that the mumbling coming from a particular Member on the other side was in the army in those days. Sir, forgive me because I do not want to get passionate. I am trying to be very level-headed in this because I believe that, in the memory of Walter Rodney, and in the findings of the Report are the essence of us, as a people, learning to live together and to resolve our problems. But if the

Comrade wants to behave in such an immature manner, then we will have it out.

[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I would simply say that you described it as level-headed; please continue to be level-headed.

Ms. Teixeira: Well, could you tell him not to call me stupid?

Mr. Speaker: And who would be him? Hon. Member, I think I will suggest that you stay focused on what you are doing. Please go ahead.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I look to you to protect me from people calling me stupid.

Mr. Speaker: And the address to the Speaker is not ‘you’ – will ‘you’ tell him. There is another form of address which, under any circumstance, every Hon. Member in this House must observe. Please proceed.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I have not called people stupid in this House, although I do believe that some are stupid.

Paragraph 8.7, page 146, the Commission goes on to say:

“We are satisfied on the evidence presented that Smith was protected by the State and this inference was strengthened when it is borne in mind...”

And it gives the example of the passports.

Paragraph 8.8:

“We hold that the change of name was intended to conceal the true identity of the killer of Walter and that it could only have been achieved with the cooperation and support of the Passport Office which was under the Police Force.”

Paragraph 8.10:

“We accept that Gregory Smith renamed Cyril Milton Johnson, received State assistance in going to French Guiana. The choice of country was deliberate and was no doubt informed by the fact that the French government, of which French Guiana

was a Department had a policy opposed to the death penalty. In short, it would have been difficult, virtually impossible, to secure the extradition of Smith/Johnson from French Guiana.”

This is part of the evidence which the Commission leads in terms of what is an intentional cover up.

It goes on, on page 109, paragraph 5.22. In this chapter, the Commission concludes:

“The evidence clearly points to the State procuring and facilitating Smith’s departure from Guyana ensuring that he remained outside of the jurisdiction and beyond the reach of its laws.”

The Commission explored the earlier evidence of forensic expert, Dr. Skuse, the expert evidence of the expert provided to the Coroner’s inquest in 1988, and came to the inescapable conclusion that Dr. Walter Rodney’s death on the 13th June, 1980 was a result of an explosion of a device provided to him by Gregory Smith, and that explosion was triggered by an external source.

When we go to page 100, paragraph 4.99, there is a definition and discussion about ‘what is terrorism’ based on the international definitions.

In paragraph 4.99, the Commission states:

“There is evidence of the significantly increasing popularity of Dr. Walter Rodney and the real threat that this posed to the governing party. The atmosphere of intolerance and dictatorial rule, the deficiencies in the investigation are all the features of the period under review. There is definitely material on which to conclude that Rodney’s death was an act of violence for political purposes...Getting him off the political scene was definitely an objective of the Government of the day. His death clearly set back and weakened the opposition forces.”

There is a whole discussion in one of the chapters, in the same chapter that maybe those who have experience with the electronic devices and telecommunications equipment would be much more familiar, as the Commission rules and reports that the equipment that was found at Gregory Smith’s house were, in fact, normal electronic equipment or telecommunication equipment used by the Military and reported on anti-personal device that there was an anti-personal device that was used against Dr. Rodney.

The Commission goes into a discussion on the era and what led to what was a State organised, State orchestrated assassination of Dr. Walter Rodney. Many other quotes from writers, from documents, from evidence of witnesses that were brought before the Commission... The comments were related from Mr. Sallahuddin's book – *Guyana: The Struggle for Liberation 1945 – 1992*, in which Sallahuddin is quoted saying, on page 116:

“Significant numbers of Public Servants and the Military were expected to pledge allegiance to the PNC. They did, under the practice of Party Paramountcy, a policy that placed the PNC over and above all other organisations and agencies and relegated the Parliament and the Government to a position of subservience in relation to the PNC.”

If we go further, and looking at some of the examples given of the subversion or submission of state entities to what were political entities, the Commission goes into detail on a number of these. And if we go to page 127, paragraph 6.36, the Commission states:

“Addressing Terms of Reference IV, we have no hesitation in concluding that, in the face of the evidence presented that both the Guyana Police Force (GPF) and the Young Socialist Movement (YSM) and those in command and superintendents of these agencies were tasked with the surveillance of and the carrying out of actions against the Political Opposition specifically the Working People's Alliance (WPA) and the People's Progressive Party (PPP)...”

Significant findings are reported on, on page 142 to 143, and I will refer to those because the significant findings led to recommendations and some of the very strong comments made by the Commission. The significant findings are on pages 142 and 143, paragraphs 7.35 to 7.40, but let me just quote from some of those paragraphs.

Paragraph 7.35:

“In the end it is clear to us that the Police were unprofessional, extremely inefficient in turning a blind eye to the obvious, or deliberately botched the investigation in Dr. Rodney's killing or were complicit with others, including the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) in hiding or shielding Gregory Smith from facing the brunt of the law for having murdered Dr. Walter Rodney.”

Paragraph 7.36:

“Given all the relevant facts, events and circumstances set out in the Report, we unhesitatingly conclude that Gregory Smith was not acting alone but had the active and full support, participation and encouragement of, and/or was aided and abetted by the GPF, the GDF, agencies of the State, and the political directorate in the killing Dr. Walter Rodney.”

Paragraph 7.37:

“Dr. Walter Rodney was a man of large and significant stature both in Guyana and beyond at the time of his death. He could only have been killed in what we find to be a State organised assassination with the knowledge of Prime Minister Burnham in the Guyana of that period...”

The Commission concluded, in Chapter 8 – Critical Findings and Summary on Gregory Smith - and I will refer to paragraph 8.22 for the purposes of the debate today. It is a repeat of what is the paragraph I just read earlier on page 143.

Paragraph 8.22:

“We have no hesitation in holding that Gregory Smith was responsible for Dr. Walter Rodney’s death on 13th June, 1980 and that in so doing he was acting as an agent of the state having been aided and abetted so to do, by individuals holding positions of leadership in States agencies and committed to carrying out the wishes of the People’s National Congress (PNC) Administration.”

There are 11 recommendations in the Report that encompass five broad areas and provide the opportunity for rectification of the wrongs of that era, and to ensure that such horrible events do not happen again. And the five areas are as follows. One can say that you can *live in hope and die in despair*. I hope that I would not be in that category. I hope that the five areas out of the 11 recommendations...and I believe that they are the objectives of the APNU/AFC coalition Government.

9.19 p.m.

They were the objectives of the PPP/C Government and are the objectives of the PPP/C in Opposition to have a well-trained and highly professional police force whose duty is to serve impartially, regardless of ethnicity or political affiliation. Under the police is the echelon of a professional police force, the focus on timely investigations with oversight from the DPP. Of

course, training is included for both the Army and police. That is an area which I do not think we could have any dispute with in this House. That is something we strive for as a people, as a country, as a Government and as an Opposition. One of the areas I stressed, which I have put under the rubric of the creation of a well-trained and professional police force, is the issue of record keeping systems, thorough and prompt review and secured computerised systems. That is all part of the rubric dealing with the police. The record keeping system also refers to the Army.

The issues with the police are at paragraph 9.7 in the area of recommendations. Paragraph 9.4 deals with the professional Army. Who does not want a professional army? No matter what people react to or reject in this Report, we have seen in the world the role of the army. We have seen recently in Turkey an attempt to overthrow a democratically elected government, a controversial government but a democratically elected government. We have seen in Egypt the removal of a democratically elected government in ensconcement of a military government. What the Commission says is not a target to Guyana; it is a warning, a caution, that we should accept with all due diligence and humility. It says that nothing is worse than an army in a country striving to be an ideal functioning democracy being partial to any political party whether in government or otherwise. An army, by definition, has a near monopoly of the legitimate instruments of violence and must be trained to act responsibly at all times. That is the area of the security forces.

The Report also calls for efficient and timely coroners inquests within six months. This is not a controversial issue. This is an issue that was recently discussed here in this House, to do with an amendment to the Coroners Act. Of course, there were other areas it was felt that should have been amended also.

Paragraph 9.10 talks about the electoral system and paragraph 9.11 about election observers. That is the fourth area of the recommendations. I do not think that we, in this House, would have any problem with this. Paragraph 9.10 states:

“No party in Government should be permitted to tamper easily or at all with the electoral system such as to secure an unfair advantage.”

It goes on to make recommendations:

“The electoral system should be entrenched in the Constitution and should only be amended by 2/3 majority. Besides, the Chairman of the Elections Commission should

be a person of the highest integrity and non-political and his/her appointment which should meet with the approval of the opposition groups and sectoral interests.”

The political Opposition and other interests should be adequately represented on the Commission. Serious changes should not be undertaken except after a thorough and meaningful public education programme and after consultation, too, with the Opposition party/parties and pursuant to a 2/3 majority vote in parliament.”

In fact, it is only this recommendation at paragraph 9.10 that actually makes the recommendation that this House - the Government and the Constitution Reform Committee of the Parliament, I would assume - would want to look at and examine in terms of what may be an amendment to law and or to the Constitution.

The other area that is under elections is electoral observers. The recommendation is:

“...in each and every General Election, observers from across the CARICOM region, United States, Canada and the United Kingdom should continue to be invited to monitor the elections.”

This is something we have had for years. We have had international electoral observers at every single Election from 1992. We had, as well, a group in 1985.

The last recommendation is certainly one that, if this House would not support it, I think my heart would break. Paragraph 9.12 states:

“The ethnic divide in the Guyanese society constitutes a fragile fault line. General elections produce an environment that puts that fault line under stress. Many of the recommendations made here in assume the existence and maintenance of a sense of ethnic harmony. But it has to be close consultation with national associations and diverse interest groups to design and implement a programme intended to strengthen ethnic harmony and a sense of national unity.”

I cannot believe that there are Members in this House who will not want to support something like that.

There is nothing in these recommendations that a democratic nation and a democratic Government would find difficult to support. In fact, there are areas of the Disciplined Forces Commission Report - and the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee which adopted almost all of

the recommendations of the Disciplined Forces Commission Report in 2009 or 2010 - that speak to the issue of a professional police force, a professional army, non-aligned and serving the state and the people without allegiance to any political party. We have, in the makings of our Constitution, some of these issues already. We have learnt lessons but we still seem to have to learn many more.

I am saddened by the fact that the amendment to this motion changes the issue of adopting the report and its findings to acknowledgments and it completely changes the Be It Further Resolved Clause to completely water it down. It changes the essence of the motion that states that it calls on the Government to take measures to implement the recommendations. It does not state that the Government must do it right away. It states:

“...to take measures to implement the recommendations therein in order to ensure that the democratic architecture of the state is preserved and strengthened.”

That is so that whoever is in government, the objective must be to protect the democratic architecture of the State as best as we know how under the circumstances we have. There must be an objective that we have, and we do it humanly, faultily, erringly but it must be something that we support. However, the amendment that is submitted states:

“Be It Further Resolved:

That the National Assembly calls on Government to take measures to examine the findings and recommendations therein in order to ascertain whether any and, if so, which are acceptable and implementable.”

It is very sad because, as I pointed out, the 11 recommendations are general principles and objectives that we have all spoken about in this House, on the electoral campaign, in our laws and in our Constitution. I find it difficult now that the recommendation of the Commission of Inquiry will have to be ascertained whether necessary and, if so, which are necessary and implementable.

The process has been an extraordinarily long one and there are many times when, over the years, I think it was 34 years...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, you have five minutes remaining.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you. I will try to keep to that. If not, I might need another two minutes from my side.

Because of the long road we have travelled, the 34 years to reach the Commission of Inquiry, I sincerely hope, unlike the suicide motion where we were trying to show one-upmanship, in this case, as there are people on both sides of the House who have lived through that era, who were politically involved in that era, who maybe tonight should give an example to our younger generation, we can rise above and look at that era as bygone and that we are not going to allow this to happen again in our country.

There are many countries of the world and many political leaders of the world who have apologised for things which happened 500 years before. It is time too for us to allow that period of *mea culpa*, even though some of the persons who were part of that era may not be here, have passed on... Nevertheless, it is time for the cleansing of our souls as Guyanese and the healing and reconciliation of our people. **[Hon. Member: Sash Sawh.]** I will suggest that you stay from talking about Sash Sawh. He was my Comrade much longer than he was ever yours.

I wish to acknowledge and extend deepest appreciation, and I hope this House too, to the three Commissioners, Sir Richard Cheltenham KA, QC, Chairman, Mr. Seenauth Jairam, SC and Ms. Jacqueline Samuels-Brown, QC, for their Integrity and wisdom in their findings and recommendations to Guyana. They said in their letter to President Granger, dated 8th February, 2016, on the submission of the Report:

“The Commission has served to unearth a wealth of evidence relating to the circumstances surrounding Rodney’s death. It has also succeeded in highlighting the need for improvement in the performance of the police’s investigative machinery, particularly as it relates to the investigation of serious crime, especially murder. Our work has exposed too the weakness of the record keeping of both the army and the police. If resulting from our work there is a correction of the limitations indicated we feel our work will not have been in vain.”

Mr. Speaker, it is, as I said when I began, with some anguish I read the document called *The Pursuit of Truth and the Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry* posted on the apnuguyana.org website. It was written in 2014 and talked about the Commission. It states:

“The PPP/C administration seems to be more interested in seeking to gain political advantage by provoking resentment against the PNC/R than in pursuing the truth about Rodney’s death. The PPP/C over the past 20 years has made several sensational...”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have two minutes remaining.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, I would like to have a few more minutes. Sir, do I wait until I finish my two minutes and then he moves the motion.

Mr. Speaker: I did not hear your question, Madam.

Ms. Teixeira: Would you like me to add on the next few minutes or go straight to two and then, when it is finished, then someone moves so I get some more minutes. I only need a few more minutes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are 45 minutes and 33 seconds now, which is beyond the time allocated. Any time you get beyond now is add-on time, if a request is made in the proper manner.

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Speaker, could the Hon. Member be granted an extension of five minutes to conclude her presentation?

Question put and agreed to.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, it is sad that the Commission and its appointment were surrounded by comments and documents that called it a mock trial and so on but there are other speakers who will deal with those issues, I assume.

9.34 p.m.

I hope too, as the Commissioners, that this report would help to bring closure to the irreplaceable and painful loss suffered by Dr. Walter Rodney’s family.

I therefore move the motion and call on the House to support it unanimously.

Thank you [*Applause*]

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, Walter Anthony Rodney was killed at age 38 when a bomb exploded... [Mr. Ali: You used to say assassinate.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister you would allow me one moment please. I would request Hon. Members to let us try to keep the temperature as it is now. Hon. Members who cannot contribute to this may wish to be silent. It does not help if we are going to, as they may say, up the temperature by unwanted comment.

Please proceed.

Mr. Nagamootoo: I thank you for your protection. He was killed on the 13th June, 1980. Like the mover of the motion I would like to salute and applaud all those who, over the years, sought to bring closure to this act that ended the life of a Guyanese scholar; a person who, at the age of 24, had secured his Doctor of Philosophy (PHD) Degree; who was extraordinarily talented; he was multilingual and spoke Spanish, Portuguese, French, Swahili; who was a historian, author and a professor in many parts of the world, notably leaving indelible marks in Tanzania and in Jamaica.

Walter Rodney's great work of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* has been recognised as compulsory reading in many universities of the world and had been translated into many languages. His well-known and familiar work *The Groundings with my Brothers* that emanated whilst he was in Jamaica had become an exhortation, the struggle amongst the poor and oppressed in our Caribbean and those who have been ghettoised.

Walter Rodney has also left for us his own compilation of the history of the Guyanese working people. So in the beginning of the report of the Commission of Inquiry (CoI) into the death of Dr. Walter Rodney it would have been fitting for the commission to acknowledge his credentials because those credentials establish the enormity of the loss Guyana and the world have suffered as a result of the death of Dr. Walter Rodney.

Like the mover of the motion, I have been acquainted with the late Walter Rodney. I first met him in 1974 when he had returned to Guyana, when his appointment as Professor of History at the University of Guyana (UG) was rescinded. This first meeting continued in many ways of a fruitful memorable association over many years, and until his death. I too, like the mover of the motion, feel that debating the report today and, more so, dealing with the issue of closure, is worth the effort as we would like to also share our perspective of this report and the circumstances surrounding its compilation. This is so that there can be a balanced, detached and unemotional account from perspectives that we ourselves understood and from perspectives that we ourselves created.

I have documented in an account, fragments from memory, most of the encounters with Dr. Walter Rodney. In many respect, I can say that he had travelled at a time in Guyana, like most of us, when we wanted to see a better country grounded in the rule of law, respect for institutions, respect for the Constitution, and that we should have justice with equity. He had lived in a period that I would consider to be characterised by features of authoritarianism. It was a period in our life, in periodization, that constituted that aspect of which we should not repeat and neither should we be held prisoners of the past as we must, in fact, move forward after assessing what has happened during that period.

For me, it is also difficult to speak to that period and, particularly, to speak about Dr. Walter Rodney. I shared his first public meeting in Guyana, when he spoke to the issue of the struggles of the people of Southern Africa, in Mozambique, Guinea Bissau and Angola. [Mr. Rohee: Where did that meeting go ahead?] It was at Crutches Square Campbell Avenue, Campbellville. The issue is that, while we lament this great loss, we all would wish to see justice brought in this case, that the truth should come out and that there be genuine lasting closure. The closure to which the widow, children, other relatives of Dr. Walter Rodney and his colleagues in struggle would welcome. There have been many attempts at securing this closure.

There was an inquest eight years after Dr. Walter Rodney died and I do not accept the conclusion of that inquest that he died of misadventure or that he had committed suicide. There was an inquiry by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) which was incomplete, as far as my memory goes. Then there was the commission of inquiry which was convened on the 8th February, 2014.

I have said that the inquiry was expected to bring closure, not only to the fact of a death and the consequences, but to a period that was a challenge for all of us who had lived in that time. This inquiry was not about rigged elections and we spoke to that issue openly and dispassionately; it was not about where the commissioners in the Guyana Elections Commission should be; and it was not about what measures the Government should take to respect the architecture of a democratic state. Our Constitution provides for how, as a Government, we build the architecture in accordance with law. This coalition Government, this united Government, has started to restore those architectures of good governance guided by the Constitution. We did not need to have political recommendations from a judicial inquiry to tell us about the architecture of governance and of our State.

I will refer in a while to the many Verbatim Reports of the inquiry which have essayed into areas of the political life of Guyana and had started a narrative from many perspectives and standpoints from 1947 to 1987 when the veteran politician, statesman and humanitarian Eusi Kwayana had testified. He started from genesis, when the Political Affairs Committee was formed in Guyana and how Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham and Dr. Cheddi Jagan came together with others and formed the People's Progressive Party (PPP), the first authentic party of the working class, when it was formed. It is not difficult for me to understand the narrative of Eusi Kwayana but this inquiry was not about an analysis of the history of Guyana and trying to situate in that history where we might have done better or where we may have went wrong. In the midst of that history stands out one person and that person is Gregory Smith also known as Cyril Johnson.

9.49 p.m.

That inquiry, to my mind, was seeking to establish whether, in fact, Gregory Smith had murdered Walter Rodney and whether he had acted alone or in concert with others. All of us wanted the truth. All of us want the answer to this question, not on the basis of any amorphous interpretation of the events or on the basis of what we think, but on the basis of credible evidence. We ask ourselves, did we fail in this task to establish the truth?

There was, at the previous inquest, a Dr. Sguse, mover of the motion, who had testified that a device was detonated by remote radio frequency and that had killed Rodney. Dr. Leslie Mootoo, the Pathologist, had given the medical terms that had caused the death and had said that it was by an explosion.

What we know from the evidence that was admitted and even from a relative of Gregory Smith, in a book that was titled *Assassination Cry* which also has a subtitled, that he had supplied the device to Donald Rodney and Walter Rodney. So when we look at the admitted fact, it would have been easy to conclude, very clearly without more, that the person who supplied the assassination device that cause the death of Walter Rodney was one, Gregory Smith.

So did we, eventually, get Gregory Smith to come Guyana? The mover of the motion pre-empted this discussion and while speaking to the issue of how she agonised, the Hon. Member had said she agonised and was anguished, I would like to say that on the 13th June, 1996, a warrant was issued for the arrest of Gregory Smith. He was in Cayenne and was

charged with the murder of Walter Rodney. But I asked the question and I suppose that those who were involved intricately in this affair would provide the answers. We knew that it would have been difficult or impossible for France to deport or extradite a person from its territory to face a charge of murder which carried the death penalty.

So what happen in 1996, if we knew that Smith was wanted for the murder of Walter Rodney? There was a recommendation that, instead of charging Smith with murder, a charge of manslaughter should have been instituted and that the French authorities should have then been approached to assist or facilitate the extradition of Gregory Smith, from Cayenne, to face trial for the murder of Walter Rodney.

Why was that not done? Why was the advice ignored? Why did we wait 10 years after to shed our anguish? I was a part of that state. In fact, since the death of Rodney, this is seventh Administration to preside over the affairs of State. I was dealing with the Administration in 1996 and had asked whether, in searching for the truth and trying to bring closure, we made mistakes ourselves? Did we ourselves fail to act in order to secure this justice and disclosure? Then again we were told that, perhaps, there would have been other methods that should have been used. The Commission of Inquiry (COI) alluded to 1990, in Trinidad, when there was coup commissioned that had granted unconditional pardons for all those persons who had staged a rebellion and attacked the Parliament of Trinidad and held the Prime Minister, Ministers and Members of Parliament hostage. An unconditional pardon had been granted to induce members involved in the attack, the insurrectionist, to come forward and to tell what had happen and why what happen, happened? Why did we not think about this earlier, if we could not have had the extradition of Gregory Smith, from Cayenne because Guyana was a death penalty country? Why was this mechanism of an unconditional pardon, not pursued, in order to get Mr. Smith to come to Guyana and face trial? [Mr. Nandlall: You were in the People's Progressive Party (PPP) Government.] I am saying that it does not matter what side we are on, we are all committed to the search for justice and when we talk that we want justice, it must not be that some must pursue it and we did not.

The failure of these efforts or the inaction to act earlier, and if so, only after entreaties from the family of the Late Walter Rodney, have prevented us from accessing credible information from authentic/original sources, including that of Gregory Smith, who is now deceased. Of course, this report, as I read it, came to the same conclusion.

In paragraph 8.22:

“We have no hesitation in holding that Gregory Smith was responsible for Dr. Walter Rodney’s death ...”

It validates what had been said before. But instead of trying to pursue how and where Gregory Smith acquired the device that was detonated electronically and from whom, it has decided to take a side alley and try to let in hearsay, double hearsay and triple hearsay in order to pursue a conclusion that was leading away from Gregory Smith, the primary suspect, who in fact from the evidence received, had been the culprit.

Mr. Speaker hit gavel.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 10 (1)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members we are approaching the 10 o’ clock hour. I would receive a motion for continuation beyond 10 o’clock.

Minister of Social Cohesion [Ms. Ally]: Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that we continue the business of today’s session until we have completed.

Question put, and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed Hon. Prime Minister.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Thank you. So as I said, even though the report seemed to have followed a lead, it was diverted somewhere along the line, hence, those recommendations that are, in the main, unrelated into the subject of the judicial inquiry. What surprised me, is that having read the Verbatim Report and having attended the commission’s sittings on some occasions, is that there were other leads that could have been followed that had suggested themselves.

One was whether the House of Israel was involved in the killing of Walter Rodney? Whether there was any foreign interest or interest that could be implicated in a plan to eliminate Rodney. As a politician, that has seen it all, in over 50 years, one cannot rule out any new possibilities or any new lead, if an inquiry is to be opened, fair and transparent; if an inquiry is to be credible, it cannot afford to bury any lead that could take one to the truth.

I listened to one of the witnesses who had testified and who is a Member of this House, the Hon. Joseph Hamilton. He stated many things to the commission of inquiry, including his

role as a priest going by the name of Hakim, in the House of Israel. I understand that he will be speaking to this motion.

10.04 p.m.

I would have thought that when he had said to the commission that there were no sacred cows beside Dr. Cheddi Jagan and Mr. Eusi Kwayana and that everybody else was fair game. That should have rung a bell in the commission. He said that his instruction and the mission of the House of Israel were to contain Dr. Walter Rodney. The word “contain” should have rung a bell. On 3rd June, 2014, when he had testified that he had spoken at length to this organisation to which he belonged, as having acquired arms and for which he admitted to carrying a weapon that had no license. He had said that he was not afraid that he could be intercepted, arrested or prosecuted. I do not want to encumber my contribution to the House. This is because I could refer and quote the exact words that he had told the Commission and had admitted in the end.

“I want to say again profound regret for the way my activities of terror and brutality were meted out to you.”

It is here that we have emerging, a contour of possibilities that I believe that the Commission had chosen not to pursue. An organisation that had participated in this difficult period, we are trying to place behind us. But as one said, and I quoted on several occasions in this House, what Galeano had said in his book *Open Veins of Latin America*:

“History is a prophet who looks back: because of what was...it announces what will be.”

So, that if we do not look back at what was and against what was, we will be unable to go forward into the future. The commission received evidence of strike breaking, bomb making and bribery, by leaders of the House of Israel, and of judicial officers. Of course, in the report and in the testimonies officers were named. We have to look to other elements that emerged in the testimony of the Hon. Member of the House, who testified in his own right and in his name as Mr. Joseph Hamilton also known as Prince Hackeem.

On the 14th July, 1979, which Mr. Martin Carter our National Poet described as *Bastille Day*. [**Hon. Member from the Opposition:** Did you ask Mr. Lumumba what his name is?] You must ask Mr. Lumumba what his name is. He is on your side. When Father Darke, a

photographer attached to the *Catholic Standards*, was bayoneted to death, I was there and it was documented. I went to my newspaper, the then *Mirror* newspapers, when this incident had happened which was on 14th July, 1979. He had testified that, as the scarlet blood of Father Darke flowed on Brickdam, he secured Father Darke's camera because he thought it had incriminating evidence within it. What did he do? He took it to the House of Israel and did not make prints of what was contained, which could have revealed the potential assassin of Father Darke. He took it and secured it and then gifted the camera, with the evidence, to the driver of Rabbi Washington. Someone who had testified and was a participant at the scene of the murder, benefited from unconditional pardon and could have said those things and have had them recorded in these volumes here for posterity. That pardon, had it been granted to Mr. Gregory Smith, he could have come and said what his role was in the death of Dr. Walter Rodney. So, I mentioned that not as an *ad hominem* on the Hon. Member of the House.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, you rise on a Point of Order?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes Sir, on a Point of Order. The Hon. Prime Minister is bordering on rather dangerous grounds.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I withheld every Member rising on anything to do with this debate on a Point of Order and held them strictly to the requirements of a Point of Order. It says a Member must get up, state his/her Point of Order and then leave it to the Speaker. So please, if you could proceed within those parameters, please, if not...

Ms. Teixeira: I am standing up. I have met one of the conditions.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, if you could proceed within those parameters you may proceed. If you cannot stay within those parameters I will not permit your question. Please proceed.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Member is referring to a Member of the House. Under the Standing Orders it is Standing Order No. 40. The issue, Sir, is that, during the interruptions, the Hon. Member is casting aspersions on a Member of this House and implying that he was involved in the murder of Father Darke. He is on treacherous grounds Sir. I am asking him to please withdraw the comment because the reference...

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for her statement. Please proceed Hon. Prime Minister.

Mr. Nagamootoo: I spoke to the issue because I am referring to Monday, 2nd June, 2014, the Verbatim Report of the proceedings. I have a document that says it is the Verbatim Report and it is relevant to the motion. It states on page 103:

“There were only two sacred cows, one Dr. Cheddi Jagan and two, Mr. Eusi Kwayana.”

So, any other Member of the Working People’s Alliance (WPA) and the opposition parties could have been harmed or assaulted. Someone is testifying, from his personal knowledge, of what seem to have been part of a conspiracy against other persons, except two. Then he states:

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, do you rise on a Point of Order?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, will you give way? Yes, please proceed.

Ms. Teixeira: We are dealing with volume one, which is the only volume that has been shared with this House by the Government. If the Hon. Prime Minister is referring to Verbatim Records of the commission of inquiry, these were never made available to the Members of this House. So, could he please show us the document and quote the proper heading of it and the page. Also, could that document be circulated appropriately, Sir, to the Members at the appropriate time?

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. We are, as I understand it, considering the report. I recall that the Hon. Member did venture into some other waters outside of the report. There is always the danger in something like this. I will hold myself free to indulge my desire for inquiry, and that I am uncomfortable with what someone may be saying.

There has to be a restraint which the Hon. Members put on themselves, however strongly they feel on a matter. The Speaker is not here to emphasise that type of restraint. If Hon. Members are going to indulge their presentations, to include matters not contained in that report, then it will be the same for any other Member who is speaking. Please proceed.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Sir, I refer to this report and on Monday, I will be happy to circulate these because there is only one volume, as far as I know, that constitutes the report. The report of the commission is based on the evidence adduced from the inquiry and the evidence adduced is contained in these volumes. The Verbatim Reports are available from the commission and from people who worked with the commission, such as the lawyers, *et cetera*. I will proceed Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, you have 10 minutes more.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Sir, just for the purpose of saying what I have said before, that the commission should have pursued other leads, rather than trying, on the basis of hearsay evidence, to arrive at certain conclusions. Page 104 states:

“Only two persons who our instructions were not to harm were Dr. Cheddi Jagan and Eusi Kwayana. Therefore, Dr. Walter Rodney would have been in the basket of who could have been harmed.”

And then I refer to the incident where Father Darke was bayoneted in Brickdam. Here is the account from page 107 of the witness who testified:

“I saw him stumbling and falling down somewhere in the precinct of the Ministry of Home Affairs. I recalled on this camera, as I said in my statement; I recalled a brother handing me the camera. I recalled collecting the camera because I suspected the camera might have had photographic evidence of a damaging nature. I could recall taking the camera and finding my way to the car park to hail a taxi to get back to the House of Israel Headquarters that is at lot 149 Light and Sixth Street.”

I mentioned that Sir, because I want this National Assembly to have a broader view of what happened.

Then of course, when Brother Eusi Kwayana testified, he had said in the report that at that time and just before Dr. Walter Rodney was killed, he and the WPA were pressuring the Prime Minister, Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham and the then Government to allow Cuban troupes to disembark and then to proceed to Angola where there was, according to testimony, the People’s Movement of the Liberation for Angola (MPLA) was locked in battle with the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), which was considered to be and described in the report, as a puppet of the United States of America’s imperialism.

10.19 p.m.

Here, it was a period that a political party called the Working People's Alliance (WPA) was in an arrangement pressuring Mr. Forbes Burnham, the Prime Minister, to allow troops to land in Guyana and their planes to be refuelled to fight imperialism in Angola. [Mr. Neendkumar: You supported that too]. We, of course, all supported that. It was in 1979 that the Shah of Iran was deposed in Iran, Somoza was removed in Nicaragua, Eric Gairy was removed in Grenada, Patrick John was removed in Dominica and Iran was removed in Suriname. Then a United States of America President had said that it is time to eliminate the Marxist virus in the Caribbean. This commission of inquiry was not considering any exogenous factors.

Therefore for me who had seen the front in the fight of global imperialism, when Dr. Walter Rodney was celebrated as a Marxist revolutionary, you did not refuse to turn a blind eye to any other lead, whether the bomb could have been planted by any other interest. The reason why these new dimensions were not pursued by themselves has left a huge gap in the historical narrative of what took place. That is why I said that the commission of inquiry could not have been pursued credible evidence, could not be pursuing the truth. Therefore all of us - as I said in my speech in 1993 in this House, I think it was my maiden speech - should be held accountable for blemish that has taken place in Guyana, that our tiny civilisation could have been the scenario for such a gigantic crime, suffering the death of a brilliant son of the soil.

Sir, it is with great disappointment and trepidation that I read in the report where ... I am so disappointed, not that I am a lawyer, but I have only been of average intelligence to read this testimony, this evidence. While I believe we would acknowledge this report, this is what smashes the credibility of this report to smithereens. It states here, on page 101:

“Allan Gates, a former policeman and an instructor in security matters, was at the time of his testimony serving a period of imprisonment for several offences of obtaining money by false pretence. At the heart of the offences for which he was convicted is dishonesty”.

It goes on. They advised themselves.

“We felt confident in accepting Gates' testimony. We found that Allan Gates was a witness of the truth”.

The question is that you are accepting what someone said as the truth, having plucked the person out of a jail, been in jail for dishonesty, fraud, deceit, lies, pretences and you elevated the testimony of that person to a truth. That is what I believe the persons said that he was told by someone who was at a certain location, that that someone heard some person, among themselves, hatching a plot to assassinate Dr. Rodney. [*Interruption from the Opposition Members.*] I have always learned that an elephant walks on in spite of the yapping at its heel. I will walk on.

The point is that you could not, if you are involved in any juridical inquiry, stretch credibility to its end level. You could not. In fact, it is because you want to make a certain political statement or arrive at a certain conclusion that you needed to do that. This part impugned the report. I do not have the answer whether Mr. Forbes Burnham or the People's National Congress (PNC) had rogue elements in the army, or the police force, or imperialist, or House of Israel or Mr. Hamilton, that the man Gregory Smith was an agent of any of these persons or entities. I cannot, because I do not have the evidence.

It is not how I feel, and I felt very much about that era of the political repression. There might have been popular sentiments, even if I share those myself, that I believe that the state had a hand, or an agent of the state. I cannot conclude if I were in an inquiry that lasted for two years instead of four months that cost over \$300 million. Cash was not the factor here, but if I spent \$300 million on myself, I should be able to say that I could not produce guess work or suspicion or intuition. I have to produce the evidence, even if I say the things I said in my book coming out of the way I felt and what I experience that I was probably a victim, and I was in that period. In that person, there was not only this narrative that was diverse and it is as different from the different point of view of those who testified. That era also had seen glimpses of hope and the glimpse of hope in what might have been this difficult time.

Challenging time for Guyana was in 1975 when I was with Dr. Cheddi Jagan and the PPP, when we declared critical support for the Burnham administration because after the 1974 Elections. Also in that period, we enunciated a policy for the formation of a national front and a national front Government involving the PPP and the PNC and all other patriotic and progressive organisations. Up to 1985, up until that time, the then Prime Minister, Linden Forbes Sampson (LFS) Burnham died... **[Mr. Neendkumar: He was President then.]**
In 1985 he was President, yes. Thank you again. We pursued on relentlessly the pathway to national unity and we appeared, Sir, and please indulge me, that, in terms of the death of Mr.

Rodney, nothing has seemed to have prevented the search for the new form of cooperation and unity even with a regime that might have been accused with the implication in the death of Mr. Rodney, because the glimpses of hope in mature politics is always to look for the brighter side. It is to leave the darkness behind. It is to leave the repression behind and to move forward. That is exactly why when 1985 came and we did not have this Government of national unity we look back at that with great regret. It was not at the death of Dr. Rodney, because we thought that the ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, I must ask you to wrap up.

Mr. Nagamootoo: In conclusion, we thought that Mr. Rodney harboured and lived the pure dreams for the development of Guyana, for the unity of our people. In 1975, he and I were walking a stair crafting a document for the formation of a caretaker Government. He revealed to me, when I asked him whether it would have included the PNC, his words were, "If Burnham were to be committed to free and fair elections the PNC would definitely be part of a new national Government". Dr. Rodney also thought that we could have moved forward and that we wanted the unity of Guyana.

Today, Sir, I regret that this motion, which appears to invite this National Assembly to adopt some of the dubious and questionable findings, cannot find favour with us and at an appropriate time an amendment would be moved in this House. I say this, again, that the report or the inquiry with all these volumes did provide information on which students of history could learn to construct our past and try to shape a new future, so that the work is not in vain. Therefore we acknowledge the report.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

10.34 p.m.

Mr. Chand: If this motion has any negative effect, it will be out of the contribution of the last speaker. Certainly, our dear revered Comrade, Dr. Rodney, would have been sleepless tonight. That was made possible by the last speaker. Of course, I rise to join in the support of this motion titled "Recommendations of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on the Death in An Explosion of the late Dr. Walter Rodney" and implore on all Members of this honourable House to unanimously support the motion. The report of the commission was presented to the Government nearly six years ago and certainly gained the attention and interest of many Guyanese, both locally and abroad. Such interest was not unexpected, given

the respected stature of Dr. Rodney and the significance of the incident that was probed. The Commissioners on page 1 of the report, in the transmittal to President Granger, wrote:

“...the Commission coming thirty-four (34) years after the death of Dr. Walter Rodney and the events surrounding that event, would, in all probability, be supported by only a few persons volunteering to give evidence and/or having an interest in this matter.

That was a wholly mistaken view and the Commission was generously well supported by volunteering witnesses who had relevant and interesting evidence to give. Some came from overseas to testify as well.”

Before I proceed, I wish to recognise the professional, well done work by the Commissioners - Sir. Richard Cheltenham, Q.C., Mr. Seenath Jairam, S.C. and Mrs. Jacqueline Samuels-Browne, Q.C.

The commission of inquiry, I believe, was long overdue and a necessary exercise. For the family and friends of Dr. Rodney, it provided an opportunity for the closure of his demise. For the Guyanese people, it allowed us to be able to truly get a better understanding of the circumstances which led to a now infamous incident and his death.

The commission's report in itself provided much information about the situation which prevailed in Guyana at the time. It was a period which can be described as tension filled and difficult and certainly one which, I believe, all Guyanese would not wish to experience again. It is important too that awareness of those times and, in fact, all times be recorded and be reflected upon, so that pertinent lessons are learnt and mistakes are not repeated. As we know history is a useful guide for us presently as well as in the future.

The general conditions of the period which found expression in the commission's report provide us the context which can trigger violence on a scale, which as a young developing nation we must pay attention to. Thus, on this note I believe the commission's report is a very good point of reference. The adoption of this report I am convinced is a logical and positive step in the right direction. It is regrettable that some of the persons knowledgeable about the incident are no longer with us. Their input certainly could have provided invaluable information which might have deepened our knowledge of those fateful events which the report addressed. This is unfortunate.

It is also unfortunate, indeed, upsetting, that the commission's work was unceremoniously curtailed by the Government associated to by the last speaker. Despite these shortcomings the commission was able to conduct a commendable inquiry which this Parliament should adopt to show our gratitude but more so to fulfil our responsibility to our people who expected from us forthrightness and transparency. The commission's report drew our attention to the erosion of cherished rights, the deterioration of the economy, the heavy hand of the armed forces among other things which were the then reality. The report tells us that the period was filled with great turbulence and repression and the arms of the state were used to further political ends and persons and organisations opposed to the state's policies and programmes were targeted.

From the workers perspective this situation was so sad. The period was characterised by many difficulties and challenges and the unity and solidarity of the working class were at times tested and even undermined. The report tells us of the erosion of the long held working class rights and values. For example, we are told, at page 48, arising from the testimony of Dr. Nanda Gopaul, that the workers inalienable right to strike was restricted. At page 49, the cherished value of collective bargaining was not upheld. Even agreements imposed by the state were not honoured and the judiciary had to be approached for resolution. At the same time the report reminds us that trade union leaders were harassed, threatened and intimidated. They were restricted in carrying out their trade union responsibilities and obligations. The independence of the trade union movement was also compromised. Unions were expected to be linked to the ruling party and the leaders of the centred unions, Dr. Gopaul revealed, "come in for special treatment".

The report confirmed that Guyana, 36 years ago, passed through tough times and faced many severe challenges. Our working people naturally suffered the brunt from those hard and harsh forces. Particularly over the last two and a half decades, then rights of the working class were observed by the administration and generally expanded. Workers organisations were able to pursue their genuine goal without fear or intimidation. The several new workers' rights and new labour friendly laws, mainly the Termination of Employees and Severance Pay Act, the Prevention of Discrimination Act, the Occupational Safety and Health Act and the Trade Union Recognition Act, which were obtained, opened great possibilities for the improvement of the lives of our working people. The era that the commission's report focused on was being left behind. Moreover then, I see the report also as suggesting that we must be wary of the return of those days in our time. This is not far-fetched. Several instances have recently

been publicised which are reminiscent of the period with which the Commissioner was concerned. In this regard, permit me to refer to paragraph 3.76 on page 52 of the report which is related to the trade unions and which would be of tremendous interest to our contemporary trade unionists. I quote with your permission, Comrade Speaker:

“In 1975 the Congress of the ruling party endorsed the following recommendations from one of its workshops on the role of labour:

1. *During this period. Unions should make funds available annually for education of workers in programmes approved by the state.*
2. *Punitive measures should be meted out to party members who support trade unions whose aims and objectives are not consistent with the revolutionary movement.*
3. *Salaried unionists should be phased out because this encourages such leaders in supporting any unjust demands by the workers.*
4. *Trade Unions operating in the public sector must be affiliated to the party, since unions that are not affiliated can undermine the aims and objectives of the party in government.*
5. *An industrial relations Bill should be introduced through Unions affiliated to the party and the party should establish a system to determine the necessity for strike action.*
6. *It is incumbent on all party members to ensure that the trade unions are affiliated to the party.*
7. *Non affiliated unions whose members belong to the party should, through the executive of that union, urge affiliation.”*

A labour movement tied up to such knots is debilitating its members...

Mr. Speaker: I hesitate to interact, but it is to enquire whether you gave the chapter and verse...

Mr. Chand: I did.

Mr. Speaker: You did.

Mr. Chand: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Have you quoted from that?

Mr. Chand: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Please proceed.

Mr. Chand: ...certainly not good for the country. Thus, I take the view that the commission's recommendation deserves our collective consideration. I view the proposal as yet another opportunity to reassert and safeguard our cherished values and rights and to promote a society that is just and in which justice in all its expressions is zealously pursued.

I wish to refer to paragraph 8.22 on page 149. The Prime Minister, in his address, stated as follows:

“We have no hesitation in holding that Gregory Smith was responsible for Dr. Walter Rodney's death on the 13 June, 1980...”

He failed to continue, but I want to continue.

“... and that in so doing he was acting as an agent of the state having been aided and abetted...”

[**An Hon. Member:** You are selectively quoting it.] Yes. He purposely quoted partly.

“...so to do, by individuals holding positions of leadership in State agencies and committed to carry out the wishes of the PNC Administration”.

[**An Hon. Member:** Prove it.] You said you are a friend, Comrade Speaker, of Dr. Rodney and you are having him spending tonight sleepless. You wondered who would have killed Dr. Rodney. Here you know that Milton Gregory Smith got a passport in a matter of hours. You know all of that. You saw the hands of the state operating and yet you tried to call names and who might have been involved, but you failed to quote this important finding at paragraph 8.22 fully. You purposely did that and that is why I think our dear Dr. Rodney would find tonight very sleepless.

10.49 p.m.

We do not understand why the Government is not willing to embrace these recommendations

at this stage. For an incident that occurred over three decades ago, the Government has a Report in its hands for six months and cannot make up its mind.

I hope the motion will be supported as printed. We hope that our Comrades, on the other side, would not pursue the amendment because the amendment would do injustice to the cause of the Inquiry and bringing an end to this matter. If we adopt the amendment, we will be leaving this matter opened. We would have to wait on the Government to make up its mind on what is implementable and when it will be implemented.

Let us, in the memory of Dr. Rodney, who was an outstanding Guyanese and friend to our working people and a revolutionary, approve this motion. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Dr. Roopnaraine: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the late hour, I ask to be forgiven for my own excursion into our recent and not so recent history. I think that it is important, and we would all agree, to understand how we reached where we presently are.

I have chosen to begin in 1987, precisely on 18th February. It was on that day that Eusi Kwayana, at that time a WPA Member of Parliament, appeared in Court on the instructions of the then Acting Chief Magistrate, Desmond Burch-Smith, to provide evidence in support of his application for the issue of summons for the attendance of Gregory Smith to answer to the charge of murder of Dr. Walter Rodney. The Magistrate rejected the application.

On 23rd December, 1993, Shaka Rodney, Walter Rodney's son and eldest child, mounted a silent fast and vigil outside the gates of the Attorney General's Chambers, vowing to continue indefinitely until he received a response to his demand for the immediate arrest of Gregory Smith and the opening of an independent investigation into the killing of his father.

On 4th January, 1994, at its first Cabinet meeting of the year, the Government established the Special Committee to review the files with a view to making recommendations for further actions. I am not aware that any recommendations were forthcoming.

One year later, in March, 1995, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), at the request of Caribbean Rights, sent a special investigative mission to Guyana to examine the Rodney files and to make recommendations.

The ICJ team took statements from various individuals and organisations, including the WPA; examined the documents that were made available to them and made a preliminary statement on the eve of the team's departure from Guyana.

The ICJ expressed its displeasure at the failure of the police to produce the files in their possession until after the team had left.

Notwithstanding the missing files, the ICJ made a number of recommendations among which were: that a fully empowered Commission of Inquiry should be mounted into the circumstances surrounding the death of Walter Rodney; that the 1998 Inquest was marred by grave defects; and that Gregory Smith be brought before the Commission.

In June, 1996, the late Senior Counsel, Doodnauth Singh, appointed a Special Prosecutor and brought the charge of murder against Gregory Smith before Chief Magistrate Juman-Yassin. I was present that day in the Magistrates' Court. An arrest warrant was issued and the pursuit of Smith could be said to have begun, 16 years after 13th June, 1980.

A new problem then arose. We have heard some mention made of it by previous speakers. Since Guyana had no extradition treaty with France, the issue required a diplomatic engagement. In the exchanges, the French requested Court documents, namely the details of the charge, the transcripts of the witness statements and all other supporting documents.

Since the laws of France did not permit the French authorities to extradite persons to a country where the death penalty operated, it would have required a statement from Guyana's Head of State that, in the event of Smith being found guilty of murder, the death penalty would not have been enforced. No such assurance was forthcoming. The French subsequently submitted that, according to their laws, if 10 years had elapsed from the date of the crime without any proceedings having been taken in the local jurisdiction, there would be no basis for extradition proceedings. As it turned out, the situation was saved by the private action taken by Eusi Kwayana in 1987. His application to the Court for a summons for Mr. Smith to answer the charge of murder fulfilled the ten-year requirement of the French.

The French required the Court records of Mr. Kwayana's application. However, while a record of Mr. Kwayana's application existed in the Register of Actions stored in the Office of the Clerk of the Georgetown Magistrates' Court and could have been made available, the Magistrate's Case Jacket had disappeared. I am not aware that it has ever been found.

At the Sitting of the National Assembly on 25th June, 2005, following the WPA's 25th anniversary commemoration of the assassination and responding to an appeal from Mrs. Patricia Rodney, Ms. Gail Teixeira, on behalf of the Government, brought the following motion to the House:

“WHEREAS, on the 13th June, 1980, Dr. Walter Rodney, a distinguished Guyanese scholar was assassinated by an explosion that occurred in his car at John and Hadfield Streets, Georgetown;

AND WHEREAS, Dr. Rodney at the time of his death, was an eminent political leader engaged in a struggle against Authoritarian rule for democracy and social justice;

AND WHEREAS there have been calls for a full investigation into the assassination of Dr. Walter Rodney which have received broad support.

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly in paying tribute to this illustrious son of Guyana on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his untimely and tragic death supports the Inquiry conducted into the circumstances surrounding the death of Dr. Walter Rodney.”

In her letter to His Excellency the President of Guyana dated 13th June, 2005, Mrs. Rodney had written:

“I write to express our family’s unwavering belief that a Commission of Inquiry can bring closure not only for our family but for the Guyanese people. The Inquiry is essential for the truth to emerge consistent with democratic principles and will be an instrument of reconciliation.

It is vital that the appointment and operation of a Commission be undertaken by an Act of Parliament supported unanimously across the House.

We stand ready to participate in the formulation of the Terms of Reference for the said Inquiry.

We have asked Dr. Rupert Roopnarine to be at your disposal for further arrangements in regards to this matter.”

In pursuit of the unanimity requested by Mrs. Rodney, I held discussions with the leadership of the ruling party and of the Opposition. Arising out of those discussions that did not yield consensus, the WPA’s then Member of Parliament, the late Mrs. Sheila Holder, proposed a number of amendments to the motion:

“In the first “Whereas” Clause 1, the word “assassinated” be deleted and replaced by the word “killed”.

After the word “scholar”, add the words “and champion of the multi-racial working people”.

Delete the second “Whereas” Clause in its entirety.”

At the end of the debate, the Speaker put the following amendments to the vote:

“In the third “Whereas” Clause, insert the words “impartial” before the word “investigation”.

Delete the word “assassination” and insert the word “death”.

Immediately before the word “support”, delete the word “broad” and insert the words “local, regional and international”.

In the “Resolved” Clause, insert the word “international” immediately before the word “inquiry”.

Insert the words “without delay” immediately after the word “conducted”.”

The Opposition PNC/R supported each amendment while the Government abstained. In the end, it was less than the unanimous support requested by the Mrs. Rodney. The motion, as amended, was carried.

I wish to conclude my short contribution by quoting the words of my late friend, the highly respected Mr. Winston Murray, in his leading contribution to the debate on the motion of 25th June, 2005. I think they have resonance for us today in the context of this 2016 Commission of Inquiry:

“We stand ready in the PNC/R to support the call for an international inquiry. We believe that the chips must fall where they may but we will not be party to a motion that seeks to prejudice the outcome of that Inquiry and we believe that it is very unfortunate that the Hon. Minister spoke in the context of evidence before an Inquiry.

I thought, in fact, that we had taken a decision about the Inquiry and she was giving evidence thereto. From much of what she said I think would be relevant to the Inquiry.

We do not intend to follow her down that path. We see laudable intentions by Mrs. Rodney but I believe I am sensing an act on the part of those bringing this motion to play politics with a serious matter.

I urge that today in this National Assembly on this motion, we desist from talking and playing politics. Let us deal with it as an objective matter to be fully and thoroughly investigated by the international inquiry leading where it may”.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Neendkumar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Report of the Dr. Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry.

11.04 p.m.

As a good friend of the Rodney Family - and I still am - I invited one of Rodney's eminent brothers, Hubert Rodney, and he is here with us tonight. I welcome him. Thank you.

This morning at the editorial board of *The Mirror*, I had a detailed discussion with Eddie Rodney, Dr. Walter Rodney's brother, about this whole story.

When I listened to the so called chronological report by Dr. Rupert Roopnarine, I still do not accept it but I want to tell him that he started seven years after - 1987 - and Dr. Rodney was killed in 1980.

For the rest of my life, I will never forget the Hon. Moses Nagamootoo for his contribution. Mr. Nagamootoo sat with us at the editorial board and he was the most... He condemned the PNC. I just cannot understand what my former good Friend, Moses Nagamootoo, was saying. He knew and he accepted that Rodney was assassinated by the PNC and today he is coming here to tell us that House of Israel did it. House of Israel did what they had to do but it did it under the instruction of the PNC, Hon. Moses Nagamootoo. You accepted that.

It brought back memories of when we published the article of Rodney's 36th death anniversary. My good friend called me from overseas, a diplomat, and he reminded me that, when Rodney was assassinated, the then Prime Minister, Burnham, recalled the diplomats and lectured them to say the bottom line: do not say and recognise Rodney as an academic or anything but talk to him and tell the foreigners that he was a revolutionary; he was a terrorist and he was an adventurer. That was the instruction by former Prime Minister Burnham.

Comrades, when I listened...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General, do you rise on a Point of Order?

Mr. Williams: Standing Order 40 (a), Sir... Is the Hon. Member referring to anyone of the documents associated with the Commission of Inquiry? If not, what is his source for that assertion?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General, you must state your Point of Order.

Mr. Williams: Yes, Sir. My Point of Order is whether the Hon. Member is relying, for that statement that he made, on any report or verbatim record of the proceedings of the Rodney Commission of Inquiry because, if he is not, then we will ask him to withdraw that statement. It is because he is impugning criminality to a former President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Attorney General for his statement.

Hon. Mr. Neendkumar, I am afraid that I have not heard the particular reference that was being made but what I would advise is that you do not trespass beyond the bounds of what is proper, even in this very lax atmosphere in which this debate is taking place. If you do, I will rule you out of order. Please proceed.

Mr. Neendkumar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I read Dr. Derrick Bernard's speech when we talked in 2005 on the 25th anniversary and I must say that I admired that speech because he spoke about Dr. Rodney's life as a student at Queen's College (QC), as an intellectual. And I could understand the contribution of Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine and Dr. Derrick Bernard but I am saying to this honourable House that I would never forget the contribution made by the Hon. Moses Nagamootoo in this House. I will never forget it and I will speak about it.

As we welcome our 50th Golden Jubilee of Independence, it is most fitting for us, as a nation, to recognise all those eminent Guyanese who contributed significantly to our country's development. Dr. Walter Rodney will certainly feature prominently among any collection of eminent Guyanese who gave their unflinching support for the freedom of the Guyanese people.

The Hon. Member Gail Teixeira's motion calling on the APNU/AFC Government to table the Report of the Commission urgently was indeed very appropriate at that time in our country's history. Why is it that this Government was not releasing the Report to the public? We are indeed grateful to the former President, Donald Ramotar, for his vision and wisdom to answer the call of Dr. Walter Rodney's family as he appointed the eminent three-person Commission of Inquiry.

The Commission, headed by the distinguished Barbadian Queen's Counsel Richard Cheltenham, and included Senior Counsels, Seenath Jairam of Trinidad and Tobago and Jacqueline Samuels of Jamaica, said that there was *prima facie* evidence that members of the Discipline Services had significant roles to play in the conspiracy to kill Dr. Walter Rodney and the subsequent attempt to conceal the circumstances surrounding his death.

Historian Dr. Walter Rodney was the victim of a State-organised assassination on the 13th June, 1980, and this could have only been possible with the knowledge of the then PNC Prime Minister...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member...

Mr. Neendkumar: It is in the Report...

Mr. Speaker: Then you will quote from the Report, the page of the Report and whatever other means you will provide so that it can be identified.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the page and...

Mr. Speaker: And if you cannot...

Mr. Neendkumar: But it is in the Report, Mr. Speaker... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, you will allow me to do this. Thank you.

Hon. Member, if you are unable to do that, then you will not be allowed to present that as a quotation from the Report. You may proceed with that caution.

Mr. Neendkumar: As for now, Mr. Speaker, I will withdraw it but I will bring it back later on. The role of the Guyana Defence Force member Gregory Smith in the walkie-talkie set-up of an assassination of this son of the soil, Walter Rodney, must not be forgotten. The fact that

the Administration of the day facilitated his change in name from Gregory Smith to Cyril Milton Johnson and went on to move him from Timehri to Kwakwani...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, are you quoting from the Report? If you are not...

Mr. Neendkumar: This is in the Report, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please allow me to say this one more time: you must tell this House the page, the chapter or the section from the Report from which you are quoting. That is a requirement.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that I got it from the Report itself.

Mr. Speaker: And I accept your assurance but the rules require that you so present the statement that you are making. Those are the rules for everyone.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, it is chapter four.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, the section that the Hon. Member is trying to find is one that I read when I was speaking – paragraph 7.37, page 142:

“...He could only have been killed in what we find to be a State organised assassination with the knowledge of Prime Minister Burnham...”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, do you rise on a Point of Order?

Ms. Teixeira: I am helping my Colleague out, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: And would “help out” be in the Standing Orders? I am not familiar with it. I really must ask Hon. Members to reduce the number of times the Speaker will have to remind Members of the Standing Orders. Let us try to do that.

Hon. Member Mr. Neendkumar, if you are quoting from the Report, then you will say where you are quoting from and you will indicate the quotation and then you will move on from that when the quotation has ended to express your own view.

Mr. Neendkumar: It is page 142, paragraph 7.36.

Mr. Speaker: That is the way we will do it, so please assist.

Mr. Neendkumar: Given all the relevant facts, events and circumstances...

Mr. Speaker: You are saying page so and so and paragraph so and so?

Mr. Neendkumar: It is page 142, paragraph 7.36:

“Given all the relevant facts, events and circumstances set out in the Report, we unhesitatingly conclude that Gregory Smith was not acting alone but had the active and full support, participation and encouragement of, and/or was aided and abetted by the Guyana Police Force (GPF), the Guyana Defence Force (GDF), agencies of the State, and the political directorate in the killing of Dr. Walter Rodney.” [*Applause*]

[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will let Mr. Neendkumar finish his presentation. Sometimes, discretion is the better part of valour. So, please proceed.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate our 50th...

Mr. Speaker: Have you completed your quotation and now moved?

Mr. Neendkumar: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed; thank you.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate our 50th Jubilee, many people from French Guiana and Suriname are visiting Guyana and many of these visitors had good relations with the then Gregory Smith and they are talking about his role in the murdering of Dr. Walter Rodney.

I visited Suriname and French Guiana on several occasions and I was fortunate to meet a number of persons and was involved in many discussions on the assassination of our Friend and Hero, Dr. Walter Rodney.

While Guyana is celebrating its 50th Independence Anniversary, we are also celebrating Dr. Rodney's 36 years since he was brutally assassinated. On that same day, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution demanding the release of the famous Nelson Mandela from the dark dungeons of the racist South African jail. And even as the UN was pronouncing on that historic human rights declaration, Guyana's Government, at that time, was involved in the assassination of its own populist political leader, Dr. Walter Rodney.

In this august House, while we are pleading with the Government to debate the Walter Rodney Report of the Commission, people of all walks of life are supporting us. I was fortunate to be at many of the good Doctor's seminars and lectures.

11.19 p.m.

The members of the Organisation of Working People (OWP) in Linden have genuine memories of Dr. Rodney's weekly lectures in the mining Town. People, such as Mr. Stanley Humphrey, Mr. Compton Fraser, Mr. Noble, Mr. Smith, Mr. Moffatt and Mr. Fyffe, are all still alive. These men are people who really loved and had genuine appreciation for the revolutionary Dr. Walter Rodney.

In those days, there were two police check points on the Linden Soesdyke Highway. I can recall vividly how the police had fun as they stripped and searched political activists. I was a victim of those wicked and vindictive searches. But Dr. Rodney was able to find himself in Linden every week to do his political work. The people in Linden will always remember their hero, Dr. Rodney. In one voice, let us call on the APNU/AFC Government to stop all forms of harassment of the Guyanese people now. We must stop it now.

I was with Dr. Rodney when he was speaking at a public meeting at Papi Square, Vreed-en-Hoop. I was the first speaker, and, when the good Doctor was speaking, a thug of the PNC unleashed a vicious attack on him. He had to run to the Vreed-en-Hoop Ferry Stelling. Yes, he ran a distance of approximately one mile. One of the thugs is still alive and has a brother here in this House with us now.

Dr. Walter Rodney studied and worked in several countries around the world. After studying in England, he was in Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Jamaica. He returned to his native Guyana and was quick to have talks with the well-established Dr. Cheddi Jagan and the People's Progressive Party. However, recognising the nature of the vicious PNC Government, Dr. Rodney joined forces with Brother Eusi Kwayana and an old good friend, Mr. Rupert Roopnaraine, as they formed the Working People's Alliance. Dr. Rodney and all the progressive forces had to endure the postponement of national Elections in 1978. A referendum was held and the people of this country were called 'mouse'. That referendum provoked the wrath of the Guyanese people as the Guyanese people had to live under the paramouncy of the PNC one-party dictatorship.

In respect to this motion, let us agree with the motion led in this Parliament by Cde. Gail Teixeira. Those dark and unforgettable days must never return to our country. Dr. Rodney was no ordinary politician. As he fought for genuine political independence, he made a defining mark on the world stage, becoming famous for his intellectual foresight and his depth in thinking as a historian and as an eminent scholar of global recognition.

As Guyanese are in the mood to celebrate the 50th Jubilee, Mrs. Patricia Rodney, along with her three loving children, Shaka, Kanini and Asha, are all not with us because their loving husband and father was brutally assassinated by an oppressive regime in Guyana. How we treat our own reflect the kind of people we are, the state of our heart as a nation. How kind, compassionate and caring do we treat each other? Let us all in this House call on the APNU/AFC coalition to stop the crime and assassination of our people. Let us have peace and always remember brother Walter Rodney. I call on this honourable House to support the motion laid by Cde. Gail Teixeira.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs [Mr. Allicock]: Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to stand in this august Assembly and to speak on behalf of the Government of Guyana on matters. Equally important, I take great pride in speaking on behalf of the Indigenous peoples of Guyana. Today is one such occasion. Today, we have before us a Report to discuss. It is a Report which is essentially the product of a process which was designed to malign and adversely reimage one of the oldest and most respected political parties in Guyana. It is clear even to the most disinterested person that the Donald Ramotar Administration, recognising its massive unpopularity, set about designing a process geared to promote itself at the expense of the People's National Congress. It was a complete failure. The National Assembly, therefore, cannot accept this motion, in the present form, on the Report of the Commission of Inquiry appointed to inquire and report on the circumstances surrounding the death, in an explosion, of the late Dr. Walter Rodney on 13th June, 1980, in Georgetown.

To begin with, architects ensured that the Terms of Reference were subjective and self-serving. There is much presupposition in the formation of the Terms of Reference. Opposition personalities of the 1980s wielded exclusive authority in 2014 and 2015. Hon. NK Gopaul, Ms. Gail Teixeira, the mover of this motion, and CJ Rohee, used their Executive authority to influence the outcome. It was the Executive which crafted the Terms of

Reference for the Commission. Hon. Member Rohee was, at the time, responsible for security; Hon. Member Teixeira was a Presidential Advisor and a former security Minister; and Dr. Gopaul was a sitting Minister of Government. The fact that Dr. Gopaul's book was accepted as an authority speaks volumes of the Executive's intended outcome of the deeply flawed process. It even suggests some semblance of conflict of interest. The acceptance of this book and the rejection of Mr. Gregory Smith's book remain unexplained.

There were multiple extensions to the inquiry process. His Excellency the President David Granger should be commended for being as generous as he was in granting at least three extensions to the Commission. Despite his generosity and patience, 10 witnesses who were available were never heard. Among that number was the Hon. Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine, a leading Member of the Working People's Alliance, the party of Dr. Rodney, and former Crime Chief, Mr. Cecil Skip Roberts. I wonder if the Hon. Gail Teixeira would care to explain why this was so, despite the available time, witnesses and financial resources. In my respectful judgement, the conclusion and recommendations cannot reasonably therefore be definitive. Although an attempt was made to explain, I think it is not enough to justify the claim that was made. In order to avoid overspending my time, I shall simply list a few of my observations to support my contention that the motion should not be accepted in its present form.

The CoI Report suggests that the PNC could never win an election. It uses this supposition to conclude that Mr. Burnham found it necessary to control, intimidate and frustrate persons and to rig elections. The evidence of the PNC/United Force (UF) coalition debunks this. Clearly the UF was not intimidated by Mr. Burnham, but rather appeared to have been afraid of the possibility of a PPP government. These fears were realised in the period 1992 to May, 2015. More time was spent on vilifying Mr. Burnham than examining the question of how Dr. Rodney died. I think too much focus was not on the main focus that this Commission was supposed to be addressing. Elements who were of the PNC in 1980 and who are now disgruntled with the party and have since embraced the PPP appear to be *singing for their supper*.

Mr. Rovincy admits that the WPA was accumulating arms. Mr. Gregory Smith, in his book, which the CoI discredited, suggested that he was asked to supply explosives. The WPA was exploring extra electoral means of removing the Government of the day. Mr. Leon Saul testified that the crowds were becoming larger due to Mr. Rodney's presence at public

meetings. He suggested that the WPA was attracting the support of the PPP. Was the PPP worried about this?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, do you rise on a Point of Order?

Mr. Neendkumar: Yes, Standing Order 40. Mr. Speaker, you asked me to give page and paragraph and you are not asking him. He should give us the page and paragraph also.

11.34 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you need to phrase your Point of Order in a different manner. I would say this: There is a difference between drawing a conclusion and quoting. While you are thinking about that, I would invite the Member to continue.

Mr. Neendkumar: The biasness will continue. I will fight it.

Mr. Speaker: What I would say to the Hon. Member is that I did not hear him. Please proceed Hon. Member.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, could the Hon. Member... I think I heard him because there was much laughter in the back that I am not sure I heard the Hon. Member...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, are you rising on a Point of Order?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Please state your Point of Order.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, but I have to explain why I could not hear the Hon. Member. He said, I believe, based on what I heard...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I asked you to state your Point of Order. Are you going to do that?

Ms. Teixeira: The Hon. Member said that the WPA had arms, could he say which part of the report states that. Thank you. I was trying to preamble, but what I think he said, because of the noise, was that the WPA was accumulating arms.

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: And the Point of Order is, precisely, what?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member said that the WPA was accumulating arms, I am asking, on a Point of Order, for the Hon. Member to advise us on what page and paragraph in the report was that stated.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, would you please enlighten the House. Hon. Minister we will give you a few minutes to discover the page in the report if such a page is in the report. If there is no such page then I will ask you to proceed.

Mr. Allicock: Thank you very much for your patience.

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, do you wish to proceed in the same vein in which you were travelling?

Mr. Allicock: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would refer to the part in the report later on, I am being supported. I will continue Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, if you have been unable to provide the passage in the report from which you made the statement then, for the moment, you must withdraw that statement and then proceed.

If you are able to find that statement before you conclude your presentation then you may inform the House accordingly, but, for now, that statement should be withdrawn.

Mr. Allicock: I withdraw the statement.

His evidence is accepted to link Mr. Burnham to a conspiracy to kill Dr. Rodney. The Commission of Inquiry (CoI) report concludes that no evidence was obtained... *[Inaudible]*... *[Interruption]* The convenience of this particular outcome is clearly evident. It coincides with the intent...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, is it a case that you are quoting from the report? If the Hon. Minister is doing that then he must tell the House the page or paragraph or whatever other reference that would enable Members of the National Assembly to follow the point that he is making.

Mr. Allicock: Mr. Speaker, it is the content of my speech, not a quotation. *[Interruption]*

I refer to page 57, paragraph 3.92:

“Ogunseye’s testimony is significant in that he admitted freely that his WPA cell had taken the decision to acquire weapons.”

[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister please proceed.

Mr. Allicock: The Crime Chief and Chief-of-Staff...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you will reclaim your seat. Hon. Member, you rise on a Point of Order. Please state your Point of Order.

Mr. Neendkumar: Yes. Page 57 has no paragraph 3.92. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Neendkumar, it would be good to rise if I am addressing you. It is my understanding that the reference is an appropriate one. I do not know whether there is a different printing that you may have...

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, this was given to me by the House and on page 57 of the copy that I have there is no paragraph 3.92. You can check my copy or someone else could.

Mr. Speaker: What the Speaker is trying to do is to assist to enable you to discover whether the Vice-President is mistaken in what he has said or whether you are mistaken in what you have said.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, the copy of the report that I have is here and anyone can check it.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, if you would allow me. I think that we are being subject to the misuse of a Point of Order. The document that has been distributed by the House is a document titled: *Report of the Commission of Inquiry...* and is dated February 2016. On page 57, which I have before me, it has the second substantive paragraph, which is paragraph 3.92 and the first sentence of that paragraph is just as been read by the Vice-President. If the distinguished Member has a different copy, I suggest that he refers it to the Clerk of the National Assembly and that will be dealt with after. The Member cannot interrupt the speech for what is really a falsehood. The document is here and the Member could not have had another page.

Mr. Speaker: Ms. Teixeira, are you rising on a Point of Order.?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, I am trying to help.

Mr. Speaker: You must help the Chair of the Speaker too.

Ms. Teixeira: I am trying to help you Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Then on what point do you rise?

Ms. Teixeira: I do not know what you call it because I am trying to say to you that the copy that the Hon. Member has was circulated by this House and page 57 does not have paragraph 3.92, as many of the other copies have. The Hon. Member's copy looks different but he was given that copy of the report by this House. His copy has paragraph 4.32. Would you like to see it Sir?

Mr. Speaker: No, the Speaker would not wish to see any of this.

Ms. Teixeira: I do not want to either, Sir, but the Member is saying that his copy is different from the copies some of us have and when he got up to...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if I understand what you are saying, it is that a different copy may have been given to some Members. It turns out that the copy from which the Hon. Vice-President has quoted is available to all under a different page. That cannot be beyond us to solve.

It seems to me that any Member who has a reference similar to the one of the Vice-President can simply pass that to the Hon. Neendkumar so that he could see that what is being quoted is properly being quoted. That does not require 15 minutes of difficult time. As I understand, it is not a challenge to the veracity of what is being quoted.

Are you maintaining the position that you have Mr. Neendkumar or do you withdraw it?

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, I would be guided by you but I am telling you that the copy that I have is what I got from the Parliament Office.

Mr. Speaker: I thank you Mr. Neendkumar. Hon. Minister, you may continue.

Mr. Allicock: At paragraph 8.23. Mr. Gates speaks of a meeting to discuss a plot to kill Dr. Rodney. There is nothing to suggest the validity of this evidence. Was this constable so

special so as to be present at a high level meeting involving a President and the country's top security officials?

11.49 p.m.

Do the presenters of this report believe that they are speaking to or that they are addressing a set of idiots? The Crime Chief and the Chief of Staff of the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) are surviving attendees of this alleged meeting...

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I believe the language that you are using, however much as it may be acceptable, it is not acceptable in the House. The word beginning with the letter 'I', I think you said a bunch of something beginning with the letter 'I'. I am sure that you could use another word for that.

Mr. Allcock: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I do withdraw. The Crime Chief and the Chief of Staff of the GDF are surviving attendees of this alleged meeting. The Chief of Staff was not asked about it in his partial evidence. He was never recalled to the witness stand to complete his evidence. The Crime Chief was never questioned, yet Mr. Gates' evidence was taken as unchallenged and irrefutable. How does the Hon. Teixeira explain this? I hope that when the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, wraps up this debate she would find it useful to address these issues.

It is clear to me, as it is to the Indigenous peoples of Guyana, that the findings and recommendations contained in this report are essentially flawed. The motion, as it currently stands, cannot therefore be accepted without amendments to correct it. My recommendations to all Hon. Members of this National Assembly are as follows: Let us together recognise that Dr. Rodney was a great Guyanese - a great Guyanese son he was; he was a world renowned historian and a good politician - a good political leader; he deserves a place in Guyana's rich history and ought to be afforded the rightful place when our history of his era is written. Let us recognise that Mr. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham was a great Guyanese Leader. He was the first Prime Minister of independent Guyana. He was Guyana's first Executive President. Mr. Burnham has made significant contributions to the development of this great country of ours. To list his countless achievements as Guyana's Head of State and the Head of Government would take several researchers, writers and volumes. As we approach the 31st

Anniversary of Mr. Burnham's death, let us call to mind and reflect deeply on his many accomplishments as a national Leader.

The people of Guyana elected all of us here to serve them. They do not enjoy seeing their elected leaders waging useless battles against each other for partisan political space. They do not wish for us, in the National Assembly, to waste their resources and our limited time waging verbal wars with bitter outcomes and from which they do not and cannot benefit. We must respect their wishes. The Guyanese electorate is the reason we are here. Instead, let us celebrate the contributions of these two Guyanese giants. Putting the dead giants against each other serves no useful purpose. Besides they are both children of our dear land who have contributed significantly to our history, as have others.

We always seem to express preference for seeing the negative in our own, when there is so much to celebrate. Let us capture this moment to celebrate rather than denigrate. It is our Golden Jubilee year, our President has set the tone, let us look at the future being ever mindful of our history as we seek to bring home the good life. I would like to ask that, if we are going to move Guyana forward, we need to take this opportunity in coming together for a better Guyana for all of us.

I would not be able to support this motion without amendments. If we have the amendments in place, definitely I think it would be the right way to go.

I wish to thank you very much Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Damon: Mr. Speaker and every other Member of Parliament in this honourable House, I stand here to support the motion in the name of the Hon. Gail Teixeira. I would like to also say that the Hon. Member, Mr. Allicock, made mention about the Hon. Members, Ms. Teixeira, and Mr. Rohee as Ministers of Home Affairs. Let me tell you this, they serve in their time and they served with distinction.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, all comments should be addressed to the Speaker.

Mr. Damon: Okay, Comrade, I am speaking to you. Mr. Speaker, through you, the following persons and I quote from page 1 of the Walter Rodney's commission of inquiry:

“1.3 The following persons were appointed as Commissioners:

Sir Richard L. Cheltenham, KA, Q.C., Ph.D. - Chairman

Mr. Seenath Jairam, S.C.

Mrs. Jacqueline Samuels-Brown, Q.C.

1.4 The Terms of Reference of the Commission were as follows:

- i. To examine the facts and circumstances immediately prior, at the time of and subsequent to the death of Dr. Walter Rodney, in order to determine, as far as is possible, who is or what was responsible for the explosion resulting the death of Walter Rodney;”

Dr. Walter Rodney had very strong ideas against the situation in President Burnham’s time in Guyana. He was a very brilliant person who had dedicated his life for democracy in Guyana. I do remember him well.

Under President Donald Ramotar, a commission of inquiry was recommended and established pertaining to the findings which were very well touching, shameful and uncalled for. Levels of recommendations were made as the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) Government refused to honour these recommendations from the commission of inquiry.

This is an act of deliberateness. The people of Guyana demand that all these recommendations must be implemented, after passage through our National Assembly. For the information of the press and all of Guyana let me now state what these recommendations are.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I hope that you are also doing it for the information of the House.

Mr. Damon: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I am happy to hear that.

Mr. Damon: For the public and, of course, the 65 Members of Parliament (MPs), especially the Hon. Members across there - all of you. The State at the time did facilitate Sergeant Smith’s departure from Guyana ensuring that he remained outside of the jurisdiction and beyond the reach of our law.

The inquiry had found that Mr. Burnham had kept tight reigns on all aspects of the country...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I must tell you that the moment you say that the inquiry has found, you will need to quote the page.

Mr. Damon: I have the page.

Mr. Speaker: You will start with that and you would indicate when you are through with the quotation. So that we would know that one would have change back into a different mode. So please assist us in that way.

Mr. Damon: Page 141... [*Interruption*] **[Ms. Charles-Broomes:** Let him read it.]
The Speaker has to direct me to read it not you. I already said page 141.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the requirement is that you must indicate where in the document so that your Colleagues could follow it.

Mr. Damon: I am quoting from paragraph 8.11,

“That Gregory Smith returned to Guyana on more than one occasion and received a new passport on one such visit, according to the evidence of Woman Police Sergeant 1725 Alexis Adams, is also accepted. On that occasion the Passport Office was acting on the instruction on the then Commissioner of Police, Laurie Lewis.

8.12 The inspection of the passport form produced before the Inquiry revealed that Smith renamed Johnson was not required to sign the form and fill in the necessary particulars required.”

The commission of inquiry also stated that Mr. Smith, the suspected killer, was encouraged in providing that device by persons of State agencies. The Commissioners have since recommended that every effort be made to have a well-trained and highly professional Police Force and Army. Much more, moneys much be spent on expertise training for the Police and the Army. It was conceded by the Police in the course of the inquiry...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am trying to be lenient. But I do believe that I must stop you here. You must refer to the part of the report from which you are quoting.

Mr. Damon: Let me go back here.

Mr. Speaker: The page and the paragraph, if there is a paragraph.

12.04 a.m.

Mr. Damon: Page 147, paragraph 8.10. It was conceded by the Police, in the course of the inquiry, that no proper investigation was done. The department in the Police Force tasked with the responsibility to investigate crimes like murder should, at all times, try to do so with truth and urgency. Additionally, the fact that important documents disappeared and could not have been presented...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, are you quoting from the report?

Mr. Damon: This is what I have written. It is part of my address Sir.

Mr. Speaker: You cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Damon: This is the report here, but this is part of what I am saying.

Mr. Speaker: Then you should perhaps make that clear. I thank you Hon. Member, but we will do this in the way in which the Speaker will wish it done. You will make clear that you, Hon. Cornel Damon, are saying these things as your view.

Mr. Damon: I, Cornel Damon, Member of Parliament of this Parliament am saying these things.

Mr. Speaker: I think that is a very good way of expressing the difference between what is in the report and what you are saying, as your view. So, let us be guided by that.

Mr. Damon: Let me quote now, Mr. Speaker, page 15, paragraph 2.5:

“As a student in Jamaica, Walter maintained his reputation as an outstanding debater. Besides, he participated in discussion circles.

2.6 When Walter was in London, his brother Lawrence was also there. He testified that they both spoke at Hyde Park and attended meetings at the West Indies Student Centre. Besides, they attended Pan African type events.

2.7 In 1965 when Walter was in London, he participated in a symposium on Guyana. It was during that period that he came in contact with the prominent West Indian intellectual and political analyst, C.L.R. James, and became one of his devoted students.

2.8 Walter was multi-lingual. He learnt Spanish, Portuguese, French and Swahili in order to facilitate his research for his doctoral thesis.

2.9 The teaching appointment which Walter first accepted was in Tanzania before returning to Jamaica and to the University of the West Indies in 1968 as a lecturer in the History Department.

2.10 In Jamaica, Rodney combined his scholarship with activism and became a voice for the under-represented and the disenfranchised. He became particularly close to the Rastafarians and the Jamaican masses to whom he took his message of Black Power, Black Liberation and Black Consciousness. He shared his knowledge of African history with them. And his speeches and lectures to those groups were published as *Groundings With My Brothers*. It became a piece of literature critical to the Caribbean Black Power Movement.

2.11 Rodney's activities had by then attracted the attention of the Jamaican Government then headed by Prime Minister Hugh Shearer. And after attending the Black Writers' Conference in Montreal, Canada, in 1968, Rodney was banned from re-entering Jamaica. That decision attracted considerable publicity in Jamaica and beyond. It sparked widespread riots and revolts in Kingston on October 6th, 1968, in what came to be known as the "*Rodney Riots*."

2.12 Having been expelled from Jamaica, Walter returned to Tanzania. There he lectured from 1968 to 1974 and continued his groundings in Tanzania and other parts of South Africa. He became deeply involved in the African liberation struggles of that era. And that influenced his second major work and his best known, *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. It was published in London in 1972. It has since been translated into many languages. Father Malcolm Rodrigues, the Jesuit priest and friend of Rodney, testified that he met a Professor from Australia who informed him that Rodney was respected not only in Europe but in Australia as well."

I do quote once more Mr. Speaker, page 25, paragraph 2.38:

"Many stirring tributes were paid to Rodney on the day of his interment and, the celebrated Barbadian author and friend of Rodney, George Lamming, in paying tribute, declared:

'Today we meet in a dangerous land, and at the most dangerous of times. The danger may be that the supreme authority, the supervising conscience of this

nation, has ceased to be amenable to any requirement of ordinary human decency.'

Once Again, Comrade Speaker, I stand here to support the Hon. Member, Cde. Gail Teixeira, and the document that she has presented in this Parliament. *[Applause]*

Minister within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure [Ms. Ferguson]: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. It is with great humility, that I rise to make my contributions to the motion, tabled in the National Assembly by the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, MP. This is as it relates to the commission of inquiry report compiled in bits and pieces, surrounding the death of the late Dr. Walter Rodney, a renowned Guyanese scholar and one who was highly respected and who had died on the 13th June, 1980.

I intentionally mentioned bits and pieces because, essentially, this is what the report, in essence, really and truly reflects. Sir, as the debate got started, I listened to the arguments posited by the Hon. Members on both sides of the divide. More so, with greater emphasis on the mover of this proposed motion and the support given, thus far.

Sir, I have carefully examined the motion and a number of questions came to mind. These are: What is the objective of this exercise today? What is the hidden motive behind this motion brought by the Hon. Member? Will this debate provide honest answers to historical questions that lingered for far too long? Simply put, these are questions in which the commission of inquiry failed to provide answers for.

Further, the motion has two resolved clauses. They are:

“That the National Assembly adopts the Report and its findings;

The National Assembly calls on the Government to take measures to implement the recommendations therein in order to ensure that the democratic architecture of the state is preserved and strengthened.”

However, I will now seek to put my contributions to this debate into perspective, capturing part (b) of the second resolved clause calling on the Government to implement the recommendations made by the Commissioners of the commission of inquiry.

Under professional military, our Government, while expressing discontent at aspects of the methodology employed by the principals of the CoI, this is against concerns aired publicly

about the quality and content of materials offered and accepted into evidence, given that there was only one witness to the incident. It is also imperative to weigh the national interest as against the political interest, given that these events have outlived one generation of Guyanese.

My last comment is mindful of the interest of the Rodney family to get closure, but one cannot be blinded to the fact that political opportunism will be exploited. I have never met the late Dr. Walter Rodney, therefore, I am in no position to lecture on him, but I have read excerpts of his writings and his works, which I deem inspiring. This was taken into context; the domestic and international settings of the world at that time. Hence, party bashing or institution blaming will not give closure, if it is that which we seek. What I do know is that no one sitting in the governing Cabinet of 2016 or on these benches was in Government in 1980.

Allow me to take a quick glance at the recommendations that address the military, on an issue I am cognisant that the APNU/AFC Government has no issue. However, the present state of the military in Guyana cannot be considered a professional one, but in a state of transition from the policy dilemma of the last Government. One would agree today, that fewer questions are posed about their ability to serve and solve. Nevertheless, there continues to be the need for modernisation and training as the challenges of the 21st Century unfold.

I know that the recommendations spoke to the issue of a professional military Police and Army and we on this side support that. The mover of this motion wants the Government in 2016, to support these recommendations too, but one has to be guarded about the sincerity of the call. Hon. Members, it was not in June, 1980, but on 27th October, 2008, that the former Minister of Home Affairs extolled this House on the professionalism of the military, while debating the motion “Successes of the Joint Services.” However, on that said day, while debating the motion, an allegation of torture by the military under the former Government, a PPP former Government Minister, in the face of a mountain of evidence, according to the media, said that acts of physical violence by the military against citizens were just roughing up and that certain amount of physical and mental pressure had to be used - not torture. Well, a judicial judgement was also given against the State for the issue with the burning of a minor’s genitals while in custody.

The point is, this Government is lectured on the virtues of the report for the events of 1980, but the lecturers, just in 2008, with far more resources for modernisation and training than in

1980, agreed with demeaning violent acts against citizens by the military which a Minister called 'roughing up', physical and mental pressure.

12.19 a.m.

So far as Dr. Rodney died and the Government changed, we had military 'roughing up', the Linden protestors' killings, phantoms killings among others and a total loss of confidence in the security forces in Guyana up to May 2015.

To question my last statement is to play deaf to the utterances of the present Commissioner of Police who was the Crime Chief about police morale and public support in 2016 and the reasons for the turnaround.

As it relates to recommendation at paragraph 9.10 on pages 154 of the report which addresses the issue on electoral or other reforms, I wish to report that our Government shares the view that electoral and wider consultation reforms are needed and the groundwork for this has already begun. However, while the modalities of this process take shape, it would be useful that racial rhetoric be discouraged. We cannot be multiracial only to take back the country for one group while saying that the other group is not qualified to be ambassadors.

I would submit that all groups in Guyana want cohesion. If their leaders want it, it is another issue. However, I could say without successful contradictions that my party, the people's Government, is committed at all cost to achieve social and racial cohesion. This is a testimony with the establishment of the Ministry of Social Cohesion by His Excellency after the May 2015 general and regional elections, which is headed by the competent Minister, the Hon. Anna Ally, Member of Parliament (M.P.). I must mention that racial rambling and ranting, as we heard recently in New York, do not augur nor would they contribute positively to our profound commitment to achieving the cohesive society that we desire.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, do you want have the floor?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes Sir. Could I ask the Hon. Member to refer to...?

Mr. Speaker: Is it a Point of Order, Ms. Teixeira?

Ms. Teixeira: The Point of Order is Standing Order 40(b).

Could the Hon. Member say what part of the report talked about race bating and race language in New York last week?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I thought you rise on a Point of Order. Please proceed Hon. Member.

Ms. Ferguson: In summarising, I cannot, and my colleagues on this side of the House cannot, support the passage of this motion in its current form. Since it is seeking to discredit a long-standing political organisation in this country and members both past and present.

I would have outlined several reasons why we, on this side of the House, would not support this motion.

- (i) One side or a group of individuals seeking political mileage so as to create disunity among villages, communities and, by extension, nation, rather than fostering cohesiveness among our people.
- (ii) The report is baseless since the information contained therein is flawed and focuses more on hearsay evidence rather than seeking to get the truth as to the cause of death of the late Dr. Walter Rodney.
- (iii) The report fails to address or to bring into context the information provided by a witness, Mr. Holland Gordon Yearwood.
- (iv) A convict, who at the time was a Constable in the Guyana Police Force, was brought before the commission. His evidence was based on verbatim reports on conversations had between the President of Guyana, the Chief of Staff of the Guyana Defence Force and two Assistant Commissioners of Police in which he was not present.
- (v) Key witnesses with the knowledge and who were available at the time of the commission were not called to give their evidence.

Sir, I rest my case and I present my submission to the National Assembly. [*Applause*]

Mr. Hamilton: Today, as we debate the report of the commission of inquiry on the death of Dr. Walter Rodney, when I was asked to speak on this motion, I considered how I would phrase my thoughts and what presentation I will make. I prepared my presentation about four pages, very brief, and before I go to my presentation proper I would just like to reference... because I was told, and I saw, that the Hon. Prime Minister spoke for one hour and for whatever reason he sought to speak about Joseph Hamilton for a half hour from that one hour.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I would not ordinarily interrupt a speaker just to correct that Member on his or her time. No one has spoken for an hour here.

Mr. Hamilton: I stand corrected.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Hamilton: Saint Mathew 23:14 states these words: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You devour widows' houses, and make long prayer: just for show.” It went on to state “This is why you would receive a harsher punishment.”

The Hon. Prime Minister is a man who is guilty of making long speeches just for show.

Again, just in passing, there is a Greek saying which states “Those whom the gods wish to destroy they first make them mad.”

The third point before I get to my speech is that I grew up in the village of Triumph, predominantly an Indian and Hindu community. In my sojourn as a child and a young adult the word *aakriti* was regularly used about the Hindis. I just move on from that.

Mr. Speaker: Is that an English word, Hon. Member?

Mr. Hamilton: It is a Hindi word, Mr. Speaker, “*aakriti*.”

Today, as we debate this report, we could do one of two things: we would debate Walter Rodney death or his life. I spent three days at the Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry where I give my testimony. The commission, at that time, was examining the circumstances of his death. I said my piece there at the commission of inquiry at that time. I made peace, p-e-a-c-e, with Dr. Walter Rodney’s family, his friends, his colleagues, the Guyanese and my Maker. My conscience is clear. Hon. Prime Minister, you would have to live with your conscience because you have made... Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Prime Minister, who I know for a long time in the good times, the bad times and all the difficult times... The Prime Minister has made a thousand degree turn from where he was in 1980 on his position...[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I would ask you to let us try to keep the proceedings in this House with some degree of decorum. I believe that sound you make is difficult for the *Hansard* to translate, so I would ask you to convert it into English.

Mr. Hamilton: I am sorry Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I would also remind you that you only used five minutes of your time so far, but you are yet to get to the point that you want to make. Please proceed.

Mr. Hamilton: As I said, let me repeat, I spent three days at the Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry where I gave factually testimony. The commission at that time was examining the circumstances of Dr. Walter Rodney's death, I said my piece there at the commission and, as I said earlier, I made peace, at that time, with Dr. Walter Rodney's family, his friends, colleagues, the Guyanese people and my Maker, so my conscience is clear. I repeat that it is the Prime Minister who henceforth would have to live with his conscience.

I will not focus on Dr. Rodney and the past. I will attempt to focus on how we situate Dr. Rodney and his memories in the present and the future. Taking into consideration, I will use this presentation to ask us to focus on Dr. Rodney's life and not his death. What did he want for Guyana? What he would have done if he was alive to help us heal this fracture society of ours? What would have been his role in uplifting the poor and downtrodden in our midst? Those are the questions we should reflect on.

Assembled in this chamber is what I called the second and third generation politicians of this nation of ours. We who are over 60 years I would categorise as the second generation politicians. Today, I want to use this opportunity to challenge the second generation politicians and ask us to reflect on what we would bequeath to the third generation politicians. What do you think they think about us? What have we done for this country individually and collectively?

Mr. Speaker, if you total the years of political involvement of us, the second generation politicians, it would be in the thousands of years, but at the same time the question must be asked: What did we do with those years and what would we do with the rest of years that we have individually and collectively in politics? Would we leave a legacy that we are proud about for the third generation? Would our legacy be a fractured society or a cohesive one where ethic security, respect and unity abound? These are the questions, and that is why I spoke at the commission of inquiry about Dr. Rodney and the circumstances surrounding his death. Today, as I said, I ask us to situate Dr. Rodney and speak about his life and situate him in the present and the future.

12.34 a.m.

Would our legacy, when we are gone, be a backwards society or a progressive one? Would our legacy be a society where justice is blind or where the moneyed class is treated better by the justice system? Or will we be like Methuselah where the Bible recalls that he lived 969 years and died, and there was no record of his contribution. The way we the second generation politicians are going, we are going on like Methuselah, we thump our chests and we grandstand but the reality is there is no record as yet about what contribution we have made.

Walter Rodney lived for 36 years and today 36 years we are debating his death and contribution. Why is that so? It is because all of us on all sides recognise that his contribution was unmatched. That is the reason why. Again, I go to the Bible St John 15:13. It states: "Greater loveth no man than this than a man laid down his life for his friends". Dr. Walter Rodney can be categorised as a man who showed great love, who laid down his life for his country. He laid down his life for a better Guyana; he laid down his life for his commitment and what he believed in. He made then ultimate sacrifice. As we meditate and reflect on Walter Rodney's life, the question we the Members of this Parliament and the other politicians must ask ourselves: What sacrifices have we made? What sacrifices are we prepared to make for our country?

Many things have said and written about the first generation Guyanese politician, some good and not so good. Some of us have put forward Dr. Cheddi Jagan as our standard bearer, whilst some have put forward Mr. Forbes Burnham as our standard bearer. [An Hon. Member: Hour?] No. "Our." It is o-u-r, our standard bearer. Whatever we say about these two politicians and former Presidents I am sure that we are agreed on one thing – they left a legacy. Whatever we think about, the legacy that they bequeathed to us is adult suffrage, one man one vote, self-government and independence among other legacies.

As I said earlier, we the legislators gathered in this chamber can decide individually and collectively whether we are Methuselah or Dr. Rodney. It is in our hand to decide. I admonish my colleagues from on all sides that from henceforth when we use Dr. Walter Rodney's name it must not be for grandstanding or to score cheap political points. Doing that, I submit that we belittle his contribution and cheapen his ultimate sacrifice that he made. In my view, we must use Dr. Walter Rodney's name to unite this fractured country of ours; we must use Dr. Walter Rodney's name to inspire and give hope to the down trodden poor and powerless people in our society; we must use Dr. Walter Rodney's name to unite our races

and ethnic groups; we must use Dr. Walter Rodney's name to develop a cohesive society; we must use Dr. Walter Rodney's name to educate and teach young people about commitment and sacrifice.

If we the second generation politicians really want to honour the work, the life and memory of Walter Rodney, then I submit that we must commit to these things. Further, we must commit to bequeath to the young Members of Parliament, the third generation politicians, the Figueiras, the Ramsons, the Hastings, the Croals, the Dharamlalls, the Charlies, the Anamayas, the Rajkumars, the Fergusons, the Alis - Irfaan, not the other Ally - the Selmans. We must bequeath on others a country that is at peace with itself, a country that is cohesive and united, a country that cares, a country that has a well educated population, a country that is progressive and developed.

In closing, as I said, I would end the way I started. I did not come this hour of the morning to discuss and to speak about Rodney's death. I did that some two years ago. I sought to have us reflect on his life and seek to question us on our commitment to a better country for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Minister of State [Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon]: I rise to make my contribution to the debate that considers the motion that seeks to adopt the findings of the commission of inquiry into the death of Dr. Rodney. Before I go into my presentation, let me first of all congratulate those Members of the Opposition who saw not the Dr. Rodney of the past but what lessons you can learn from his life. I want to congratulate the Members of the Opposition for taking that progressive stance. Despite his politics, his ideology and political views, there can be no doubt of Dr. Rodney's scholarship, his international stature or his commitment to Guyana. It is within this context that successive governments have attempted to bring closure to the issue regarding Dr. Rodney's death to end speculation as to the cause of his death and the culpability for that death. I do not intend to go into a dissertation of Dr. Rodney, but more particularly I will try to stick to the motion which is in fact to debate the report itself. I will try to focus on the report itself, the findings of then report and the recommendations which it made.

This august House would recall that after vacillating on this issue for over 20 years, the People's Progressive Party led by President Donald Ramotar appointed a commission of

inquiry on the 6th February, 2014. The inquiry was to enquire into and report on the circumstances surrounding the death in an explosion, of the late Dr. Walter Rodney. It had the following terms:

- First, to examine the facts and circumstances immediately prior at the time of and subsequent to the death of Dr. Rodney in order to determine as far as was possible who or what was responsible for the explosion resulting in the death of Dr. Walter Rodney.
- Secondly, to inquire into the cause of the explosion in which Dr. Rodney died, whether it was an act of terrorism and if so who were the perpetrators.
- Thirdly, to specific examine the role, if any, which, the late Gregory Smith, Sergeant of the Guyana Defence Force, played in the death of Dr. Walter Rodney and if so to inquire into who may have counselled, procured, aided or abetted him to do so including facilitating his departure from Guyana after Dr. Rodney's death.
- Fourthly, to examine and report on the actions and activities of the state such as the Guyana Police Force, the Guyana Defence Force, the Guyana National Service, the Guyana People's Militia and those who were in command and superintendents of these agencies to determine whether they were tasked with the surveillance of and carrying out of actions and whether they did execute those tasks and carried out those actions against the political Opposition for the period 1st January, 1978 to the 31st December, 1980.
- Fifthly, to examine, review and report on earlier investigations and inquiries done adding to the death of Dr. Rodney.

The opposition political parties at the time of the appointment of the commission of inquiry supported its establishment. His Excellency President David Granger, the Leader of the Opposition at that time, in his publication *The Pursuit of Truth and the Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry* stated that "there has always been widespread support for the establishment of a commission of inquiry". However, what was contentious about the appointed commission of inquiry was the arbitrary and contemptuous approach by the PPP's administration in the selection of the Commissioners and the termination on the terms of reference. In this regard, objections were raised and reservations stated by many persons and organisations about the terms of reference, particularly terms of reference number four of those terms.

The 8th March, 2014 edition of the *Stabroek New* newspaper alluded in an article to a letter sent by the co-leaders of the Working People's Alliance, Dr. Rodney's party, Professor Dr. Clive Thomas and Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine, to then President Donald Ramotar. That letter urged the removal of that contemptuous part of the terms of reference of the commission of inquiry and the replacement of Commissioner Seenath Jairam. The two gentlemen were quoting as stating that having waited for more than three decades for this commission of inquiry, it will be disappointing if, in the words of the International Commission of Jurist (ICJ) on the infamous inquest, "it were to be marred by grave defects." In the said letter, Professor Thomas and Dr. Roopnaraine emphasised the lack of consultation with the parliamentary Opposition. They contended that this represented a marked departure from the process that had generated the Government's motion on the inquiry that was laid in the National Assembly in June of 2005. The *Stabroek News* newspaper in another article on 7th March, 2014 also gave prominence to a letter from the Guyana Human Rights Association (GHRA) to the administrator of the commission of inquiry expressing its unwillingness to be associated with the inquiry. The reason given for this unwillingness was the lack of consultation with the WPA and the inclusion of the contentious item number four of the terms of reference of the commission. Then Guyana Human Rights Association arrived at the following conclusion regarding the establishment of the commission, "thus reluctantly the GHRA feels compelled to conclude that the proposed initiative has more to do with prolong the ethnic dimension of Guyanese politics than laying to rest controversy over who was responsible for Walter Rodney's death."

The Guyana Trades Union Congress (GTUC) was quoted in the 21st April, 2014 edition of the *Kaieteur News* newspaper as expressing its reservations about the commission. This newspaper article stated that the Guyana Trades Union Congress felt strongly that the terms of reference should have had the input of all the Members of the National Assembly, since that was the forum that authorised and approved the decision for an inquiry.

12.49 a.m.

The PNC/R also expressed its reservations about the Commission of Inquiry. This was not as a result of any sinister motive or an unwillingness to bring closure, but to the party's unwavering commitment to arrive at the truth in this matter.

However, the party was reluctant to participate in an exercise that was riddled with bias from the inception. The People's National Congress/Reform, like many other stakeholders, never

questioned Mr. Seenath Jairam's credentials but objected to his presence on the Commission and its impact on the credibility of the work of the Commission.

Mr. Jairam had previously served as a Defence Attorney for the PPP/C Administration. It is court challenge to the Parliamentary Opposition 2012 Budget cuts, the same People's Progressive Party/Civic has, over the years, maintained an unfounded allegation of culpability against the PNC/R Congress about the death of Dr. Rodney.

There was the Chairman of the Commission, Sir Richard Cheltenham, QC, who not only knew Dr. Rodney, but had great admiration for him as was evident in the *Barbados Advocate Newspaper* of 30th June, 1980 in which he paid tribute to the late Historian. This prompted the PNC/R to question the impartiality of the Chairman in a press release of 30th April, 2014, and I quote:

“The disclosure is cause for grave alarm concerning the impartiality of the Chairman of the Commission of Inquiry into the death of Dr. Walter Rodney. It is clear from the report in the *Advocate Newspaper* that Sir Richard Cheltenham not only knew Dr. Rodney, but was an admirer and was inspired by him.”

In fact, he eulogised Dr. Rodney.

Any professional with a modicum of decency would have recused himself or herself from the process in the interest of justice.

It became clear as the Commission commenced its work that either the Commissioners were not interested in the public perception of bias or that a biased political outcome was their primary objective. This was evident in the manner in which they treated witnesses when it was recognised that statements made by these witnesses were not in keeping with their objectives.

The Commission had, at its disposal, a long list of credible and well-informed witnesses, some of whom submitted written statements but were not called to testify or to be cross-examined. Those included: Mr. Lincoln Lewis, Guyana Trades Union Congress; the Co-Leader of the Working People's Alliance, Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine; the Crime Chief at the time of Dr. Rodney's death; and Mr. Cecil "Skip" Roberts, who the Commission brought into Guyana and had languishing in a city hotel for weeks.

Mr. Nandlall: Point of Order: Standing Order 40 (b). Cecil “Skip” Roberts, who was the Crime Chief at the time of Dr. Rodney’s death and who came to Guyana to testify, did not give a statement to the Commission of Inquiry. My learned Friend said that he gave a statement.

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Harmon: Mr. Chairman, I never said that Mr. Roberts gave a statement.

Mr. Nandlall: You just said that.

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Harmon: I never said that.

Mr. Nandlall: I am happy that he did not say that. I thought he said that.

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Harmon: If you will just stay awake, Mr. Nandlall...

Mr. Nandlall: But you said that.

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Harmon: I did not say that he gave a statement. Just like you, I was closely connected with the Commissioners and followed all the work that they did.

The Commission brought Mr. Roberts to Guyana and had him languishing in a city hotel for weeks during the course of the Commission’s hearings.

Major General (Ret’d) Norman McLean and Holland Gordon Yearwood known as “Jomo”, a Nigerian and a longstanding friend of Dr. Rodney, to name a few, had payments of their hospitality stopped by the Commission shortly after giving testimony.

These individuals were either part of the security apparatus or part of the activities that embodied Dr. Rodney’s life and would have provided the Commission with insightful information. Instead, the Commission relied largely on the testimony of a convicted felon, Robert Gates, to make its erroneous conclusions of culpability.

The Commissioners questioned Mr. Gates’ credibility in Chapter 8, Section 15 of the Report:

“...at the heart of the offence for which he was convicted is dishonesty.”

All of these incongruities must be taken in the context of the agenda of the Government at the time of the Commission’s proceedings.

It is our view on this side of the House that the Commission of Inquiry was a well-planned ploy by the PPP/C Administration to deflect public attention from the numerous economic

and social ills prevalent in our country at that time, such as the high crime rate, unemployment, continued mass exodus of skilled and qualified persons and crises in the sugar, rice and bauxite industries.

This side of the House was, therefore, not surprised at the extensive media coverage that the work of the Commission received to hoodwink and sidetrack the attention of the Guyanese people. All of the sittings were broadcasted live on the State-owned television – the National Communications Network (NCN), channel 1 - and radio stations with daily summaries by a Commission's lawyer on newscast, along with daily coverage by the State-owned *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper.

To add insult to injury, the Commission had contracted a Consultant, Mr. Shawn Michael Samaroo, who appeared at the hearings as a special Reporter for the State-owned *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper. Most of Mr. Samaroo's articles were biased and inflammatory; they were based on sensationalism and full of political rhetoric aimed at tarnishing the good name and reputation of the Opposition political parties and their leaders at that time.

The Commission refused to rescind Mr. Samaroo's contract even after it was known that he had received millions of dollars for the work which he had done. This is so much for impartiality, fairness and justice.

We are all aware that, during the life of the Commission, Guyana held General and Regional Elections on 11th May, 2015. Throughout the campaigning season leading up to the Elections, senior officials of the Government at that time, including former President Donald Ramotar, used information from the proceedings of the Commission for electioneering and sought to influence the work of the Commission by calling on leaders of the PNC/R to appear before it.

It is against this background that I cannot give, with good conscience, my support to the findings embodied in the Report of this Commission of Inquiry. To do so would be to contribute to the farce perpetrated by the previous Government and to fly in the face of natural justice. Any support to the findings will also contribute to a perpetration of a well-orchestrated attempt by the PPP/C to deceive our citizenry and the world at large.

This Commission of Inquiry failed to fulfil its mandate outlined in its Terms of Reference. The findings of the Report is riddled with conjecture, personal opinions, unverifiable evidence and fictitious conclusions.

The Report failed to factually state who was culpable both as the perpetrators and the intellectual authors of Dr. Rodney's death. The Report failed to answer critical and pertinent questions and to provide factual evidence to support its conclusions.

The Commission of Inquiry missed a great opportunity to provide moral clarity and to provide factual answers to this 36-year-old anomaly in our nation's discourse.

Therefore, on this side of the House, I must say that we cannot support the findings of the Inquiry but we are prepared to accept some, if not all, of the recommendations captured in Chapter 9 of the Report, since those recommendations have close similarities to those embodied in the Disciplined Services Report and to certain other matters on which we have made public statements.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Rohee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is clear that there is a division in the House on this matter of national importance and significance. This division is reminiscent of so many other national issues that have come before this House.

One speaker said that to accept the motion in its present form, minus the amendments, would contribute to further divisiveness in our country. But we are already seeing the contours of the divisiveness in the course of this debate. This is most unfortunate. I believe that rather than cultivate divisiveness, Dr. Rodney's death would have summoned all the energies, the intellectual capacities that we have, in order to advance the political fortunes of our country. Alas, this is not to be.

I have noted that, in the course of this debate, anything goes. Without attracting too much attention to myself, I am one of the few in this House who have witnessed many political misfortunes in this country, episodic events such as those in which Dr. Rodney was involved and so many others which I would not wish to burden the House with at this hour of the morning. Many books have been written on these matters. In the Report, there are quotations from many books that chronicle the events with which we are living even today.

I shudder to even consider how a Member of Parliament on the Government benches could stand in this honourable Chamber and pretend, with such great ease, that the occurrences and the circumstances which led to the death of Dr. Rodney were in a situation that was surreal. This is most unfortunate.

It was indeed very distressing to listen to some of the presentations here this afternoon because we are 90 degrees away from what actually took place and what is actually reflected in this document that we are currently debating.

1.04 a.m.

As I said, at the Commission of Inquiry, one had to have lived through that period. One would have had to have lived and witnessed those events to speak authoritatively on those issues. Alas, there are not many around today who can do so. And so what we witnessed here tonight was what I would describe as an assassination of the truth; it is not only an assassination of Dr. Rodney, as we are discussing here tonight, but an assassination of the truth.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Rohee, I do not believe that that word finds itself in either the title or in any other part of what we are discussing here and I simply thought that you should be reminded of that, however much you express what you wish. I think the word is 'killing' that has been used and you are aware of that, and I would like for ease for the rest of the evening that we stay as close as possible to what has been recorded and what is before us. Thank you. Please proceed.

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, with due respect, I am using words that are quoted in this Report but, if you do not wish us to reuse that word 'assassination', I will use the word 'murder'. The truth about the circumstances surrounding the death of Dr. Rodney has been murdered. The presentations so far have been characterised by a plethora of distortions and recitations of views and I am dismayed to the extent of being apocalyptic on these discourses.

The findings are obviously damaging to the current Administration. Therefore, by logical extension, its Members have to reject it. That is the only logical conclusion one can draw if and so it is that the results and the recommendations are found to be unacceptable to you. Therefore, logically, you have to rubbish it and debunk it by coming with an amendment to the original motion.

From day one, the Government benches have sought to demonise the Commissioners and we just heard the Hon. Member, Mr. Harmon, in a rather cynical but eloquent way, describe the extent to which the Government found the Commissioners unacceptable to them. The first task was to demonise the Commissioners and to follow that logic consequently which was, in

the end result, to reject what these demonised Commissioners had drawn up in terms of the recommendations.

They targeted two of the Commissioners – the Chairman, Mr. Cheltenham, and we just heard what the basis of the target was, and the other one who was targeted was Mr. Jairam. Political arguments were used to demonise these two distinguished gentlemen. The whole approach was to deem them as uncredible; they had no credibility and, therefore, they had to develop arguments to describe them as such. If the jurists were not credible, it meant that, by logical extension, what they would have concluded was not credible too. And that was the whole basis; that was the whole foundation under which the arguments were built. Destroy their credibility and then destroy, as they are doing now, the recommendations – simple.

We were told that we, who were then the Government, after manoeuvring, eventually decided to have the Commission of Inquiry but what the Hon. Member, Mr. Harmon, failed to point out to this House was notwithstanding all the arguments that he made in respect of why they could not have accepted the jurists and the Terms of Reference, *et cetera*, they eventually somersaulted. At first they said that they were not going to recognise the COI and then in one of the newspapers - I think it was sometime after the Commission was set up - an article was published where the Hon. Member, Mr. Joseph Harmon, turned up and, in a photograph, was seen shaking the hands of then Attorney General at the Commission of Inquiry, thus signalling an about turn of the party to which he belongs in contrast to what the position was at the very outset.

The party to which the Hon. Member, Mr. Roopnaraine, belongs also joined the bandwagon by stating that it was not going to support the COI. The party continues to do so.

I disagree with the position that the Report that we are debating is biased and replete with hearsay and a whole host of adjectives that are unacceptable to the Government. One thing that struck me in the course of the presentations and the one that the Hon. Mr. Harmon just made was when he told the House that the Commission entertained evidence from a convicted felon, but here is where the irony of that situation lies. Only recently, a CoI was established to inquire into the allegations made against the Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU) by a felon; they set up an Inquiry to investigate allegations of a felon against a *bona fide* drug enforcement agency. I find this a rather ironic situation. If you have strong arguments against convicted felons – and, by the way, I heard names were mentioned rather freely in the House, Mr. Speaker, and nobody objected to it... Barry Dataram is a convicted

felon. And they accepted what he said on the surface and gave that enough basis to set up a Commission of Inquiry. Where is that taking us?

The Hon. Member, Mr. Nagamootoo, First Vice-President and Prime Minister, asked a rhetorical question, in a sense, condemning the then PPP/C Administration as to why an unconditional pardon was not granted by the then Government to allow Gregory Smith to return to Guyana to stand trial, thus denying vital evidence in order to establish who killed Dr. Rodney.

I was the then Foreign Minister that was tasked with the responsibility to engage the French Government on this matter and, in the conversation with the French Ambassador who was then situated in either French Guiana or Paramaribo - I do not recall which one - he discussed this matter in great detail. The French were not going to budge from their position and there was no way, at that time, in the given circumstances, that the Government of the day could have budged from its position because the political climate in the country at the time would have meant us committing political *harry-carry*. Were we to grant Mr. Gregory Smith a pardon...and I doubt that that would have gone down comfortably with the WPA. The circumstances that obtained at that time were responsible for the situation being as it was, and as it turned out to be. I would describe this, with great respect, Mr. Speaker, as a *slight of hand* argument to claim that we should have granted Gregory Smith an unconditional pardon so he could come here to stand trial.

We heard another most ridiculous argument when we were told that the WPA pressured the then President to allow Cuban troops to pass through here. This is the first time ever in my political life that I have ever heard this argument from someone who is in the party that I belong. I have never read that anywhere. This is a fantastic concoction, which the Hon. Member is famous for. He is famous in the PPP for doing these things - constructing these theories and concocting these high-flown, imaginative scenarios like the one that he was promised to be the succeeding President of Dr. Jagan were he to die. This is almost unbelievable, and I believe the historians when they come across this concoction...

1.19 a.m.

There is a saying...

Mr. Speaker: Do you rise on a Point of Order?

Mr. Nagamootoo: The Hon. Member, Clement Rohee, is misleading the House... [Mr.

Ali: Standing Order what?] Standing Order 40 (a)... In referring to what I said, I was quoting Mr. Eusi Kwayana on what he told the Commission with regard to what was described as pressure on Mr. Burnham and his Government to allow Cuban troops to land here en route to Angola. I was quoting Mr. Kwayana and I referred to the evidence. I ask the Member to withdraw his accusation.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Prime Minister for the elucidation.

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, the House was thrown into a rather puzzling situation to determine who really killed Dr. Rodney. Was it the PNC or the WPA through some conspiratorial scam that killed Dr. Rodney? Or, was it the United States Administration that killed Dr. Rodney? I do not know if more information was discovered, since we left the government, to give succour to these three theories. We are focussing on one which this Report makes reference to. This Report makes reference to the Burnham Administration being guilty in respect of the death of Dr. Walter Rodney. If, since we left Government, the new Administration has found new evidence to the effect that the Working People's Alliance, in connivance with the then US Administration, caused the death of Dr. Rodney, then, I believe, in the public interest, we should certainly hear about it.

The presentation made by Dr. Roopnaraine was most disappointing. I am very saddened over the presentation made by the Hon. Member, Dr. Roopnaraine. These matters are going to be recorded in the Hansard and future generations will read about it. I am sure many will not be exonerated from what was said in this House this evening.

A lot has been said about this Report but there is one section that I would like to focus on, and that is page 149, Chapter 8, paragraph 8.22:

“We have no hesitation in holding that Gregory Smith was responsible for Dr. Walter Rodney's death on 13th June, 1980 and that in so doing he was acting as an agent of the State having been aided and abetted so to do, by individuals holding position of leadership in State agencies and committed to carrying out the wishes of the PNC Administration.”

Irrespective of what is said on that side of the House, I will go for myself, I will go like Copernicus or Galileo, with the conviction that what is said here about how Dr. Rodney was killed to be the truth, the sole truth and nothing but the truth.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Trotman: Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my brief contribution, given the lateness of the morning, and I hope I will not prolong much further.

We are here on a motion brought by Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira calling on the House to do two things:

“...adopt the Report and its findings;

...calls on the Government to take measures to implement the recommendations therein in order to ensure that the democratic architecture of the state is preserved and strengthened.”

I stand in support of my Colleagues on this side of the House who have already spoken - the Prime Minister, Vice-President Allicock, the Minister of Education, the Minister of State and the Minister within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. We all feel, like our Colleagues in the Opposition, that Dr. Walter Rodney was an outstanding citizen of the worth. There is no doubt about that. There is no doubt that he was one of Guyana’s brightest sons. There is no doubt, 36 years after, that he died in a bomb blast.

Unfortunately for me, age 14 when he died, as a young teenager, I was anxiously looking at different activists passed by selling the *Day Clean*. Listening to the radio in those days - television with Betamax and video home system (VHS) had just started to come - we were just as interested then and are just as interested now in what happened on that fateful day. This Report, unfortunately, falls far short below even the minimum standard one expects from a panel constituted not by laypersons, but by persons of high legal learning and with extensive - decades I should say - years of experience.

What is before us is a Report, and, as my learned Friend who is coming after me would well recognise, reports of this kind are subject to review. I believe by not taking the review to the High Court of Judicature but bringing it to the High Court of Parliament, we, in fact, over the last 10 hours, have been conducting that review in this court. It is trite law that reviews of commissions of inquiry are permissible; they are not sacrosanct; they are not immutable; they are quite capable of being dissected, scrutinised and impugned or quite capable of being upheld.

I refer you, Mr. Speaker, to a judicial decision of the Court of Appeal of New Zealand, the case of Peters versus Davison, quoted in 1988, New Zealand Law Reports, page 164. I quote specifically from what would appear to be page 196 about commissions of inquiry generally:

“A Commission of Inquiry is certainly not a Court of law.”

That is the first thing we have to accept. So when we are being told that we must adopt the findings as being irrefutable evidence of findings it is not to be so.

“A Commission of Inquiry is certainly not a court of law nor is a Commission of Inquiry to be likened to an administrative tribunal entrusted with the duty of deciding questions between parties. There is nothing approaching a *lis*, [a Latin term for a lawsuit or quarrel]. A Commission has no general power of adjudication, it determines nobody’s right, its report is binding on no one.”

Parties to hearings by Commissions of Inquiry have no right of appeal against the reports [but there is the right of judicial review]. The reason is partly that the reports are, in a sense, inevitably inconclusive. Findings made by the Commissioners are in the end only expressions of opinion. They would not even be admissible as evidence in legal proceedings as to the cause of a disaster. In themselves they do not alter the legal right of the persons to whom they refer. Nevertheless they may greatly influence public and government opinion and have a devastating effect on personal reputations...”

That was borne out quite palpably over the last eight to 10 hours. In our judgement, and that is the judgement of the new Zealand Court of Appeal:

“...these are the major reasons why in appropriate proceedings the court must be ready if necessary in relation to Commissions of Inquiry, just as to other public bodies and officials, to ensure that they keep within the limits of their lawful powers...”

Having said all that, I would like to review some aspects of this Report, at the conclusion of which, I will state now, like my Colleagues, I cannot accept the findings of this Report, though I was at pains to find something to hold on to. As I said, at age 14, I was just as interested in the findings as to why, what happened, the tumult of the time and what was happening. But this Report, as I said, falls far below the minimum standard and below the expectations of the general public.

I turn my attention to the Terms of Reference, the terms which Hon. Member Harmon quoted from extensively. I would not go through them, but look at the circumstances to inquire into the causes of the explosion; to examine the role, if any, of the late Mr. Gregory Smith, Sergeant of the Guyana Defence Force; to examine the report on the actions and activities of the State; and to examine, review and report on earlier investigations and inquiries done on and into the death of Dr. Rodney.

For some strange reason, this Report veered very far away from what the Terms of Reference mandated the Commissioners to do. So I turn to some aspects of the Report itself.

We start with a statement made in the letter of transmission to His Excellence the President to be found on the second page:

1.34 a.m.

“We hope, too, that this Report will help to bring closure to the irreplaceable and painful loss suffered by Dr. Rodney’s family.”

As has been stated before, there was no attempt to prevent an inquiry into the death of Dr. Walter Rodney. In fact, it was Dr. Roopnaraine who reminded us of a motion that came to this House and the amendments that were, strangely enough, supported by the then Opposition and the Working People’s Alliance (WPA), but quite strangely not by the then Government. As we speak about finding reconciliation and we go into this report, we wonder where it is that we went wrong because, at the end of it, all of us are left without that answer to that question which this commission of inquiry was supposed to deliver; the circumstances and the why.

As I listened to the Hon. Member, Mr. Rohee, I had cause to recall some phrases that I learnt in law school, when I did Forensic Pathology. There is a movement when a body, after death, continues to display signs of life and there are several terms for it. It is known as the Lazarus sign, the cadaveric spasm, instantaneous rigour, cataleptic rigidity or, as Mr. Rohee said, post mortem spasm. We are trying, after 36 years, tonight to have something that failed that, in my view, is dead; that the attempt to try to impugn a person in the person of a late President by this report has failed and failed miserably. There is no doubt that, perhaps, Gregory Smith had a hand in the death of Dr. Walter Rodney, but to go on to find that Mr. Burnham, the then President, ordered the death, I do not know. It was a quantum leap of Olympian and biblical proportions to make such a finding.

Again, I say that we are unable and I am unable to adopt this report. I take you Mr. Speaker, with your leave, to the report, to page... [*Interruption*] The report itself impugns the findings made at the end, at page 7, paragraph 1.17:

“The decision of the Executive...”

I take it that the “Executive” referred to here is the APNU/AFC Executive.

“The decision of the Executive will have implications for the thoroughness and completeness of the report.”

Those are not our words; they are the commission’s words.

“In so far as there were at least ten (10) witnesses still to be heard and who will not now be heard, some of the Terms of Reference, not adequately supported by the testimony received, will so remain.”

That is a damning statement and one made by a commission that had, originally, four months to deliver a report, but in the end got 24 months. It got 20 extra months and still at the end of it is admitting that its report is lacking for thoroughness and completeness. Yet we are asked to adopt the report and implement its findings. Mr. Speaker, we are unable to do so.

I now turn to a personal discomfort that I felt as a lawyer who has practised in all of the courts of this land and that is the level of familiarity that the commission took on with the subject. Understanding that we were dealing with a matter that had tried the patience of this nation for decades, had driven lines of division between us along ethnic, ideological and, perhaps, even economic lines, we found and I found, at pages 22, 23 and elsewhere, something that is quite unique in all of my years of reading reports at the hands of legally trained officers. It is the *full-mouth* reference, if I could use a colloquialism with your leave Mr. Speaker. I have never, in my life, seen a commission or a commissioner refer to the subject as “Walter” and that betrays the level of familiarity and even raises the ugly spectre of bias in this matter.

“Walter was married to Dr. Patricia Rodney...”

“Walter did not spend all of his energies in writing, mobilization and lecturing.”

Here is a commission or commissioner who idolised the deceased “Walter” perhaps rightly so. But, as Minister Harmon has said, if you so idolise him then you should have done the

decent and professional thing to recuse yourself from sitting in judgement over those who have been accused of killing him.

It goes on at page 24 and I quoted because it proliferates throughout the entire document.

“According to Patricia, he took the children everywhere...”

This is more than a casual familiarity. This is an intimate familiarity and a familiarity that the author does not even seek to hide or disguise. He is quite comfortable and quite proud to show how intimately involved he was, not only with the life, but with the memory of Dr. Rodney. How then, with any modicum of judicial or legal training can we be expected to adopt this as being irrefutable? I cannot. That as I said, was personal to me and in my 26 years of practise I have never seen something like this.

I go on to mention something that had been mentioned by the Hon. Member, Vice-President Allicock, about Mr. Ogunseye’s testimony, where, again, at the very pages 22 and 23 there are references to the arming of, whether it be a cell or a faction, the taking up of arms by elements of the WPA. Those were dangerous times, but for some reason, as the Prime Minister tried to point out, there was no attempt to even investigate, to even inquire into, to even, at least, open that door, investigate and close it to say that there were no misadventure here. When there is an admission that one was involved in the raising of arms then, certainly, a well put together, reasonably constituted, board of inquiry would have tried, even if not altogether successfully, to put that matter to rest. In my mind, there is a grave doubt and it does leave the issue of misadventure lingering.

I move on to this other point that I call fact giving way to fiction, hearsay even moving into heresy. This is because those of us who practise law and understand the rules of evidence know that what pass here, again, was tragedy. We accept that a commission of inquiry is not bound to follow all of the rules of evidence as laid out in the Evidence Act but, certainly, three senior practitioners, Queen’s Counsel (QC) and Senior Counsel (SC) ought to have known better than to allow a man who said he heard a man who heard. To look at him in the eyes and believe him, it is a tragedy of the worst order. In this court of a review it will not be allowed to pass.

If I can be allowed look at some of pages that I earmarked. When I speak about fact going into fiction, and I look again at the terms of reference as I set them out, the commission went, as the Hon. Attorney General would remind us from time to time, on an exercise that could

only be referred to as a grazing expedition. Nothing in the five terms of reference allowed for findings such as this one that:

“Walter did not spend his time or energies in writing and mobilization.”

What business is that of the commissioners? The commissioners were to make findings of fact about the death surrounding Dr. Rodney. I will now go to page 50 of the report and I will stay within the confines of the report. To quote again from elaborate findings by three persons, two of whom are non-Guyanese. One is Guyanese but has not been living in Guyana for some time but I will quote:

“But the workers were to suffer yet more at the hands of Government...”

Where in the terms of reference were they required to make such finding? I will go so far as to say, how presumptuous of the commissioners to get into the internal politics of Guyana, to come and determine about the plight of workers. Let us make those findings. We are not saying that workers were not engaged in some hardships or were not experiencing some hardships but nowhere in these terms of reference were this commission invited to enquire into the conditions of the working people of Guyana. That again, betrays that, even before there was a finding or a conclusion, rather, there was a finding that this commission had to be pointed in a particular direction. I will go on to quote that:

“But the workers were to suffer yet more at the hands of Government, for in June of 1979 the Minister of Finance withdrew all increments which had been paid to workers...”

And it goes on to relate a story which, even as child, I have heard, but no one has been able to verify, but it took three commissioners flying into Guyana to lift, like Lazarus out of the dead, something into life. On page 50

“Mr. Desmond who was the branch official of CCWU and a staff member of Guyana Stores was also fired. The President, Mr. Gordon Todd, was picked up while picketing outside Guyana Stores, put on a helicopter by Government personnel and taken on an unknown ride. So concerned was his union and work colleagues about his whereabouts that Mr. Pollydore , General Secretary of the TUC, called the President who assured him Todd would be at Ogle by a certain time.”

It goes on to state that:

“Mr. Todd, according to Dr. Gopaul, reported that he was taken on a tour...”

The finding is first made and then efforts are made to support it after, with some evidence. We have heard this story and it is one of the myths surrounding political life in Guyana. Perhaps, he can or maybe he cannot, the erstwhile Mr. C.J. Rohee, attest to this matter. How is it that, after 36 years, three commissioners could fly into Guyana and move fiction into fact? On what basis, on what evidence and where in the terms of reference were you given a mandate to enquire into who was dangling out of a helicopter or not? All of these, when woven together, form a very strong cord that shows that this commission had a bias, in my view, before it arrived at its conclusion.

Page 51:

“Economic Conditions of Guyana”

Again, nowhere in the terms of reference were this commission invited to enquire into the prevailing economic conditions in the country. But, for some reason, there was a great excitement about telling a story, a fable, a Nancy Story or as I believe the former Major General McLean would say, a ‘*Ma riddle, me riddle Marie*’ story, as he complained about what was said about him.

1.49 a.m.

So as I said, all of these cumulatively showed that this commission of inquiry veered way off and outside the perimeters that had been set. Even under the skilful hand of the former Attorney General - I was about to say late. I believe that he took some pride in drafting these terms of reference. At the bottom of page 52:

“3.77 As far as Burnham was concerned, strikes and other forms of industrial action had their roots in colonialism and ought not to take place in his republic.

Was Mr. Cheltenham Mr. Burnham’s buddy as well? On what basis were these findings being made? We are not saying that they are right or wrong, but show us, in the evidence, what caused you to come to these findings of fact. That is my great difficulty in accepting this result.

Another example, at page 59 and this is a fantastic one.

“3.103 The period under review was one of extreme hardships...”

It is amazing how one could transpose oneself – dissolve his self/herself from being a highlander and be reformed as a Guyanese in the 1980s or late 70s.

I quote paragraph 3.103:

The period under review was one of extreme hardships and difficulties in the life of Guyanese people. The Rule of Law was systematically subverted on a daily basis.”

Again, a finding of fact, an intimate knowledge of daily life in Guyana, by three commissioners, I do not know how.

“It was replaced by the Rule of Man in the person of Burnham and the PNC.”

The point I continue to make is that, not only did this commission veer dangerously outside of its mandate, but there was no supporting evidence for these findings. So by the time we get to the end of the report, we are not surprised by some of the findings. This is because throughout the report, every attempt was made to paint a picture, almost in theatrical style, of a life that supports a particular finding that has to come. That because things were hard and workers were depressed because the man Burnham was a dictator, therefore he killed.

Those of us who are legally trained know that even in the lowest of courts and tribunals that argument would not *hold water*. In other courts we would be run out by the sitting judge for failing our profession.

So, as I come to the end of my presentation, I conclude as I began. We cannot, in all good conscience, adopt this report. The test of bias for the unlearned is the appearance of bias. That is the test that is upheld throughout the free world with Guyana being no exception. It is not actual bias but the appearance that justice must not only be done, but be manifestly seen to be done, to quote Lord Mansfield.

So, at the end of it all, we cannot say that justice was manifestly seen to be done in this instance and I end at page 148, taking my legal lawyer’s hat and I quote the commissioners – paragraph 8.15. The basis upon which the findings were made that basis was on the word of a convict and not a convict for murder, thieving car parts, bicycles, vehicles or any another offence, but the offence of dishonesty. It is again Trite Law that one does not accept the evidence of a person whose reputation and credibility cannot be defended.

So the commission itself accepted this and it states:

“At the heart of the offences for which he was convicted is dishonesty.”

However, as if to give justification for a finding that had ready been decided upon the next paragraph states;

“8.16 There is no rule of evidence or of human experience that because a man is in prison or has been convicted, his testimony must be rejected.”

This is a very simplistic approach to a trite matter.

We know that there are certain tests and filters that liars and dishonest persons must pass through before their evidence is accepted and one of them is corroboration. Only recently, two weeks ago, in the United States (US) in Washington, the District of Columbia (DC), the news brought the person convicted in 2010 for the murder of former Congressional Aid, Chandra Levy. A man was convicted in 2010 for her murder. Based on what is known in the US as a *jailhouse snitch* that whilst in jail someone said or he admitted, it is now accepted that the person in jail who said that he heard, was lying. So last week, the person convicted for that Congressional Aid’s murder was released without condition and exonerated, and the Government of the United States is moving to have him deported to San Salvador or El Salvador, where he is from.

It is a reminder that the testimony of, firstly, convicts is manifestly unreliable. And secondly, when that convict is convicted for fraud or dishonesty, one must bend over backwards to prove beyond a reasonable doubt. I accept, as I said before, that commissions of inquiry are not expected to adhere to the strict rules of evidence but there has to be some standard that is set. It would appear that in this instance, it is a free for all and anyone could have said anything, defame anyone and damage anyone’s character and reputation. At the end of it, we are no closer to finding the truth as to what really happened to Dr. Walter Rodney, a son of the soil, a scholar and a man of the world.

I thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you very much, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Dr. Walter Anthony Rodney was assassinated on the 13th June, 1980. Thirty-four years later, we finally managed to hold an inquiry into his death. Thirty-six years after, we are now presiding over the assassination of the results of that inquiry.

That Dr. Walter Rodney had made an indelible contribution to the politics of Guyana, the Caribbean and to certain parts of Africa is not something we should dispute. We have passed that stage. That Dr. Walter Rodney was assassinated by a bomb, we have passed that stage. As to who killed Dr. Walter Rodney, in my personal view, we have passed that stage a long time ago.

As a young child, I was seven years old in 1980, I stood on the road side of the Annandale Public Road and there was a march on the day that Dr. Rodney was going to be buried. That march was from Buxton to Georgetown and was led by the Hon. Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine and Professor. Clive Thomas. Dr. Roopnaraine, at that time, very handsome, dashing, sun shades, long hair - they were leading a march of hundreds. I could remember distinctly. The chant, led by Dr. Roopnaraine and Professor Clive Thomas, was "Who killed Rodney? Burnham killed Rodney". That was the chant of the march and I remember that very distinctly. So, for me, who killed Dr. Rodney, was never in dispute.

However, I have read great details about the available writings and evidence surrounding the assassination of Dr. Rodney. I read the writings of the Hon. Prime Minister in the *Mirror* newspapers - dozens of articles, all lending and pointing the accusatory finger in one direction. I read articles written by the Hon. Prime Minister in the *Thunder* newspapers and they all pointed the accusatory finger in one direction. So speaking for myself, I am not in doubt.

The Dr. Walter Rodney commission of inquiry was streamed live. My Hon. Friend, Minister Harmon, for some reason, found that objectionable. That demonstrated a lack of appreciation of the magnitude and stature of who Dr. Rodney was.

I, proudly, had the privilege and honour of working to establish this inquiry. It gave me an insight into the nature of a man, who was only 36 years old and who enjoyed the amount of respect that is indescribable.

I spoke with chief justices' out of Africa; I spoke with professors in universities all over the world while setting up this inquiry; people who were interested in the life of Walter Rodney and who wanted this inquiry. The live stream of this inquiry was requested by Dr. Patricia Rodney and it was live streamed into several classrooms in universities in Africa and in Atlanta, USA, where students were looking all day at the testimonies of the Dr. Walter Rodney commission of inquiry.

Today, in Dr. Rodney's own home, where he fought for national unity, where he fought against the oppression and for the advancement of the working people of this country, his Parliament is denigrating his legacy and his life. That I find is unfortunate. All that this motion does is to ask this National Assembly to adopt...

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, a Point of Order, please.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you rise on a Point of Order?

Mr. Nagamootoo: Yes. [Mr. Ali: What is the Standing Order?] The Standing Order is 40(a). The Hon. Member of the Opposition is making misleading statements and he is impugning the integrity of this honourable House; that this honourable House is denigrating Dr. Walter Rodney. This is an attack on the efficacy and integrity of this House and the Hon. Member ought to withdraw those remarks. No one, at least not on this side, has said anything that is deprecatory of the great Dr. Walter Rodney. We said things that are laudatory of him, but we questioned the efficacy of the report and that is the issue.

2.04 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Member Nandlall, please proceed.

Mr. Nandlall: All the motion seeks to do is to ask this National Assembly to adopt the report, which is the first thing, and secondly, its findings and then we take measures to implement the recommendations contained, therein. That is all that this motion seeks to do.

Over the last 34 years, prior to the commission, we have had calls from organisations right across the globe, asking for an inquiry into Dr. Walter Rodney's assassination, not killing. At one point in time, there was some contention as to whether it should be killing or assassination. The PPP, the WPA and the then newly formed Guyana Human Rights Association (GHRA) called for an inquiry in 1980.

We heard of Brother Eusi Kwayana, the former Hon. Member of this House, issuing a summons in the Magistrates Court in 1987, attempting to get an inquiry started. That failed. We heard about the efforts of the former Attorney General, the Hon. Mr Doodnauth Singh, filing private criminal charges of murder against Gregory Smith. That failed.

Gregory Smith and the explosion - these are things that have been accepted in this country. These are facts. His implication in the murder has been accepted in this country. So much so

that he was going to be charged with murder. So, this attempt now to plead complete and utter ignorance of how Dr. Rodney died is a notion that I would want to reject. The circumstances under which Dr. Rodney died were known on a very narrow compass. That is how the terms of reference were crafted and I will get to that Sir.

In 2012, President Ramotar, during a visit in the United States of America, met with Dr. Patricia Rodney and Ms. Asha Rodney and they requested of him that they would like this commission of inquiry to be held. Dr. Patricia Rodney, is now well in her 70s if not 80s and she wants to bring closure. She wants closure because said she does not have much more time to live. She asked an outstanding request; she asked President Ramotar to give effect to it. There was, of course, a motion passed in this National Assembly, resulting in a resolution, to which reference has been made, calling for the establishment of an inquiry. President Ramotar decided to proceed with the establishment of the inquiry.

Dr. Patricia Rodney insisted on two conditions: One - that she wanted no political involvement with any other political party and that the President must use his powers, under the Commission of Inquiry Act, and establish the inquiry. She specifically wanted no participation from her husband's party, the WPA party and, certainly not from the APNU. Those were her requests. She gave reasons why and I do not want to repeat those reasons here.

The second request that she made was that she wanted to see the terms of reference because she wanted it to capture a certain atmosphere. She said that there were previous inquiries where the terms of reference were deliberately circumscribed, to produce a certain result and she wanted the widest possible terms of reference.

So, that is how the non-participation occurred and there is nothing wrong with that. A President, in the exercise of his powers, under the Commission of Inquiry Act, is enjoined to exercise those powers to the exclusion of influence or consultation from an external source. President Granger has done this repeatedly. We have had a series of commissions of inquiry since President Granger took Office. Not a single one was we aware of. We are the major and only Opposition party in the country and in the Parliament. We have presumed that these inquiries relate to matters of public importance. Not once were we consulted by the President. So, this argument advanced by my learned Friend, Minister Harmon, that something was fundamentally wrong because we did not consult, is one that is flawed. We were requested not to consult and we were legally right in not consulting. **[Hon. Member from the**

Government: What is the point now?] help you.

Well, if you cannot get the point then I cannot

Then we come to how we arrived at the Commissioners. In order to bring impartiality because of the stature of Dr. Rodney, we did not feel that choosing a Guyanese, who would have lived through that period, could have brought an impartial mind to the inquiry. We even felt that appointing a Guyanese outside of that period, would still not bring an impartial mind to bear on the inquiry. That is why we went to Jamaica because Dr. Rodney spent a great part of his life in Jamaica. Then we went to Barbados because that is the country that offered a home to his family when they had to flee this land. [Hon. Member from the

Government: You travelled a lot.]

When I say “went” I did not physically go. Dr. Luncheon and I explored those possibilities.

The other jurisdiction where we wanted to recruit a commissioner from was from Africa, where Dr. Rodney made a significant contribution. With the help of a former Member of this House, Mr. Stanley Moore, we were able to make contact with the sitting Chief Justice of Kenya at the time. Unfortunately, he could not have extricated himself from his obligations there and that is how we came back to the Caribbean.

Mr. Seenauth Jairam was chosen because he is Guyanese but he lived there and he is an East Indian. A large part of Dr. Walter Rodney’s politics had to do with the forging of racial and national unity in this country. We felt that an Indo-Guyanese, being part of that commission would have been a good thing.

In terms of their qualifications, let me read their qualifications into the *Hansard* of this House because those professional men and woman, in my humble view, their reputations have been adversely commented upon, in an unfortunate way, by the Members of this House. I believe that I owe it to them, that the archives of this Assembly must record their professional standings and qualifications.

Mrs. Jacqueline Samuels-Browne, is a well-known prominent Jamaican Attorney. As a general practitioner, her emphasis is advocacy, both at trial and appellate levels. She is one of Her Majesty’s Counsel in Law, QC. She was so appointed in 2010 after 30 years and was called to the Bar. She heads the firm which she started in 2005 known as Firm Law in Kingston, Jamaica. She has extensive experience in Criminal and Civil Law to which we add Constitutional and Judicial Review.

Although Jamaica is her main arena of practice, she has been called to the Bars of the Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos and Grenada. In these jurisdictions, she has also worked extensively. She has appeared too before Her Majesty's Privy Council in London. She is currently the President of the Jamaica Bar Association. She has a deep interest in legal education and is an Advisory Counsel Member of the Faculty of Law, at the University of Technology in Jamaica, in addition to being a member of the Counsel of Legal Education for the Caribbean, and a tutor in Criminal Law and Procedure at the Norman Manley Law School. She served, at one stage, as the Chairperson of the Broadcasting Appeal Tribunal in Jamaica and was a founding member of the American Association of Jurists (Jamaican Chapter).

Mrs. Samuels-Browne also has a keen interest in the well-being of children as is reflected in her appointment as Executive Member of the Jamaican Association for Children with Learning Disabilities, an organisation of which she was also the President. She also represented the Office of Children Advocate before the Armadale Inquiry, which was established to investigate the deaths of seven wards of the state in a fire at a correctional facility in Jamaica.

Mr. Seenauth Jairam, a Senior Counsel, currently President of the Law Association of Trinidad and Tobago since 2012. He was called to the Bar in 1977, and has a varied and outstanding career in the Law. In his early years, he worked as a Legal and Industrial Relations Officer with Canning Groups of Company in Trinidad. Thereafter, he served in a similar capacity with Habib Group of Companies.

He excelled in the areas of Tax, Commercial, Construction and Employment law. He has made many appearances before the Tax Appeal Board and the Industrial Court in Trinidad. He served as an acting Judge in the High Court of Trinidad and Tobago and was later called to the Inner Bar as a Senior Counsel in 1988. He continues to practise at the private Bar, but has held several public appointments, such as Chairman of the Police Service Commission, Director of the Private Hospital Board and a member of the Law Reform Commission. He is also an Executive Member of the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board. He has appeared before the Privy Council on several occasions. He has been called to the Bars of Guyana, Saint Lucia and Grenada and has appeared before the High Court and Appellate Court in those countries and it goes on.

The Chairman, of course, is a Barbadian and a member of 13 Regional Bars in the Caribbean, as well as the Bar of England and Wales. He studied at Mona Campus, University of the West Indies, where he obtained a first degree in Economics and a Masters in Public Administration and International Relations. He then went on to pursue doctoral studies at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. He attended Manchester University, where he was awarded a Doctorate of Philosophy.

He obtained a degree of the Utter Bar at Middle Temple in London. Both the doctoral and law programmes were pursued, simultaneously, in 1968 and 1970. His practice goes across the region. He was an advocacy in both criminal and civil matters.

2.19 a.m.

He has been defence counsel for over a 100 murder cases and he has also been involved in many judicial reviews and constitutional applications, not to mention arbitration, commercials instigation and employment law. He was called to the Inner Bar as a Senior Counsel in 1991 and continued to play, although enjoyed a wider and vary practice in Barbados and across the region. His clients has included Government, Chief Minister, Prime Minister, judges, professional across a wide range, Commission of Police and Superintendent of Prisons, both of whom was charged with murder.

He has acted as counsel to the subject of inquiry, commission's counsel on four occasions, sole commission on one occasion and as Deputy Commission to the recently concluded 1990 Coup of Trinidad and Tobago Commission of Inquiry. There is another list explaining how he got knighthood.

This is the reputation and professional standing of these Commissioners. These are men who have travelled and distinguished themselves all over the world, and the good lady. At this court, as my learned friend was saying, we are so bright that we could condemn them as incompetence. These men would have left their country and come to Guyana to sacrifice their professional rectitude and reputation, and that is what we are being asked here tonight to believe.

I have in my hand a statement from the WPA issued in 2008. This is what it states:

“The Working People’s Alliance on Thursday reiterated its commitment to the inquiry into Dr. Rodney’s assassination which occurred in 13th June, 1980 and declared the

long overdue inquiry should be held without delay. We, therefore, called upon the PPP/C Government to move with urgency to set in motion the arrangements for holding the inquiry. Our support for the process is guaranteed”.

[Mr. Williams: Which year? Was it 2002 or 2008?] It was 2008.

A lot had been said about how the commission was established. Let me answer the question about the contract. The contract, if my learned friend read the Commission of Inquiry’s Act, he would have seen a section that speaks specifically to the remuneration of Commissioners. It is a matter between the President and the Commissioners. He is running several commissions, so I do not understand why he asked me.

This Parliament approved all the allocations of moneys that were paid to those Commissioners. You do know even understand what you had approved. Every single cent, which was paid to those Commissioners, was approved by this National Assembly, where the Opposition controlled the Parliament and where the Opposition cut the national budget, but it approved all the payments for the Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry. I do not understand now, how they are questioning the moneys that were spent. In my view, there is no amount of money that one could spend to get to the bottom of the truth as to who assassinate Dr. Walter Rodney. It could never be a question of money.

A lot had been said about the commission of inquiry. The truth is that when the Government changed it was a Ramotar commission of inquiry. The law, the Commission of Inquiry Act, states this:

“No commission issued under this Act shall lapse by reason of, or be otherwise affected by the death, absence, or removal of the President issuing the same”.

Under the Act, President Granger could have terminated the commission. The Act gives him that opportunity. President Granger decided to continue the commission. If they were so outraged by the terms of reference or the composition, the commission was almost completed with its work when we had a change of Government and the money that was expended, the President at the time should have repudiated and terminated the commission, but he did not do so. By continuing the President had adopted that commission, so now it is a Granger commission of inquiry. It is no longer a Ramotar commission of inquiry. It is a matter of the President if he wants to repudiate his own commission of inquiry. It is his inquiry.

We heard a lot about the evidence and witnesses not being heard, but President Granger assumed control of the inquiry. There was not anything to stop President Granger from calling the dozens of witnesses that he felt should be called. He chose not to call them. They must answer, on that side, why they did not bring back Cecil 'Skip' Roberts? Why they did not bring back Norman McLean and all the names that they called? They had every opportunity to do so, so they cannot be heard to say that we or the commission denied people the opportunity to testify. It was their commission of inquiry and they had all the opportunities to call whoever they want to testify. As you know, Sir, why it is that they could not have done? It is because it is who kill Walter Rodney? It is only one finding a head of a commission could make and it would be one implication. As the Hon. Member Comrade Clement Rohee said, it is only one conclusion you could have come to. You could not have held Castro's government liable. Could you have held Castro's government liable? It was only Burnham's government you could have held liable.

The last thing I want to talk about - he heard a lot about hearsay evidence - my learned friend, the Hon. Member Raphael Trotman said correctly that it is not a court of law. Let me read from Lord Carman quickly. There is no other law Lord, I believed, in England who has done more commissions of inquiry than Lord Carman. He did the Brixton riot. This is what he said, speaking about the Red Lion Square Inquiry in 1974:

“First of all, and I stressed it, this is an inquiry and not a piece of litigation. It is not the adversary type of confrontation between parties with which we English lawyers are familiar in criminal and civil trial in our country”.

Then, Sir, I want to cite the sentiment of a Canadian judge speaking in a case which is reported at OWN, page 418, 1934, Justice Riddell. This is what that judge had to say speaking of the Royal Commission of Inquiry in Canada:

“A Royal Commission of Inquiry is not for the purpose of trying a case or a charge against any one, any person or any institution, but for the purpose of informing the people concerning the facts of the matter to be inquired into. Information should be sought in every quarter available.

Everyone able to bring relevant facts before the commission should be encouraged, should be urge to do so.

Nor that the strict rules of evidence to be enforced, much of that could not be admitted in a trial in court may be of the utmost assistance to the commission”

Rules of hearsay are not applicable. This is not about guilt; this is about going to the truth. It is an inquiry. It is not a trial.

Then we heard about the credibility of the witnesses. One particular witness was identified as a person who was described as a convicted felon.

His Excellency President David Granger established an inquiry into the fire at the prisons. Ninety per cent of the witnesses who testified were convicted felons. How were their evidences admissible and credible? How was that so? One person is incredible, but you accepted 40 witnesses who are convicted felons and their evidences are not admissible. The evidence is what I am speaking about. That man was a witness. Mr. Gates was a witness. You cannot reject Mr. Gates as a convicted felon then accept the testimony of 40 convicted felons from the prison at Camp Street.

Then, Sir, there is the last point I want to make, since Your Honour is signalling to me. There is a Member of this House, whose name I would not call, he sits on the Government benches, about 12 years ago he travelled to Africa and upon his return he and I had a conversation. He said to me, having come back from Africa, that Africa would never forgive the PNC for what it did to Dr. Walter Rodney. He is in this House.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Williams: I must say that I have to wrestle with *Mr. Morpheus* in whose grip I was. That notwithstanding, I endeavoured to make my contribution in relation to this report on the life of undoubtedly a brilliant son of this soil, Dr. Walter Rodney.

This might be one of the great mysteries in my life. I had never met him. I had never gone to meetings where he spoke. I had absolutely no idea about the late Dr. Walter Rodney. In fact, when I was studying with his brother, Mr. Hubert Rodney - I do not know if he has left - we were actually in the lobby of the Sherlock Hall at Cave Hill Campus when he left us to answer the phone. We noticed that he was quite on the phone. Someone asked what was happening, what was the problem, and he said in a stunned way - I could still see his face – “Walter dead”. I said, “Who is Walter?” “He said, “My brother.” That is to show that it is a remarkable thing. Now here I am drawn into this Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry, by

circumstance. As a result, I was able to learn a lot about that period, so I have a panoramic view of the proceedings. Therefore I am in a position to say, where I stand, that I concur and embrace the contribution made by the Hon. Members on this side of the House. I would not burden the National Assembly at this hour to go with my full presentation which I would have prepared.

2.34 a.m.

That notwithstanding, I will inveigh against those arguments that were put forward by the Hon. Members on the other side of the House.

The issue is a simple one: Dr. Rodney died by an explosion, the remit of the commission was to determine how he met his death. I would not deal with all those other issues, but what I wish to say is that the Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall said these words: “The President met with Dr. Patricia Rodney in America and she asked him to hold the inquiry.” [An Hon Member: She asked him.] It is whichever one. They met in America, and she asked.

Fortunately, Dr. Rodney came to the inquiry and had to be examined by me. I would like to respectfully refer you, Mr. Speaker, and the Hon. Members of this House to her response to what the Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall just told us. I refer to the verbatim report of Tuesday, 21st October, 2014. I will start at page 79.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, a Point of Order please, Standing Order 40 (a). We do not have access to the verbatim records of the commission of inquiry. We have the Volume 1 of the commission of inquiry report, so we are at a disadvantage. The verbatim records were never shared with this House. I had raised that the day when the report was first tabled, that there were other volumes and they were denied. It is just as I asked the Prime Minister if we could have either the excerpts from the verbatim that they were referring to at an appropriate time. I did not say right away. It was the same too with the Attorney General. We have no access to these verbatim records which we know are being housed in the Attorney General’s Chambers.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I thought we had traversed this ground earlier. We had already traversed this ground. It was established that regarding the verbatim reports that support the report. They could not have arrived at their report without relying on the verbatim reports from the proceedings of the House. I am not sure what the request is because the Hon. Member Nandlall, the former Attorney General, was just regaling us with all the things he did

to set up this inquiry. It was his inquiry. How come he does not have these reports and the Members on that side were not given the reports? I do not know how we could be blamed, in any event. All we are required to do is to give the source of what we are referring to, to this honourable House.

As I was saying, I was respectfully referring this honourable House and yourself to page 79. This was what was stated:

“Mr. Williams: You spoke with someone on this matter.

Dr. Rodney: Somebody from the President’s office called to tell me that they were going to start an inquiry”.

That is what her testimony is.

“Mr. Williams: Did you object to the participation of the WPA in the setting up of the inquiry”

I turn to page 80:

“Dr. Rodney: I did not object to the participation of the WPA.”

Ms. Teixeira: He cannot even verify any of it.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: You do not have to verify it. It is there in the records.

Ms. Teixeira: We do not have it.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: But you could get it, though.

Ms. Teixeira: Can we have it now?

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: He has a copy of it because he was running everything.

Mr. Williams: At the bottom of page 80:

“Mr. Williams: So equally, did you object to the participation of the People’s National Congress in the setting up of the inquiry?” [*Interruption from the Opposition Members.*]

Mr. Speaker, could we have your protection? I know they do not want to hear what is going to come.

“Dr. Rodney: Did I object to them?”

I turn to page 81.

“Mr. Williams: Yes.

Dr. Rodney: They were never mentioned to me. I did not object to anybody”.

That is what she said, yet the Hon. Member has come to this House and deliberately misled this honourable House. That is what he has done. [*An Hon Member (Opposition) knocks on table.*] You have to knock more because more is coming. The Hon. Member told us that she did not want any other political involvement with any other political party, including the WPA. Then he was saying to us that he did not want to give any reasons why she said that. Then he continued: “She wanted to have the widest possible terms of reference and that is why there was nonparticipation”. I was writing on everything he said. We could show right away that the entire inquiry was conceived in deception.

They excluded the PNC and the WPA, Dr. Rodney’s own party. Why did they do that? They had every reason to consult and involve both the WPA and the PNC because of the resolution passed in this honourable House in 2005. Notwithstanding that they abstained from voting for their own motion, the WPA and the PNC voted for the inquiry to be held. Any inquiry, which was to be held, naturally would have had to involve the WPA and the PNC, and even though they abstained, they too. That is what we have.

They are contending that cost is not this and cost is not that. The cost is now well over \$400 million. The least that the Guyanese people could expect is that if you are going to spend all that money, which could do so much in the villages in this country and in the communities, it is to have, at least, a written contract embodying the terms and conditions of this engagement. I do not understand what is happening. We are talking about transparency and accountability - nothing.

At the last minute when they finally had to conclude this thing they sprang upon us some nebulous condition about a writing fee. It was tremendous money, again. It was a real shakedown. As I said, it was conceived in darkness, but it has come to light.

The Hon. Member ‘Chief Justice’ Rohee, C.J. Rohee - you have lovely initials, Clement - I am sure my colleagues will recall what he said just now - “There is only one focus”. That is what he said. Allow me to get you the verbatim.

“We are focusing on this theory, that is the Burnham administration, and there might have been others, but we are focusing on the Burnham administration.”

This brings us to the whole question: Who has done it? There is no clear evidence. My learned friend and Hon. Member Raphael Trotman gave a good explanation as to the quality or lack of in the findings on this point. [Mr. Lumumba: You had no say then, Mr. Williams.]

None. Therefore this question is still up in the air, the jury is still out. “Who has done it?” There are several theories. The Chairman, Mr. Cheltenham, gave three theories. He said that it is either Rodney’s colleagues killed him; he died by negligence or he was killed by the Burnham’s administration. Do you all remember that? [Lt. Col.

(Ret’d) Harmon: He said that. It is in the verbatim report.] I am saying it from this. I then asked him: “What about the fourth theory?” He was nonplussed and said, “Fourth theory, what is that?” I said, “Sir, the fourth theory is that the PPP killed Rodney.” I would not to describe his look. “What! How can you arrive at that? How are you going to support that?”

I will ask you, Sir, your permission to show this honourable House and yourself how I was able to support that. I think I should start with the verbatim report of the 7th August, 2014. This is in the context that the PPP and the WPA had an agreement that they would collaborate to remove the People’s National Congress from office. Sir, I like to refer this honourable House and yourself to page 64 of this verbatim report. The evidence of, I think he was Crime Chief at the time, Leslie James states:

“Mr. William: Could you read the first paragraph?

Mr. James: It states and I quote:

‘The WPA/PPP joint talk. The WPA said they were holding talks with the PPP towards a formation of a united front to get rid of the PNC government. The WPA said that there were some minor differences between the WPA and the PPP, but both Dr. Jagan and top members of the WPA vowed to iron out their differences and form their united front as the main priority in the struggle’”.

What is here, Sir, is an agreement to collaborate to get rid of the PNC. Nothing is wrong with that. That was their agreement, but then the problem developed when the PPP discovered that the WPA was poaching PPP Members from them.

2.49 a.m.

This is baseless so let us walk through the nonsense. That was a problem that they had throughout the country. As I said, they will get more agitated as we go along.

I respectfully refer this honourable House to page 44 of the same Verbatim Report. The evidence of Mr. James:

“The People’s Progressive Party (PPP) has recently warned its activists on East Bank Demerara to be very careful in the dealings with activists of the WPA.

They were told that the WPA was encroaching on the membership of the PPP and that, if they were allowed to continue, then the PPP would be without any Members which could become very embarrassing to the party.”

I refer this honourable House to page 48. Mr. James is addressing another PPP group from the PPP Reliance, East Canje Berbice Regional Conference. Paragraph 10 states:

“PNC loses support. He observed that the WPA had gained lots of support amongst PNC Members and even tried to encroach on PPP Members. He said that although PPP Members might give them financial support, these PPP Members would not support them in any Elections. It makes reference to one Perry Lall in a comment and said that John Milton, a former PPP activist, was using his influence among PPP supporters to win support for the WPA.”

You had East Bank Demerara and Canje bawling.

I now refer this honourable House to page 88, paragraph 2 of the Verbatim Report of the 16th February, 2015. This issue arose in relation to Georgetown. The caption reads:

“PPP Freedom House Georgetown Regional Delegates Conference”

Could you read the second paragraph, please, Mr. Rohee?

The second paragraph states:

“Discussions were centred on the Secretary’s Report and emphasis was placed on a directive pursued by the Party. They stated that no Member of the Party must assist the WPA with the field work unless otherwise directed by the PPP Executive.

The directive stated that if a breach of this instruction was occasioned, disciplinary actions would follow.”

Mr. Speaker, you can see that, throughout the country, the PPP was troubled and was paranoid about losing support to the WPA throughout this country.

When one looks at the tenure of the whole Inquiry, they said that it must have been the PNC because Rodney attracted large crowds in the PNC strongholds. If they are saying that it must be the Government because the Government believed that it was losing support to the WPA, how is it different when, in the core of the Party Delegates Conference, it was said that this problem was permeating throughout. Therefore, it cannot be said, since the standard is on the balance of probability, that it was improbable that the PPP could not have a motive to get rid of Dr. Walter Rodney.

All I am doing is showing that there were other theories about how Dr. Walter Rodney met his death because no one was there, other than his brother.

Paragraph 8.22 of the Report states that it was an agent of the Government. My brother has described it as a quantum leap. It has no basis. It is clear that they were given a task to do and they therefore had to arrive at their destination.

I do not want to detain this House any longer. I could do so if I wish. I think that I have already established the core elements in this entire... On the basis of setting up this Commission of Inquiry, in my notes that I prepared, I had intended to show that it was designed with the knowledge of the upcoming General and Regional Elections to be able to influence those Elections and for propaganda purposes. That is why Mr. Shawn Samaroo was paid millions of dollars to prepare a documentary and to provide daily coverage.

When one looks at the evidence of which the journalist was employed and given over \$60 million to \$70 million... Let me give some examples of the work of Shawn Samaroo. This was one of the headlines that he published in the *Guyana Chronicle* of 14th November, 2014:

“Robert Allan Gates makes stunning claim at Rodney Commission - McLean, Lewis, Roberts, vital to dark Rodney plot”

He published another in the *Guyana Chronicle* of 31st October, 2014, which states:

“Gopaul, Williams ‘brawl’ in dramatic face-off”

He also said, in the *Guyana Chronicle* of 7th August:

“Remote trigger detonated bomb that killed Rodney”

They paid a journalist \$17 million, that is, more than \$1 million per month, to cover these proceedings and for him to make those headlines. If one looks at the Report – I do not even have to look at the Report because I would never forget - one would see that Dr. Cheltenham is saying that there was no problem with the newspaper’s coverage. Could you imagine that? I raised the issue of inaccurate headlines many times in the Commission. They were attacking all the time.

There are so many other things to say but I do not want to detain my Colleagues. I want to say that we cannot accept and support the motion as worded.

We cannot adopt the Report because we do not accept the findings. I will not go into the reasons. The reasons are already given by my Hon. Friends on this side of the House.

On the recommendations, I have a single suspicion that the Commissioners lost all sense of reality.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General, you have four minutes remaining.

Mr. Williams: Yes, Sir.

I do not think they appreciated that they were actually dealing with the period of 36 years ago. Therefore, those recommendations that they purported to make have absolutely no relevance to this period in 2016. As it was said, they were way out of their remit. How could Dr. Cheltenham come here to tell us how we must have, construct and constitute our Elections Commission? Let me stop now before I start... It shows that it was inevitable that the APNU/AFC would have won that Election. Winning that Election is a total rejection by the people of Guyana of that farce of a Commission of Inquiry that they said they held for Dr. Walter Rodney. I am therefore sorry for the Rodney’s family. I hope that they could have some closure on it. The whole issue being conceived in deceit did not have their interest or closure at heart for the Rodney’s family. They wanted to use them and hope that they would gain some advantage at the Elections, which they lost miserably.

Thankfully, we are a new Government and we have a new and fresh approach and we promise to continue in our approach to make this country a better place and to guarantee, as we promised to each and every Guyanese, a good life. Thank you. [*Applause*]

3.04 a.m.

Ms. Teixeira (replying): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that people are tired but it has also been an extraordinarily important issue that we have been looking at. I believe, having heard the debate, our nation is more divided than it was in 1980. In fact, the misinformation and disinformation are on levels, in this House, that remind me of those days too.

Mr. Speaker, just let me try to respond, in closing, to a number of issues that were raised; some were pointedly put to me by some speakers that I need to respond to and others were clearly because people, I think, forgot - maybe it is the hour and they are tired and they are making leaps of deductions which are incorrect...

First of all, the last speaker, the Attorney General, talked that the Commission of Inquiry was a political ploy for the 2015 Elections. Well, let us look at facts, my dear Colleagues and Members. The Commission of Inquiry was set up on the 8th February, 2014. At no point in February, 2014 was there any conceptualisation by the Government of the day - maybe by you who were in the Opposition but not us in the Government - that there were going to be Elections until 2017. So this view that this Commission of Inquiry was created with four months to do its work was all for Elections, which were non-existent and were not even being conceptualised as far as I knew... Maybe, in some other quarters and other side rooms and with other kind of external help, who knows what was going on. But it certainly was not going on in terms of the five-year term that the Government had from 2012 – 2017. So that myth that is being propagated is absolutely fallacious.

Secondly, the modalities which my Hon. Colleague, Anil Nandlall, spoke on here under Terms of Reference, and there are aspersions being cast on the contracts... I was the Presidential Advisor on Governance until 15th May, 2015 and I was privy to correspondence written by Mrs. Patricia Rodney to President Ramotar and emails and other correspondence that took place among Mrs. Rodney, Dr. Luncheon as Head of the Presidential Secretariat and President Ramotar in relation to the Commission of Inquiry being set up in accordance to the terms and the references that Mr. Nandlall read in relation to her desire and attention and the

reasons why - which I will come to – she changed her modality from 2005, which I will also read her letter of 2005.

Mrs. Rodney, in 2012, based on whether it happened by chance, deliberate, interlocutors or other means, approached President Ramotar and gave her very strict guidelines and concerns under which the conditions of a Commission of Inquiry were the President of Guyana to agree to her demands or her requests. As Hon. Member Anil Nandlall correctly put out and the reasons he gave: she was getting older, she wanted closure and that these were the parameters...

It is also in the actual design of Terms of Reference, and this is to answer the Hon. Fourth Vice-President of this country, Mr. Sydney Allicock, when he accused me directly in this House that I, Gail Teixeira, Nanda Gopaul and CR Rohee of crafting the Terms of Reference for the CoI. I had nothing to do with the drafting of the Terms of Reference, Mr. Allicock. I do not know who has misinformed you, Hon. Member, but I wish to inform you...

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, please direct your remarks to me.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. Well, Mr. Speaker, could you advise the Hon. Vice-President that he was misinformed?

Mr. Speaker: My request to you was not conditional. Please proceed.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, it is late in the morning and I have been asked to answer questions and I will do so. Matters have been put directly to me by Hon. Members in this House. It is quite unusual, actually, and I am abiding by the requests of the Hon. Members. I was accused that the architects, according to the Hon. Member, assured that the ToRs were self-serving, and that the architects for crafting the Terms of Reference were Gail Teixeira, Rohee and Nanda Gopaul.

The Terms of Reference were developed and guided by Mrs. Rodney and her family, the Justice for Rodney Committee and a number of other very outstanding persons, Horace Campbell and others, in relation to ensuring... The item number four on the Terms of Reference, which the APNU/AFC had objections to and wrote about in the pursuit of truth, the Commission of Inquiry of the Walter Roth Museum 2014, in fact, ignored and did not know that those Terms of Reference were designed completely outside of Guyana.

[Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: By who?] I have already said who, Mr. Harmon. I will not repeat it. I said it. [Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: You did not say anything.] I did.

Mr. Speaker, the Terms of Reference: In relation to the selection of the persons, Mr. Nandlall reported that.

In relation to contract, the contracts and the documentations in relation to the Commissioners, their payments, all went through Mr. Denbow with the clearance of the Office of the President and with the Ministry of Finance and so there are records. The agreements – contract, agreements, bills - were produced and there are records at the Ministry of Finance, at the Office of the President now Ministry of the Presidency in the Head of the Presidential Secretariat's (HPS) Office. A number of the documents that were in my office were all left there on my departure on the evening of 15th May, 2015 and I understand that most of the records that I left in that office for the purposes of the new Government coming in had been boxed off and parked in a corner and even the poor Prime Minister does not know what to do with all these records. So, my advice to you is that the records are there because no payments could be made to the Commissioners without the proper documentation through the Ministry of Finance.

The Commission of Inquiry makes recommendations on record-keeping and the record-keeping under this Government seems to be in total disarray. And part of it maybe the waltz of the Ministers from one Ministry into another and from one department to another, losing files along the way. But the issue Sir... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Ms. Teixeira: There are several accusations, Minister Harmon. One is that you are saying that there are no records. I am saying that there are records. You are saying there is a contract. I am saying that there are records to show what the amounts of money paid were...

[Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: [*Inaudible*] contract.] I said “agreement”; I did not use the word ‘contract’.

[Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: It is the same thing.] No.

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, at this stage...

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have been doing fairly well. Let us try to continue that way.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I do not think, at this stage, anything we say is of any value in this House. Maybe it is the time of the morning; maybe it is that it does not matter. The main point is that we are divided. The Commission of Inquiry, which pointed out that a gentleman called Gregory Smith, who was a serving member of the Guyana Defence Force, who was involved with an electronic apparatus that exploded on the lap of a gentleman called Dr. Walter Rodney on the 13th June, 1980, which was found in a 1988 inquest to be an anti-personnel device and also, in that inquest of 1988, points out, as it did in the Commission of Inquiry, that the gentleman involved, Mr. Gregory Smith, was flown by a GDF plane to Takama to Kwakwani then Takama and then ultimately to French Guiana... The evidence of the Pilot and the logbooks are in this Commission of Inquiry Report.

There are a lot of smoke screens going on in this debate because the aircraft that took not only Mr. Gregory Smith, who later got renamed Cyril Milton Johnson, who was accompanied by a woman with children on one of the flights that were on the GDF who was also whisked out of Guyana... And one of his other women – ladies, girlfriends, fiancées, whatever you call it - also happened to suddenly moved from a Ministry to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and suddenly into a diplomat mission overseas and then ultimately disappeared. Now, I am not a lawyer and I do not pretend to be one but I am being logical. It is logical and deductive mechanism in people's brains; it may be a coincidence; it might be that, somehow, Gregory Smith, who first the army denied was a member of the army and then found out that he was because it was William Gregory Smith and then he became Cyril Milton Johnson who was given passports with different birth certificates... Obviously, this would be impossible for the WPA to have done and it would have been impossible for the PPP to have done it. We were in the Opposition; we had no access to these things. And, in fact, the Commission of Inquiry recognises and says, in the Report, that there is no way... The Commissioners dealt with the accusation that maybe the WPA had something to do with this, and they debunked that. The issue that has to be examined...it is passionate; it is hurting; I know this Commission Report hurts you. It hurts you badly. I know that and I understand that. You have my sympathy but the issue is, Comrades, that you have to be able...

3.19 a.m.

How does one explain the labyrinth of connections in the Report by the evidence of Mr. Sydney James, by the evidence of other officers, by the evidence of political activists in that period? The labyrinth of connections cannot be explained any other way than that it would have been highly improbable, nearly impossible, for any other grouping of people in Guyana except external forces, which were not proven, regrettably, and maybe would come up in another 20 years. Only the State machinery, at that time, could have done this. Therefore, the smoke screen of saying and trying to say, as Mr. Williams said, that the PPP had done it; Mr. Jagan had done it... [Hon. Member: Did he say that?] Yes, you were not here in the room, maybe. [Mr. Williams: You are not a lawyer and that is why you would say *[inaudible]*] I am very happy that I am not a lawyer. [Mr. Williams: That theory got you off balance.] No; it is not off balance because it is absolutely bizarre. It is the work of a mad man actually. It is the absolute psychology of a mad man. So it cannot, in this House, have any credence.

I want to raise one issue because I think it did not catch anyone's attention. [Hon. Member: It is late.] Yes, I know it is late but I listened to you; you have to listen to me. You could leave though. In the Volume 1 of the Report - and I repeat we have no access to the verbatim - on 7th December, 2015, Sir Richard Cheltenham wrote to President Granger with regard to trying to complete the work. I want to read just two sentences. He was referring to the preparation of the Report and that they were from three different countries.

“And it will be left to me, as Chairman, to read the entire manuscript in draft to ensure that there are no unnecessary overlaps or significant omissions. In addition, it will be necessary to have the Report printed and bound before presentation. I feel obliged to add that I had discussed with Mr. Denbow the printing and binding of the Report which he had undertaken to coordinate with the Government Printery.”

This is the sentence I want to emphasize:

“I have been unable to contact Mr. Denbow in recent months and the advice reaching me is that the Commission's Secretariat has been closed and its staff severed.”

Its Secretariat was closed for months before. This was the letter written to the President in December, 2015, appealing for more time. This was the period when the Secretariat was closed for months before. The Secretariat's documents were moved and, therefore, where they are located is of interest.

There is conjecture about why there was all that time after the Elections and when the Report was produced. Generally, a commission of inquiry's report takes about two to three months to compile the evidence, write it up, get it cleaned up and printed. The last sessions they had were on 2nd October, 2015. Therefore, it was after this that the Commission's Secretariat was closed, the staff severed and the documents were then moved to a location which, I assume, somebody in this room knows.

The issue of witnesses has been raised. There were witnesses who were called and refused to come. There were names of persons who were suggested, who may have information, but who denied coming, and the Commission's Report states that. It admits that there were people it did not meet that it wanted to, and these were people who agreed to come before the Commission. The point is that if we really wanted to know the truth - we started at 8.40 p.m. discussing this motion and we gave it a lot of attention - having heard all the discussion tonight, there appears to be no desire whatsoever. As my Colleague, Friend and Comrade said, we, in this House, not the Commission's Report, are repeating the assassination of Dr. Walter Rodney through the Commission of Inquiry. It is smashed; it is gone. We know how you are going to vote; we know what you are going to do. Therefore, it has to go on record that the divisions that people fought for in the 1970s and 1980s, Guyanese overseas like Mrs. Rodney who wanted, in 2005, in a letter to President Jagdeo, an earlier letter which led to the resolution in the House where she stated:

“I write you to express our family's unwavering belief that a commission of inquiry can bring closure not only for our family, but for the Guyanese people. The inquiry is essential for the truth to emerge, is consistent with democratic principles and will be an instrument of reconciliation.”

We have failed in that regard.

“It is vital that the appointment and operations of the commission be underpinned by an act of parliament.”

She then named her Interlocutor, who is someone in this room. That was 30th June, 2005. The motion was drafted based on documents presented and written by WPA members on how Mr. Rodney died - what happened. The motion that I presented on 21st June, 2005 was based on the language that came out of documents, booklets and press releases by the WPA, and it came to this House on 21st June, 2005.

On 29th June, 2005, Mrs. Holder, representing the WPA, brought amendments on WPA's letterhead and the motion was amended. The issue is that it was in that situation that the motion was amended and that was why we did not support it. We abstained; we did not vote against it because different people said different things. The reason we did was because the understanding among the Interlocutor, Mrs. Rodney and us on the language was changed in the middle of the House. The Interlocutor reported that Mrs. Rodney, when the motion was passed in the House, no longer wanted to have any further movement on the commission of inquiry and that is where the matter remained until a year or so later when it was discovered that Mrs. Rodney never gave that instruction to the Interlocutor.

Mr. Speaker, a lot has been asked. We, therefore, feel proud that the Commission's Report was completed although prematurely. We are pleased that whatever the Commission's Report was able to ascertain from available records and from witnesses who had the courage to come forward, there are documents there to show the linkage and the connections. Certainly, many things are still unanswered but enough evidence is there, enough documents have been produced, to show the connection between those who were involved in plotting and planning of the execution or assassination of Dr. Walter Rodney. The most important aspect, I think, of the Commission of Inquiry, and the intention of Mrs. Rodney and those all those who wanted this to come to light, as well as the Commissioners themselves, was that the recommendations would be ways of healing and having reconciliation. We have failed in that regard. Therefore, what will go down in the record of this House is a Commission of Inquiry Report which, I am sure, will never see the light of day again.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: The motion is proposed. I draw Hon. Members' attention to an amendment to the motion under the name of Mr. Basil Williams. You have the floor, sir.

Mr. Williams: If it pleases you, Sir, I move that the first resolution clause of the motion be amended by substituting the word 'acknowledges' for the word "adopts".

In the second resolution clause, delete the existing clause and replace it with the following:

“BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the National Assembly calls on the Government to take measures to examine the findings and recommendations therein in order to ascertain whether any, and if so which, are acceptable and implementable.”

This amendment has been circulated.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. Before you take your seat, it would be correct to say that the amendments are the only two which you propose and that they are with respect to what is commonly called the resolved clauses.

Mr. Williams: Yes, please, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, you have heard the amendments. Is there a seconder to these amendments?

We will take them in the order in which they were presented. The proposal is that, in what is called the first resolved clause, to replace the word “adopt” by the word ‘acknowledges’.

Question put and agreed to.

Amendment carried.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I invite you to look at the second amendment being proposed in relation to the second resolved clause, the one which reads, “BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED.” The proposal is that that clause be replaced by the clause which reads:

“That the National Assembly calls on the Government to take measures to examine the findings and recommendations therein in order to ascertain whether any, and if so which, are acceptable and implementable.”

Hon. Members, please allow me one minute.

[Mr. Speaker in aside with the Clerk of the National Assembly.]

3.34 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, we have before us a proposal that the existing second resolved clause which is:

“BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

That the National Assembly calls on the Government to take measures to implement the recommendations therein in order to ensure that the democratic architecture of the state is preserved and strengthened.”

It is intended by the amendment that that resolved clause, which I just read, be replaced by the following text:

“BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

That the National Assembly calls on the Government to take measures to examine the findings and recommendations therein in order to ascertain whether any, and if so which, are acceptable and implementable.”

Amendment put, and carried.

Motion as amended put and carried.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I thank you for your assistance during this evening’s effort. We have had over six hours of debate on this matter. I stand advised, but I gather that this ends our business for today.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence. The matter regarding the Public Procurement Commission (PPC) is still pending. It was, by agreement, deferred to this part of the agenda. I am just pointing out to Your Honour that there was a consensus that the motion be taken today but if there is another consensus that it should be taken on Monday... [Ms. Teixeira: We said if time permitted.] If time permitted but, of course, I suppose this early hour in the morning may be interpreted as not time permitted. In that case, I ask that this matter be deferred to Monday.

Mr. Speaker: The proposal for the treating of the motion concerning the Public Procurement Commission is deferred to the next sitting which is to be held on Monday.

Mr. Ali: It would be unkind of us to if we do not recognise my Hon. Friend, the Hon. Minister of Finance, and to wish him, though we have passed his birthday by a few hours, I think we have to, together, wish him a happy belated birthday. Also to wish him a life that is filled with good health, strength and continued success.

Mr. Speaker: I would say that I take the liberty in assuming that all Members would wish to join in that.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, I invite you to move the adjournment motion.

Mr. Nagamootoo: On that happy note Your Honour, I wish to move that this House be adjourned until Monday 8th August, 2016.

Mr. Speaker: The Sitting stands adjourned until Monday 8th August, 2016 at 2 p.m.

Sitting adjourned accordingly at 3.40 a.m.