

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

43RD Sitting

Thursday, 13th October, 2016

Assembly convened at 2.03 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Welcoming Remark

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I welcome you back, after nine weeks of absence from the chamber. I hope that we are all fully rejuvenated and ready to face the task ahead.

There are some announcements which the Speaker will, on the next sitting, bring to the attention of the Hon. Members.

President to Address the National Assembly

Mr. Speaker: I have been informed, Hon. Members, that His Excellency the President will attend the chamber today to deliver a message to us. We will suspend the sitting to receive His Excellency and, then resume the sitting when His Excellency arrives. After the message of His Excellency, we will suspend the sitting again and then when His Excellency departs the precinct of Parliament we will resume to our business.

Hon. Members, I think the time, which I understand, His Excellency will arrive is at 2.15 p.m. I

see that we have a few minutes which we could use in moving ahead with some of our work.

Resignation of Mr. Ramson

Mr. Speaker: I was informed that the Mr. Charles Ramson has resigned his seat as a Member of Parliament. With Mr. Ramson's resignation a seat in the National Assembly has become vacant. The vacancy is in accordance with section 99 (a) of the Representation of the People Act, Chapter 1:03 to be filled by a person whose name is to be extracted from the list of candidates from which Mr. Ramson name was extracted. As Mr. Ramson's name was extracted from the People's Progressive Party (PPP) list of candidates in accordance with section 99 (a) of the said Act, I call upon the representative of the said list to further extract from that list the name of a person who is willing to become a Member of the National Assembly to fill the vacancy in the Assembly.

Leave

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, leave has been granted today to the Hon. Member Mr. Clement Rohee, Hon. Members Ms. Gail Teixeira and Mr. Komal Chand to be absent from today's sitting.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Papers and Reports were laid:

1. (i) Report of the Auditor General to the National Assembly on the Public Accounts of Guyana and on the Accounts of Ministries, Departments and Regions for the fiscal year ended 31st December, 2015.

2017 Budget Proposals Of Constitutional Agencies

- (ii) Parliament Office – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$1,723,483,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2017.
- (iii) Office of the Auditor General – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$771,215,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2017.

- (iv) Public and Police Service Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$95,236,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2017.
- (v) Teaching Service Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$150,741,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2017.
- (vi) Guyana Elections Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$5,822,974,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2017.
- (vii) Supreme Court – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$2,033,313,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2017.

[Speaker of the National Assembly]

Sitting suspended at 2.12 p.m.

Arrival of the His Excellency the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana.

Sitting resumed at 2.22 p.m.

**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE COOPERATIVE
REPUBLIC OF GUYANA ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, His Excellency the President is here to speak with us.

His Excellency the President of the Cooperative of Guyana [Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger]: Hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, Chancellor of the Judiciary, Hon. Justice Carl Singh, Speaker of the National Assembly Dr. Barton Scotland, Vice-Presidents, Ministers of Government, Hon. Members of the National Assembly, members of the diplomatic corps, Chief Justice, Her Worship the Mayor of Georgetown, members of the Judiciary, Chief of Staff of the Guyana Defence Force, Heads of the Disciplined Services, Chairman of the Service Commission, Auditor General, Clerk of the National Assembly, Permanent Secretaries, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen.

Let me start by congratulating the His Honour the Speaker on receiving his high national award, the Order of Roraima. It was a well-deserved award, not only for his past service, but for the prospect of things to come.

It is an honour for me, Mr. Speaker, to be allowed to address this honourable Assembly on the first day of the resumption of work after I am sure a well-deserved recess. I see that some people are still in recess. This is an important time in our lives and we are here for important business.

The quality of life is a measure of citizens' satisfaction with their lives. People's personal values and life experiences determine their level of satisfaction. This includes their health, independence, participation in community and civic activities, their personal development, physical and material well-being, recreation, relationships with other people and social support.

Citizens usually are uncomfortable with high levels of crime; insanitary conditions in the countryside and city and incivility by officials, all of which contribute to lowering the quality of life. These conditions should not be regarded as a permanent state. There are temporary problems which have to be solved.

The State, regional administrations, the media, municipalities, trade unions and civil society can do much to enhance the quality of life, to give citizens the feeling of satisfaction to solve the problems that affect them.

Public services are essential to citizens' quality of life. Public services involve public trust. Citizens expect public servants to serve the public interest with integrity and reliability in order to manage public resources efficiently.

Public trust encourages active citizen participation in society and the economy. It makes public agencies more accessible and more accountable. Reliable public services inspire public trust and create a favourable environment for human safety and for the functioning of businesses thereby contributing to well-functioning markets, economic growth and, consequently, a high quality of life.

Dreams of a 'good life' turned into a horrible nightmare at the dawn of the new millennium. The most unforgettable experiences and most frightening evidence of our descent into chaos were the bloody, drug-driven decade known as the 'Troubles.'

The 'Troubles' will be remembered as the darkest hour in our history. It was a time of the uninvestigated assassination of a Minister; of the investigation into the alleged implication of another Minister in the direction of a 'death squad' of the alleged implication of yet another

Minister in the acquisition of a computer to track the telephone communication and location of adversaries targeted for assassination.

2.28 p.m.

It was a time of arbitrary arrests; of disappearances, of torture of young men; the surge in armed robberies, narco-trafficking and gun-running. During that first, deadly decade, there were 1,317 murders and 7, 865 armed robberies, two arm robberies a day.

It was a time of deception and the cynical rejection of £4.9 million UK Security Sector Reform Action Plan for which a memorandum of understanding was signed in August 2007. It was a time of the rejection of recommendations of numerous security reform reports; it was a time of total disregard for the implementation of the National Drug Strategy Master Plan.

The evidence of the impact of the man-made criminal crisis is still visible. The damage is most manifest in the demoralisation of the public and security services, in the erosion of public trust and the lowering of the quality of life.

The grisly security situation was accompanied by a parlous economic situation. The undermining of public infrastructure by the encouragement of cronyism led to serious, costly, serial scandals as seen in the construction the Kato Secondary School, the Hope Canal bridge, the river-front revetment at Kumaka, Barabina road and Moruka bridge, Supenaam stelling and the still unusable Ministry of Social Protection's building right here in High Street, Georgetown.

The paralysis of public telecommunications became evident in the incompetent or corrupt implementation of the US\$70 million Fibre Optic Cable Project and the misapplication of computers under the One Laptop per Family Project.

The environmental policy will be remembered, forever, but not fondly for the administration's responsibility for the most destructive environmental disaster in Guyana's history - the catastrophic 2005 flood. This was an event of incalculable damage, of disease, of discomfort and, in some cases, of death.

The exaggerated emphasis on narrow elements of the Low Carbon Development Strategy obscured the absence of strategic thought and action. Guyana's rich biodiversity, wildlife, its

wetlands, coastal zone, rivers were not adequately protected against the ravages of lawless logging, mining and solid waste mismanagement.

Mr. Speaker, your Government entered a depressing financial landscape in May 2015. The economic legacy that this nation inherited was characterised by a lack of strategic planning and whimsical decision-making. The absence of a policy to provide employment opportunities for youth and to reduce extreme poverty and the failure to energise the manufacturing sector weakened our economy.

Economic mismanagement was accompanied by huge debts for unpaid international obligations and court judgements. The gravest financial problem was the bankruptcy of the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) which owed \$89 billion in debts. Your Government was forced to divert money from economic development and social programme to rescue the ailing corporation with an immediate injection of \$12 billion. An additional \$11 billion had to be provided the next year, 2016, making a total of \$23 billion bail out in 18 months.

These transfers exclude the servicing of GuySuCo's debts in respect of the Skeldon Estate Modernisation Project, a monstrous and monumental US\$200 million mistake and, probably, Guyana's single most costly industrial catastrophe of all time.

Paddy farmers in the rice industry were not spared the previous administration's reckless mismanagement. The PetroCaribe Fund - used to meet payments to farmers for rice and paddy shipped to Venezuela - contained less than US\$1 million in May 2015. Your Government once again was forced to make available nearly \$4 billion immediately so that poor paddy farmers could be paid.

Mr. Speaker, your Government inherited a large number of liabilities, including judgements in excess of US\$34 million or G\$7 billion in favour of NH Elias, in respect of the East Bank Demerara Road; judgement for \$1.3 billion in favour of Rudisa Beverages; judgement in favour of Trinidad Cement Limited; settlement for \$1.4 billion with B.K. Tiwari on Haags Bosch Project and several other judgements that will cost the State over \$1 billion.

Your Government, also, was obliged to provide another \$5.4 billion bail out the National Insurance Scheme as a consequence of the previous administration's irresponsible Colonial Life Insurance Company (CLICO) Limited investment.

Your Government, despite encountering this immense mountain of debt, was able to meet commitments to the nation's hard-working public servants. The minimum wage grew from \$39,520 in May 2015 to \$55,000 in January 2016, an increase of almost 40% in 7 months.

Public servants have benefited, in addition, from the raising of the tax threshold, from \$600,000 in May 2015 to 660,000 in January 2016. They benefited from the removal of income tax from workers' contributions to the National Insurance Scheme and a tax-free payment of \$50,000 to all workers earning less than \$500,000 in December 2015.

These benefits, taken together, augmented workers disposable income significantly. Collective bargaining with public service unions could result in yet more benefits in the form of increased increments, allowances and adjustments made for 'de-bunching.' Old age pensions have been increased from \$13,120 to \$18,200 or by 38.7% and public assistance increased by 24% during the same period, that is, May 2015 to April 2016.

Your Government's overarching objective is to ensure a 'good life' for all of our citizens. We have chosen a green pathway to achieve that higher 'quality of life'.

Guyana's 'green agenda' is a comprehensive, multi-sectorial development programme. It is not limited narrowly to low carbon initiatives but is a broad based development programme, which incorporates:

- management of our unique biodiversity;
- management of our vulnerable coastal zone and our valuable protected areas; and,
- management of solid waste and sanitation.

Guyana's 'green agenda' will promote 'green economic' sectors such as the development of climate resilient agriculture, ecotourism and information communications technology and promote renewable energy generation. It will ensure a diversified and resilient economy while

promoting 'green' growth and 'green' employment and secure a clean and healthy environment for future generations.

Mr. Speaker, Members of the National Assembly, ladies and gentlemen, your Government announced on 1st October 2016 National Tree Day, the establishment of the Department of the Environment within the Ministry of the Presidency. That department will ensure more effective communication, cooperation and coordination among the Government agencies concerned with climate change, energy generation, environmental protection, forest conservation, national parks and protected areas, rivers and with the protection of our wildlife. The department has been tasked with developing a master plan to achieve the objectives of our 'green agenda.'

Guyana established itself as a global leader on the environmental front as early as 1989. We accorded to the international community the use of 371,000 hectares of our forests - an area larger than Malta - an area that would be used for research into the sustainable management of our forest resources and an area that would be used by the whole world.

The Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development (IICRCD) remains in the vanguard of our campaign to conserve our forests, to counter the adverse effects of climate change and to conduct research into our rich biodiversity.

Iwokrama will be the site, from the next financial year, for the establishment of an international institute for biodiversity. That institute will allow local, regional and international students to come here and do research on rich and diverse flora and fauna.

We will set aside, also, an additional two million hectares of forests and wetlands for conservation, in accordance with the commitments we made under the Paris Agreement on climate change. Protected areas will be established in every single administrative region of Guyana.

Environmental degradation caused by reckless logging and mining remains a source of concern. We will continue the process of reclaiming mined-out areas in our country and of restoring the ecological integrity of our forested areas.

Loggers and miners will be under a legal obligation to ensure sound environmental practices. Your Government will reboot the fledgling ecotourism sector in 2017. Our unmatched

biodiversity is a world class product which will allow us to create a globally competitive ecotourism sector.

Public infrastructure, connecting our hinterland communities to each other and to the coastland, is pivotal to the development of the 'green state'. Our ecotourism destinations are located in the hinterland in large measures. Infrastructure is needed to access these attractions.

We will continue to advance in 2017, initiatives for climate adaptation. A programme to bolster and better manage and maintain our sea defences will be developed with our international partners. It will form part of the matrix of measures in the 2017 budget of estimate. We will guard, also, against the effects of flooding by strengthening our drainage systems, particularly along the coastland. We will also counter the effects of prolonged dry weather on our wildlife by establishing sanctuaries for endanger species.

Your Government will intensify its improvement of aerodromes, bridges, roads and stelling in order to enhance communication between the hinterland and coastland. We will begin negotiations with national and international partners to build a bridge across the Essequibo River in 2017.

We aim at improving the pace of economic development by removing bottlenecks to the implementation of infrastructural projects. Planning units will be established within all ministries. National procurement procedures will be strengthened to address the institutional deficiencies which led to poor implementation and monitoring of public infrastructural projects.

2.43 p.m.

Public contracts are a key concern of our Administration. We will seek international support to streamline our procurement systems and methodologies within Ministries and Budget agencies. A Bid Review Committee has already been established and has begun to work. The Public Procurement Commission will soon be brought into existence to improve the integrity of public procurement.

Mr. Speaker, Members of the National Assembly, your Government established the Ministry of Public Telecommunications in January, 2016. We are proud of having passed legislation which

will allow for the further liberalisation and modernisation of Guyana's telecommunications sector. We will extend telecommunications services to all 10 Regions.

The e-governance programme will eventually network all Government agencies and will facilitate efficient data sharing among those agencies. This network will then be extended to citizens so that they can access Government services online. Information communication technology (ICT) is integral to our 'green agenda'. It will become a major driver of economic diversification.

Internet connectivity of Government buildings will be extended. Every Government building, including airports, hospitals, markets, police stations, post offices, schools and this National Assembly, will have access to the internet in coming years.

Information communication technology will impact positively on our educational system. We have already reconfigured the One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) Initiative into the One Laptop Per Teacher (OLPT) Initiative in order to allow our teachers, the guardians of quality assurance in education, to be better equipped to improve educational attainment in our schools. We will continue the nationwide distribution of computers to our teachers, an initiative which commenced, appropriately, on 5th October - World Teachers Day.

Your Government intends to make Guyana safe for this and future generations. We will do so not only by combatting crime and criminals, but by combating the causes of crime and its links with international and transnational crime.

We established a National Security Committee. We are in the process of establishing a new National Anti-Narcotics Agency (NANA) to address the mother of all crimes – the trafficking in narcotics. We will establish a new National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) to ensure better surveillance of our borders and our coasts.

We have also made a decision to re-engage the United Kingdom with a view to restoring the aborted Security Sector Reform Action Plan (SSRAP). That Plan will commence soon with the arrival of experts from the United Kingdom to advise us on the crafting of a national strategy to respond to domestic and transnational crime, including narcotics trafficking and gunrunning.

Aerial surveillance over the maritime zone over the past year led to a drastic reduction in the incidence of piracy. We will continue to augment the Guyana Police Force Marine Branch. The Police Force Mounted Branch will also be expanded to enable it to conduct patrols in the Savannahs and in the backdams which are not easily accessible by vehicular patrols. The Corps of Wardens will be brought into being to enforce the law with regard to mining, logging, hunting wildlife and trafficking in persons in the hinterland.

The 'green' economy will require significant new local and foreign investment. We recognise the importance of human safety and a secure environment, and the legal framework for attracting such investment. We want to protect our citizens, fisherfolk, households and farmlands.

Public services, including cultural development, education, health, justice, recreation, security, sport and social protection, are provided by the State. The provision of quality public services forms the basis for increased opportunities and wellbeing of our citizens and communities.

Public services must be accessible to every citizen, in every town and in every region. No citizen should have to leave his or her region in order to access public services. We will accelerate the decentralisation of public services alongside the development of capital towns in 2017. The provision of quality public services is associated with enhancing the quality of life of citizens. We are mindful of the need to improve public administration to make those public services more accountable, more accessible and more affordable.

Continuous training and filling resource gaps in the public service will be integral to the process of reforming our system of public administration. We will improve the professionalism of the public service in 2017. The establishment of the public service staff college will enable the training of a corps of public officials who will be better equipped to ensure quality and timely delivery of public goods and services. Attention will be paid to filling human resource deficits, particularly in our rural and hinterland regions.

Your Government is committed to good governance. It is committed to reforming the Constitution. It will, in this regard, convene a consultative constitution reform commission in 2017.

We have already demonstrated our determination to ensure that local government elections are held. We will, without fail, ensure that those elections are held every three years, as required by the Constitution. Citizens' rights to elect representatives of their choice at free and regular elections will never be suspended again.

Public policy will be undergirded by an inclusionary political process. The empowering of local communities through the holding of the historic Local Government Elections on 18th March, 2016 created a platform for Government to be brought closer to the people and for authority to be exercised by the peoples' own elected representatives.

The derailment of public policy marked by the previous Administration's bizarre determination not to conduct local government elections, marked by the uprooting of neighbourhood democratic councils and marked by the imposition of a perverse form of dictatorial rule on local government organs, has been brought to an end.

The previous Administration's disrespect shown to the public service by abandoning the principle of collective bargaining with the Guyana Public Service Union contributed to the demoralisation of that service. The arbitrary imposition of salary increases damaged the service's professional ethos, undermined its moral and the careers of public servants through the appointment of political permanent secretaries. Your Government's legislative agenda for the next year is aimed at correcting some of these aberrations and deficiencies.

Mr. Speaker, Members of the National Assembly and Your Excellencies, your Government's agenda, aimed at ensuring a good life for all, will guarantee the protection of the interests of Guyanese by strengthening our legal architecture. Your Government, in this regard, is committed to promoting standards of probity in public office. We will also ensure that those who unlawfully expropriate State property will be brought to justice. We will ensure the recovery of all stolen State assets.

We will amend the Integrity Commission Act, which will provide for a revised Code of Conduct for public officials, *inter alia*. The State Assets Recovery Bill will establish a State Assets Recovery Agency to recover State property that has been unlawfully acquired through civil proceedings.

Your Government will also seek to improve the efficacy of our immigration services by tabling the Immigration (Amendment) Bill to delink the Immigration Department from the Guyana Police Force. The National Registration (Amendment) Bill will guard against identity theft by allowing for inclusion of biometrics of citizens to be recorded on their national registration cards.

The justice administration system will be fortified by the promulgation of three important pieces of legislation. The Witness Protection Bill will give effect to the Caribbean Community's Agreement Establishing the Regional Justice Protection Programme (1999) which came into force in 2006. The Bill provides for the establishment of a programme to protect certain witnesses and other persons.

The Protected Disclosures Bill, referred to as the "Whistle blowers Bill", aims at combating corruption and other wrongdoing by encouraging and facilitating persons to make disclosures of improper conduct. The Deeds and Commercial Registries Authority (Amendment) Bill will provide for a change in membership of the governing board of the Deeds and Commercial Registries.

Your Government will pay greater attention to safety in the aviation sector and on our roadways. The Aircraft Accident and Incident Investigation Bill will provide for the establishment of an authority to investigate aircraft accidents and incidents.

A safer aviation sector will be pursued through the modernising of civil aviation legislation and the amendment of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport Corporation Act to strengthen the Airport's executive and operational functions and capabilities.

The Road Act (Amendment) Bill will place emphasis on the removal of derelict vehicles and impose weight limits on our roads.

A stable industrial climate is integral to protecting the rights of our workers and ensuring an environment that is conducive to the workers' wellbeing. The Industrial Relations Tribunal Bill will provide, *inter alia*, for the establishment of an independent tribunal to settle industrial and labour disputes.

Your Government will amend the Marriage Act to put new procedures in place for non-nationals applying for a special marriage licence.

The Tobacco Control Bill will contribute to the protection of the health of our citizens.

We aim at the development of a cohesive society, one in which confrontation is replaced by cooperation. The removal of inequalities based on geography and ethnicity will lay the foundation for a better quality of life for everyone. We will work to reduce prejudice and violence. We will fashion a multicultural society characterised by tolerance and by mutual respect.

The projection of our national interests abroad will ensure the protection of our interests at home. This requires a professional foreign service to ensure that the national interest is advanced internationally. Our principal foreign policy objective is the safeguarding of our territorial integrity and sovereignty. Our Diplomats also will be aggressively pursuing increased trade and investment.

Your Government will assume the chairmanship of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in January, 2017. We will use that opportunity to continue the process of strengthening the pillars of regional integration and advancing the development of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME).

We adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of which the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are compatible with Guyana's own social agenda. The 2017 National Budget will reflect the harmonisation of the SDGs with our own national development plans, particularly in the social sector.

The 2017 National Budget will be laid in this House in a few weeks' time. The preparation of this Budget started several months ago and has been characterised by an inclusive and consultative approach. It will be designed around a results-based format. It will be guided by the objectives of fiscal sustainability, institutional sustainability and environmental sustainability.

Budget measures will include renewable energy generation and improved energy efficiency – key initiatives of our green agenda. It will include Guyana's adoption of renewable energy generation and increased use of energy-efficient technologies.

2.58 p.m.

We will graduate our economy increasingly towards greater renewable energy use across all sectors of the country. Government buildings will be powered, eventually, by renewable energy sources and will utilise energy-efficient technologies. Incentives will be offered to the private sector to follow the Government's lead.

The 2017 National Budget will evince measures aimed at developing a more diversified and climate-resilient agricultural sector. We will promote agricultural expansion further inland by introducing mega farms in the Intermediate and Rupununi Savannahs. We will promote the expansion of non-traditional agricultural production, such as coconuts, fruits and spices; and we will promote the increase of aromatic rice production which will add to the rice sector at a higher end of the value chain.

Public trust

Ladies and gentlemen, the 'green' state that we envisage will ensure that we bequeath to our children and grandchildren a secure and safe future, and a higher quality of life. The 'green' pathway to development will allow for us to sustain growth; to generate new sectors; and to provide additional jobs. It will allow us to build a more resilient and diversified economy; to promote human development; to reduce inequalities and ensure the safety, security and wellbeing of the citizens of our country.

The discovery of large petroleum reserves in our offshore waters is an exciting development. The emergence of a petroleum sector, however, will not derail our march towards establishing a 'green' State. We are wedded, irrevocably, to that mission.

Guyana celebrates its fiftieth anniversary of Independence this year. We are celebrating our Year of Renaissance. We owe it to future generations to use the remaining months and days of this year to continue to build bridges across the abyss of discord.

The two sides have not always agreed but, from time to time, they have found common ground in the pursuit of the common good. And let us hope, despite the absence of the Opposition, today, we will continue to search for and find avenues for compromise and consensus.

Guyana is pursuing a people-centred ‘green agenda’. This agenda can become a platform for increased political cooperation between the two sides of the House. Our legislative agenda is evidence of the scope for consensus.

Mr. Speaker, I trust that this honourable House will consider these few words of mine and lend support to the goal of attaining a higher quality of life through a ‘green’ development trajectory.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: I thank Your Excellency for the message which you have given to Parliament today. I am tempted to say retrospect and prospect. We do appreciate it and we pledge our continued efforts in the achievement of the ‘good life’ for Guyana.

Hon. Members, there will be a short suspension to permit His Excellency to leave the Chamber and the precincts. Then we will resume our business.

Sitting Suspended at 3.01 p.m.

Sitting Resumed at 3.19 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Sitting is resumed. I will continue the presentation of the Constitutional Agencies’ budget proposals for 2017.

I last mentioned the Supreme Court.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Reports and Papers were laid:

In accordance with section 3B(2) of the Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Act 2015 – Act No.4 of 2015 to present the recommendation and comments of the Minister of Finance on the Annual Budget Proposals of Constitutional Agencies.

- (viii) Public Prosecutions – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$206,258,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2017.
- (ix) Office of the Ombudsman – Current Estimates totalling \$50,311,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2017.

- (x) Public Appellate Tribunal – Current Estimates totalling \$13,933,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2017.
- (xi) Ethnic Relations Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$141,204,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2017.
- (xii) Judicial Service Commission – Current Estimates totalling \$15,020,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2017.
- (xiii) Indigenous Peoples’ Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$33,162,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2017.
- (xiv) Human Rights Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$74,995,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2017.
- (xv) Rights of the Child Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$97,009,000 the period ending 31st December, 2017.
- (xvi) Women and Gender Equality Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$62,916,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2017.
- (xvii) Public Procurement Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$0 for the period ending 31st December, 2017. (2017 Budget Proposals Of Constitutional Agencies) [Speaker of the National Assembly]
- (2) (i) The National Sports Commission for the year ended 31st December, 2011 to 2013.
- (ii) The National Trust of Guyana for the year ended 31st December, 2013 and 2014. [Minister within the Ministry of Education]
- (3) (i) Financial Paper No. 3/2016 – Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling \$9,518,122,347 for the period 2016-01-01 to 2016-12-31, and I name 27th October, as the date of consideration for this Financial Paper. [Minister of Finance]
- (4) (i) Audited Financial Statements of the Guyana Water Incorporated for the year ended 31st December, 2014. [Minister of Communities]

- (5) (i) Annual Reports of the Protected Area Trust Fund for the years 2014 and 2015.
[*Minister of Natural Resources*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before we proceed to the next item, it is my very pleasant duty to present to you and to record here in this Assembly, the happy occurrence of the award to the Leader of Government Business, the Hon. Prime Minister, the award of Honoris Causa Degree (Doctor of Letters) from the Bharath University, Chennai, on the 5th October, 2016.

You would no doubt join with me in offering congratulations to the...[*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Hon. Members, the Speaker is addressing the gathering.

You would no doubt join with me in offering congratulations to the Hon. Prime Minister.
[*Applause*]

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, in my absence, I learnt of Your Honour's receipt, conferral of the Order of Roraima (OR) National Honour on you, Your Honour, Hon. Dr. Barton. U.A. Scotland, and I ask that it be recorded that this National Assembly offers you sincere congratulations on your recognition by His Excellency the President and the people and nation of Guyana. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Prime Minister for his statement.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Speaker, I wish to join the Prime Minister in congratulating you on this achievement and wish you continued good health and service to the nation. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member.

Hon. Members, I thank you for your kindness. I shall continue to do as I have been doing in the past.

Thank you.

3.29 p.m.

STATEMENT BY MINISTERS, INCLUDING POLICY STATEMENTS

Answers to Questions on Financial Papers Nos. 1 and 2 of 2016

Minister of Public Health [Dr. Norton]: Mr. Speaker, on Monday, 8th August, 2016, during consideration of the Estimates of Financial Papers Nos. 1 and 2/2016, I was questioned extensively by Members of Parliament (MPs) representing the Opposition, People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). In the process, I gave answers that were, in some parts, based on my personal knowledge and ability and, in other parts, based on information and advice presented to me.

Since 8th August, 2016, I have come to the firm position that the answers given to two questions relating to the payment to New Guyana Pharmaceutical Corporation (GPC) Inc. and the storage of drugs in the bond at Lot 29 Sussex Street, Georgetown, were not accurate, as these were based on information supplied to me. In the circumstances, I wish to express my sincere and profound regret to His Excellency Brigadier David Granger, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana; His Honour, Dr. Barton U. A. Scotland, Cacique Crown of Honour (CCH), M.P., Speaker of the National Assembly; Prime Minister, Mr. Moses Nagamootoo; and my Parliamentary Colleagues of A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC); Members of the Parliamentary Opposition; and all others who were present or were able to observe the process of the consideration of the Estimates relative to the approval for payments to New GPC Inc. and Linden Holding Inc.

As the Minister of Public Health, I know that a high standard of duty and care is expected of me and the staff of the Ministry of Public Health, so I take, fully, the responsibility for this unfortunate episode and give my full commitment that it would not reoccur.

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

MOTION

ADOPTION OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY 2015 OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA

WHEREAS the National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana was laid in the National Assembly on 30th June, 2016;

AND WHEREAS the Government of Guyana is desirous of the National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana being adopted by the National Assembly;

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly adopts the National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.” *[Minister within the Ministry of Education]*

Minister within the Ministry of Education [Ms. Henry]: Mr. Speaker, I rise to address the motion, which stands in my name, calling for the adoption of the National Youth Policy of Guyana 2015.

Let me, from the onset, make mention of the fact that, on assuming office in May, 2015, very preliminary work was done to conceptualise the National Youth Policy. Having reviewed what existed, it was then determined, through a consultative and collaborative process, what was needed. I am pleased to say that, coming out of that process, this long awaited Youth Policy has been finalised.

This Policy takes into consideration the groundwork laid by the Ministry formerly known as the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, and seeks to enlarge overall advancement of all Guyanese youths.

It is no secret that this Policy comes after an uncharacteristic and prolonged absence of any policy direction, and even after many calls from the young people of this country on the previous Government for a policy that establishes goals and addresses areas of actions that are transformational and achievable.

This National Youth Policy is quite resolute and innovative and differs in a number of ways from the preliminary draft. Let me point out that this Policy does not address youth solely as a cohort from 14 to 35 years but, rather, it seeks the development of youth as a process which begins in early childhood. To this end, the Policy states that the development of youth is a process beginning from early childhood to adulthood. In addition, there is increased recognition that the

first few years of a child's life is a particularly sensitive period in the process of his or her development, laying the foundation for childhood and beyond, not only for cognitive functioning, behavioural concerns, social and self-regulatory capacities and physical health, as captured on pages 2 to 3.

This Policy further states that, while youth is categorised as 14 to 35 years, this Government recognises persons within the ages 10 years to 14 years as pre-adolescent and is cognisant of the unique challenges and vulnerabilities they face during this phase of their lives. In this transitional stage of physical and psychological development, which general occurs during this period, their needs and challenges have also informed the youth development policies, as outlined on page 3.

It is important to note that the initial vision statement in the draft did not, in any way, speak to youth being united, involved in decision-making processes, educated, well-trained and happy. These have all been included in this National Youth Policy. Hence, the vision of this Policy is aligned with the vision of this Government, as it states that we envision:

“A nation in which young people are united, educated, trained, safe, happy, healthy and integrally involved in the decision-making processes, while enjoying equality of opportunity and equal access to resources of our country and are politically, economically and socially empowered.”

This Youth Policy clearly identifies the attributes of Guyanese youths and what they should aspire to acquire, as outlined on page 10.

Additionally, the Policy clearly identifies 20 qualities which our youths should seek to acquire, as outlined on pages 10 and 11. These were all developed after consultation with the young people themselves and other stakeholders.

The Government of Guyana acknowledges that the situation is not only dynamic, but evolving and that this Policy cannot be sacrosanct or static. Therefore, there is a built-in mechanism for its review. To this end, the Policy states that the Government of Guyana is cognisant that what is relevant today may not be relevant tomorrow. In addition, the Government fully acknowledges that there might be emerging issues that have not been addressed in the current version of this Policy. In an effort to address any emerging issues as well as to assist in the identification of

future and incipient challenges, as well as to assess the effectiveness of the policy in terms of accomplishing end results, the National Youth Policy would be periodically reviewed and updated within a five-year period or earlier, if necessary, as outlined on pages 36 and 37.

I have to point out that this Policy is based on the concept that, in order to empower young people, we have to engage in training for employment and training for entrepreneurship. The National Youth Policy caters for the development of a national youth empowerment action plan which will include comprehensive and strategic programmes and projects to be implemented. The apposite tools and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating effectiveness of the strategies are also part of the framework.

This Policy is rooted in the Constitution of Guyana and addresses five strategic areas which include improving the social, emotional and cultural skills of young Guyanese; producing a productive and enterprising youth work force; developing quality education and market-oriented skills; encouraging leadership, participation and representation; and promoting good health, security and safety. Let me say that, as Members of this honourable House, it is imperative that we be fully acquainted with the areas addressed in this National Youth Policy 2015 on several levels.

Firstly, this Policy is one that has been in the making for over a decade and benefited from several rounds of consultations, embracing youth groups, international organisations, educators, employers, trade unions, religious leaders and other civil society actors. This National Youth Policy is part of the Government's broader plan for greater democratic participation and equitable economic and social progress for all. For this Government, a national youth policy certainly needs to adhere to and be informed by appropriate principles and standards. This Policy is one that the young people can claim ownership of as it was built with their input, knowledge and experiences, and takes into account contributions at the local, regional and international levels. It is focused on action resulting in tangible outcomes so that our young people, their families and this country can benefit.

3.44 p.m.

Additionally, I have to say that this Policy is inextricably linked to the empowerment of young people as individuals and Guyanese citizens through life skills development support, an enabling environment, arts, sport, culture and volunteerism.

Furthermore, it seeks to create an enabling environment for the reduction of youth unemployment through self-employment, entrepreneurship, and demand-driven education and training. This policy aims to develop an effective and dynamic national system of formal and informal education that is accessible by all young people, that ensures functional literacy and equip our young people with the skills demanded by the market and what is needed to overcome existing challenges. Likewise, it seeks to ensure that young people are respected, and become active participants and representatives in decision-making at the village, neighbourhood, regional, national and international levels.

As a final point, it speaks to strengthening social support systems for young people, while improving conditions for their safety, health and well-being. In pursuing these strategic areas, the Government of Guyana accepts its shared responsibility to advance youth development in partnership with the young people themselves, the private sector and civil society, as outlined on page 1. This policy will guide youth work, grounded by seven clearly defined principles found on pages 12 to 14.

At this stage, let me turn my attention to the Youth Development Policy Priorities. Notwithstanding the comprehensive and fresh approach that this policy offers, there is need to extricate and prioritise. Hence, the nine priority areas identified which speaks to identity, empowerment, education, skills development, employment, entrepreneurship, health and well-being, political participation and representation.

The policy also points out, in great detail, the critical role of sport in youth development and it thus states:

“The GoG recognises that sport contributes to social cohesion, improve health and wellness, increases pride in the country and community, generates economic benefits and contributes to the development of stronger communities”.

At this stage, permit me to take a few minutes to point out the general thrust of the Youth Policy. The aim of this Youth Policy, its concomitant programmes, projects and other activities, is to transform and empower the youth of Guyana. The following are the key elements of the National Youth Policy of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana:

It speaks of a vision for the future. Young people should be respected, valued and listened to and be supported and encouraged to develop their innate abilities and talents for the benefit of themselves, their communities and their country, and in building fulfilling personal and social relationships.

Additionally, in seeking to realise this vision for the future of young people, several overarching values have informed all aspects of the National Youth Policy. These values include, respect for the individuality, worth and dignity of all young people, regardless of their beliefs, ethnicity, physical and mental capacities, socio-economic background, sex or gender and for the right to have their voices heard and to be informed of all issues that concern them and, more importantly, for the right to determine their own future.

The recognition of the rights and privileges enshrined in the Constitution of Guyana, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child are all upheld in this policy.

Furthermore, sustained support for all young people in developing their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being, and in fulfilling their potential and aspirations in meeting their needs are also addressed. There are measures to ensure young people's active participation, sense of responsibility, caring and capacity to build quality and life enhancing relationships with their parents, siblings, peers and elders, be it in the home, school, workplace and community, are considered. Through the promotion of programmes, projects and other activities are aimed at motivating, developing self-esteem and hopefulness in young people in general, and at-risk youth in particular, and to contribute to the building of strong families, schools, communities and other institutions that are necessary for the empowerment of young people.

The promotion of an education system that ensures the inculcation of spirituality, morality, the attitudes and habits which will contribute to the development of a well-rounded and empowered youth, to maximise their talents and abilities and the promotion of a volunteer, patriotic, tolerant,

cooperative, self-helping, self-reliant, self-respecting, respectful, responsible and empowered youth. This would include the provision and facilitation of access to computers and the promotion of the understanding of, and access to, communication and information technology as important tools in the process of empowering the youth of Guyana. As I said before, the promotion of sport, culture and the arts as necessary activities in the development of a well-rounded and empowered youth which is also enshrined in this Policy.

Before I conclude my presentation, let me say that the young people have spoken by way of this National Youth Policy of Guyana 2015. Youth from all levels of the society are catered for in this policy. The programmes and initiatives are geared toward developing Guyanese youth that function in a global environment; that they are aware of themselves; that they know and exhibit self-worth; that they are patriotic and actively involved in the development of Guyana; that they value themselves as a resource for community and national development; that they have good deportment, a positive attitude, integrity and good habits; that they are imbued with the spirit and practice of volunteerism; that they possess strong leadership qualities; that they are knowledgeable of country, well read, well-rounded and involved in social activities; that they are creative, industrious, skilled, ambitious and qualified to fulfil career and vocational aspirations while enjoying their youth; that they are financially literate, have an entrepreneurial spirit, not averse to risk taking and are willing to explore new and innovative avenues to develop self and country; that they are technologically savvy; that they are team players who understand and embrace cultural diversity, accepts various differences of Guyanese society; that they recognise the importance of compromise; that they are tolerant and respectful of others; that they promote a sense of national unity and national cohesion; and that they are responsible and reliable.

The youth are undoubtedly the present and future of this country and must be engaged, from an early age, to ensure sustainable planning and continued development of this country, thus creating opportunities for the young people of Guyana to be involved in the decision-making process and growth of this country, which is essential. This policy is not only an embodiment, but a demonstration of the Government of Guyana's agenda to do just that.

I, therefore, commend this motion to this honourable House, with the anticipation that it will be unanimously supported as a motion that will promote the development of the young people of this country.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Ali: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great honour and privilege to speak on this very important national policy. This policy that would shape our collective national will in defining, promoting, advancing and developing, for implementation, a strategy that would be to the ultimate benefit and upliftment of the youths of our country. In defining such a strategy and in bringing such a national policy to the Parliament, the Hon. Minister must cover certain essential information. For example, the people would be like to know how much was spent on the finalisation of this National Youth Policy 2015; the nation would like to know the level to which we went to achieve consensus. I will give a simple example. The Progressive Youth Organisation (PYO) is one of the largest and oldest youth movements in this country. If one wants to develop a strategy that is national in nature and captures the national interest, one cannot avoid achieving political consensus. Political consensus becomes an important ingredient to the development of a national youth policy. This is just one example where the Progressive Youth Organisation was left out of the process of finalising this document.

Context is also very important. Only a few moments ago, we saw how important context is and how important it is to understand the context in which strategies and policies are developed, lest we forget the factual basis that lays the foundation for the development of such policy.

The development of a national youth policy is not the end. The implementation strategy and the costing of the policy are of critical importance for us to understand the timeframe in which this policy would be implemented. The Hon. Minister said that the National Youth Policy 2015 would be updated within the five-year period. If there is a national youth policy that will take us in the medium term, then we are supposed to have, with that policy and with that strategy, the budgetary and financial plan that would allow the implementation of the programmes in the policy. That section is completely missing.

3.59 p.m.

There was a time when 94¢ on every \$1 revenue earned in this country was used to repay foreign debt. The space to find resources for youth development and to invest in the youths was never there because 94¢ was being utilised on every dollar earned just to repay and service foreign debt. Today, however, under the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) Government, we were

able to create that space to the extent that we are using less than 10¢ earn on every \$1 revenue to repay that debt and it is important for us to understand this context. No national policy can be framed or implemented in an environment where there is no fiscal space to accommodate the expenditure that would give meat to what is being proposed here.

We came from a period when our foreign debt was about \$2.2 billion dollars. Today, we have reduced that by more than 50% or close to 50%. This too will allow us the fiscal room to invest in the youths and to implement a plan that will advance the welfare of our young people. If one looks at the Millennium Development Goal structure, on the development of youth policy, one would see an entire section dedicated to economic empowerment. How do we intend to empower the young people? We cannot empower the youths by these four lines that are written here. There must be a set of initiatives and a policy-driven framework that would give the young people an understanding of how we are going to go about empowering them to become entrepreneurs and empowering them economically.

For example, under the PPP/C Government, we ensured that, in every single sector, there was a strategic outlook, and particular attention was paid to the youths and women. One would recall that there was the Poor Rural Community Support Service Project that looked at empowering young people, especially in the riverine, hinterland and farming communities. The project was to empower them and to bring out their entrepreneurial skills beyond the provision of primary products from farming.

Under that project, we were able to develop many small agro-processing industries, most of which are owned and operated by young people. We had the Agricultural Support Programme, another programme that had a specific component aligned to young people and the Hon. Minister of Finance is aware of this. There was the Mortgage Interest Relief (MIR) Programme for young homeowners, which has now been cancelled by this Government. We had the Linden Economic Advancement Programme (LEAP), the Revolving Fund for young people, the Young Professionals Housing programme, the Women of Worth (WOW) initiative, the Youth Entrepreneurial Programme and the accessibility of loans.

In order to empower young people, we must give them the ability to own items, for example, their own homes. There was a time when the dream of home ownership for the youths was non-

existent. The interest rate for a housing loan, at that time, was about 37%. Today, the interest rate for a housing loan is between 4–10 %. This is the structured transformation that would allow youths to prosper; that would empower youth; and that would allow young people to grow in this economy.

We continued on this agenda. That is why we went to India and negotiated, while we were in Government, the funds to establish the first Centre of Excellence for Information Technology in this part of this world. The Government has inherited this and we hope that the Government would actively continue to move towards the implementation of this programme that would empower our young people. We went to the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and negotiated for the Hospitality Institute in Guyana so that we could have young people trained, at a higher level, for the services industry. When we built the Marriott Hotel and invested in an upgraded airport, it was to ensure that our young people would be trained and equipped to function in the most modern environment that exists. *[Interruption]*

These economic investments, which the Government did not support, were well–crafted in the interest of the future of our young people. If one would visit the Marriott Hotel now, which the Hon. Carl Greenidge visits most mornings, one would see how many young people are employed there. *[Interruption]*

In investing in youths, we must also identify the most vulnerable youth population. We must engage the section of the population that requires specific and special attention. That is why we had invested more than \$1.1 billion, annually, in the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF). That is why we had invested more than \$700 million dollars in the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). But do you know that Mr. Speaker? In this entire document on the National Youth Policy, the word “Amerindian” is not mentioned once and we are calling this document a National Youth Policy document.

The Hon. Members do not understand what I have just said, and that is, one has to have targeted population with special needs and circumstances. Otherwise, the policy would be too broad and not specific enough to deal with a specific population. That is what is wrong with this strategy. This strategy has failed to identify the specific.... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, an Hon. Member is on the floor, allow him to make the point that he is making. You have the floor Sir.

Mr. Ali: Thank you Sir. I have tried to outline, just for the Hon. Members on that side, for them to understand how important the context and the formulation of a national policy for youths is, when linked to the wider economic and sectoral issues. For example, if we want to encourage our youths to stay and invest in agriculture, this policy does not address how we are going to do that. What are the specific initiatives that could be put in place? What are the incentives that we could give in order to help young people to move towards agriculture, whether one moves to agro-processing or to a higher level of agriculture production?

The document states that we have to re-align the educational output with the requirement of the labour force. So if one wants to go the University of Guyana and let us say that there is a greater demand for doctors than there is for sociologists, how are we going to drive students' interest towards that? What framework are we going to place this policy in? We cannot just list it and think that it would happen. We have to induce the young people. We have to give them an incentive to move into the direction in which we would like them to go.

Any policy or programme must be able to give us measurable indicators so that the implementation could be verified. The Hon. Minister said that we would review. We cannot review what is here. There are no measurable indicators; there no analysis of the assumption. So, unless we have these things, how are we going to measure progress? A national youth policy is not a *gaff session*. A national youth policy is a very important document.

Another important aspect for the development of youths is education. When the PPP/C was in Government, we had a School Uniform Grant, a feeding programme, and a transportation allowance. We distributed textbooks and we advanced technical education. It was under the PPP/C Government that we saw new technical institutes in Essequibo, Lenora, Corentyne and Region 5. It was under PPP/C Government that we sought to expand technical education. It was under the PPP/C Government that we took university education to Berbice. It was under the PPP/C Government, that we targeted young people for the teaching profession when we took the training programme into the various regions. All kinds of remarks that are bordering the line of ethnic issues are being used here. The word "racist" and it is allowed in this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Ms. Ally: What racist?

Mr. Ali: What did you say just now?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please resume your seat. You address the Speaker. The Speaker will not permit cross talks. If you wish to continue then you must address the Speaker. Please proceed.

Mr. Ali: I will definitely do that Mr. Speaker. It was under the PPP/C Government and our care for young people that we achieved 100% coverage for primary education. It was under the PPP/C Government that we moved coverage for secondary education from 33 % to 95 %. It was under the PPP/C Government that we built or rehabilitated close to 1500 schools all across this country. This is what we did for the young people. This is how we empowered the young people. This is how we developed the minds of the young people.

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: I wanted to attract your attention Hon. Member. The Speaker is this way.

Mr. Ali: Yes. Mr. Speaker, you have my full attention. It was under the PPP/C Government that we built a special dormitory for the Amerindians, so that they could come here and also have equal access, like any other young person, to a university education. [Ms. Ally: That sounds like a campaign speech.] This is not a campaign speech. Would you like for me to tell you what is campaign speech? Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member would not like for me to refer to the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) Manifesto?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I need clarification. Are we talking about the National Youth Policy 2015?

Mr. Ali: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed.

4.14 p.m.

Mr. Ali: I am sure that the population is following this issue very closely. I understand that we are talking of the youths, Mr. Speaker. We have two manifestoes. Under the new campaign strategy, in the debate, Mrs. Hilary Clinton would say go to the *fact-check*. I say to the population and the media: “take the two manifestoes and go to the *fact-check*. Go and check the facts on our commitment and performance towards young people, as against what is in this manifesto and what they have delivered and you will be your own judge.”

In crafting a youth policy, we cannot avoid looking at the international context. Any national youth policy must be crafted in conjunction with what is required under the United Nations (UN) in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) planned for young people.

If one looks at what the Millennium Development Goals states under the National Youth Policy for countries. These are the goals that it would have targeted and outlined. It states:

- “Goal One: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
- Goal two: Achieve universal and primary education;
- Goal Three: Promote gender equality and empower women;
- Goal Four: Reduce child mortality;
- Goal Five: Improve maternal health;
- Goal Six: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- Goal Seven: Ensure environmental sustainability;
- Goal Eight: Develop a global partnership for development.”

Youths at the forefront of fair trade; youth employment; and youths at the forefront of national leadership. There is no youth at the forefront of national leadership. They have failed to achieve the Millennium Development Goal for youths in Parliament and leadership. There was a time when one could have checked the Cabinet of Guyana and there were six Ministers below the age of 40. Today, if one checks the Cabinet of Guyana, 95% of the Ministers are above the age of 70.

What is the message? I stand corrected. There are 95% of the Ministers, in the current Cabinet, who are above the pensionable age. *[Interruption]*

It is very important that we look strategically at the National Youth Policy, reframe it in the international context, taking into consideration our specific local needs and then develop it for the purposes of ensuring the funding, advising the Minister of Finance and developing a funding mechanism so that we could implement the policy.

With these few words, I would encourage the Government to ensure that this policy is sent before a Special Select Committee so that it could be redefined and returned as a consensus document.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for his statement. Hon. Members, I see that we are fifteen minutes past the four o'clock hour. We will now have a suspension for one hour and then we will return at 5.15 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 4.15 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.21 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I must ask that you not to turn in your chairs and speak to one another. I have been paying particular attention to the Standing Orders and I have noticed that many of them are honoured more in breach than in the observance. So, my request to the Hon. Members is that we try to follow the Standing Orders, without the intervention of the Speaker. Please proceed Mr. Figueira.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Sir. I rise with great humility and appreciation for this opportunity to join my Colleague and to make my contribution to this historic document, at an historic time of Guyana's Golden Jubilee; a document that will have positive effects on the lives of all Guyanese, especially, our youth and will add to our country's social, cultural, political and economic development.

Before I get into my actual presentation, permit me Sir, to welcome you back to this august body. I trust that you had some rest to aid the work in guiding us in this House. To my Colleagues on the Government's benches, welcome back to continue the hard work you are doing, to provide a good life to all Guyanese and to make Guyana great. I would also like to welcome back the Members of the Opposition, and I am still faithfully optimistic that we will be able to work collectively to build a Guyana that benefits all.

It would be remiss of me if I fail to make mention of the most recent walkout by the Hon. Members of the Opposition that has demonstrated, clearly and climaxed desperately, the need for a national... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, I want to remind you that we are discussing the Youth Policy. There is a latitude that is permitted Hon. Member, but I believe that we are taking it too far the other way. So, please let us stay on course. Proceed.

Mr. Figueira: Yes, Mr. Speaker. This desperate need for a national youth policy to help guide and fashion our nation's youth, to exhibit behaviours of a high calibre for they are our future leaders. I am persuaded that the young people of Guyana are very disappointed with the callous display of juvenile delinquent behaviours of our leaders in this country, who are representing their interest.

We believe the National Assembly is a serious place to discuss and make decisions of a Guyanese nature that will impact every citizen within this country. The Government is ready and prepared to serve the people of this country, with or without, filled seats in this House. The people's interest is our primary focus.

I would also like to express profound thanks and give commendation to the competent team, headed by Presidential Advisor on youth, Mr. Aubrey Norton, who has engaged the key stakeholders - the youth - in our country through vast and extensive consultations.

With regards to the Hon. Member, Mr. Ali's, presentation, when he made reference to the PYO absence in participating in this very comprehensive and well thought out document, needs to recognise that all of Guyana's youth were invited to participate in putting together this needed

document for our nations' youth. It is no secret that the Opposition has a very good record of absenting themselves from invited consultations. Just recently, they were absent from the budget consultations, which is an important document in piling us in the way forward.

Reflecting on the words of the Hon. Member, Ms. Africo Selman, in the *Kaieteur News* dated 3rd February 2011, she had said:

“The implementation of a National Youth Policy would present Government’s genuine commitment to implementing programmes that are critical to youth development and empowerment.”

I firmly believe the Government has answered the call that was made five years ago by the Hon. Member. The National Youth Policy 2015, being presented and debated here, is a testimony of Government’s genuine commitment to the young people of Guyana.

According to the United Nations, for statistical purposes, persons between the ages of 15 to 24 years are considered a youth. This definition, however, varies in different societies around the world. In Guyana, a youth is a person between the ages of 14 to 35 years. This policy caters for youth who are much younger.

With regards to the questioning by the Hon. Member, Mr. Ali, about the presence of youth in this honourable House, and based on those two readily accepted definitions, I believe that I and I alone stand as a youth in this House.

I would also like to make mention of the reference he posited with regards to the *fact-check* about the word “Amerindian” not being made mentioned in this document. I believe that if the Hon. Member had carefully perused this document on page six, he would have noticed that the document does caters for youth in the hinterland communities. We all know, in this House that the youth, predominantly found in the hinterland communities, are referred to as indigenous people. We rebuke the name Amerindian. I believe that my brother, Mr. Chavez, who is from the hinterland region, would disagree with you in referring to him as an Amerindian, for he is rightfully an indigenous youth.

Guyana’s youth are intelligent, bold, strong, resilient and endowed with enormous potentials, to succeed in life and that success must be achieved right here, in the land of their birth. Our youth

represents the possibilities and have the solutions for Guyana's development, today and in the future.

5.31 p.m.

Sixty-eight per cent of my generation grew up under the previous administration, a generation that experienced the largest incarceration and extrajudicial killing of their peers; a generation that sought a life in a foreign land because they feared for their lives and thought that they could not build a successful life in this country.

We have lost too many of our young people, the best and brightest, to overseas markets, crime, drugs, jail and carnage on our roadways. The Members of the Opposition, undoubtedly, Sir, will agree with me in this regard because it was under their watch that Guyana experienced the greatest exodus of graduates. Brain drain was the order of the day. I can recall sadly that a former Minister of Education, when asked about the issue of migration of the true nation builders, our teachers, his response was "Let them go. We will train more". That was the level of arrogance and visionless approach to leadership that this country endured. This is why, after 50 years, Guyana, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has moved from being the second poorest country in the western hemisphere to being the third poorest country.

This position of Guyana will not be permanent under the leadership of the Granger administration. This coalition Government does recognise the importance of our young people in changing this position. Guyana's social, cultural and economic development, today and in the future, rest on our youth. It is, therefore, necessary for us, as a responsible Government, to robustly embark on structured and coherent programmes and initiatives that will encourage youth participation to harness skills, ideas and solutions which they have to better Guyana in every aspect.

As a country, we have not invested enough in our young people. Our Government will be the instigator, the catalyst for change, and this motion on the National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, which we are presenting here today, is a step in the right direction towards providing a good life for all Guyanese.

It is my fervent hope that the net outcome of today's debate will be one that adds and builds on what we, as a country, desperately need.

We are behind in the region with having a national youth policy. Jamaica had its first youth policy drafted since the 1980s, consistently upgraded it throughout the years and, in 2015, presented a newly upgraded national youth policy. Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago and several other Caribbean sister states have demonstrated their commitment to their youth, as we in this Government are doing with this national youth policy. The policy of Guyana is a concoction of ideas, vision and thinking of Guyana's youth from all ten administrative regions, youth organisations, religious bodies and civil society.

Government acknowledges that a lot more should have been done for the young people of our nation over the many years past, but we also accept that the past is what it is and we have to do what should have been done and more for our youth in moving this country forward. This national youth policy provides insights from our youth on what they want and how it should be done. This policy for youth by youth will aid and assist the necessary partners in developing our country.

The vision of Guyana's youth, captured in this document, is to live in a country that is safe, where they have access to equal opportunities, could participate in public life and be healthy and empowered to meaningfully contribute to Guyana's sustainable national development. Government is committed to transforming and empowering our youth through this policy, programmes and activities. Government is serious about the nation's youth and has made the focus of youth development one of the top national development priorities of Guyana.

Our quest, our mission and our vision, is to prepare our young people to take advantage of the countless opportunities that the world offers for global producers. If we, as a nation, are to develop economically, we have to change from being a nation of consumers. Otherwise, we will be marginalised by a world without borders.

We live in a generation where information is easily accessible and it is literally at our fingertips. In Guyana, many of our young people are owners of mobile devices or have access to a laptop or a desktop computer. The passage of the Telecommunication Bill by Government was for Guyanese to benefit from the fruits of competition but, more importantly, for them to take

advantage of the menu of opportunities this Bill affords. Our young people must venture into mobile and e-commerce businesses. China has over 500 million smartphone users, 65% of the United States of America's (USA) population have smartphones, and India has just surpassed the USA with over 200 million users. Forty-one per cent of owners of mobile devices make purchases using their smartphones on online media and 48% says that social media is a greater influence on their produce purchase.

This policy will provide our youth with the skills and training necessary for them to position themselves to profit from these possibilities in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector and boost our country's economic growth.

Additionally, the agriculture sector provides many untapped potential for our youths. This sector provides the best prospects to reduce imports and increase exports. Many young people are living longer than they did twenty years ago, due to improved technological procedures and health care services but, more importantly, people are becoming more health conscious. They exercise more frequently and nutrition is important to them. Many people around the world desire organic fruits and vegetables. They need natural juices, chemical-free chicken, eggs and beef. This need provides countless opportunities for niche markets where the produce of our young people must be taken advantage of.

We have to orient our young people not to see agriculture as hard work with a long boots and a cutlass, but as a business that is very lucrative. They must see beyond a tomato plant and see a bottle of juice, tomato paste and ketchup. Our young people must be able to take advantage of the possibilities that this sector offers so that we can put our products in supermarkets around the world, with the label of "product of Guyana". This national youth policy has all of the ingredients to make this possible.

The several principles that inform and guide this policy to realise the youth development goals are practical and achievable.

Principle one, which speaks to adopting a rights-based approach, recognises that we live in a multi-ethnic society and, therefore, no one group of people or community will ever be selectively marginalised or discriminated from receiving the benefits of scholarships, proceeds from our

natural resources or from giving service to our country, be it as an ambassador or as a lecturer at the University of Guyana (UG).

My countenance is one that is not always seen and accepted in every sphere. Due to the jaundiced view of what is politically correct, I was not supposed to be here, in this House, with these fine Guyanese people. I give thanks to the leadership of my party and this administration for having the vision to see past what is considered politically correct and have a world view, a vision that understands that it is the diversity in us as Guyanese, in our youths. It is what which makes us stronger and it is what is needed for us to reach and surpass our own expectations as a nation.

The high levels of poverty and unemployment among our youth, inherited by this administration, continue to be a challenge for Government. However, with regard to the “Adopt an Asset-Based Approach” principle, the Government has initiated programmes to eradicate unemployment in Guyana and empower our young people. These include the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics programme which is known as STEM, the Youth Leadership Training Programme and the Sustainable Livelihood Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) initiative, among others.

Government’s serious commitment to our young people has birthed a Youth Empowerment Unit within the Ministry of the Presidency. This unit has been conducting training for our youth across the length and breadth of Guyana. One such programme was the Financial Literacy and Small Business Training that was aimed at empowering young people to develop their own businesses.

Our very active and hard-working First Lady has embarked on a robotics youth training camp to harness the power of information technology. The next generation must take a bold step to equip themselves with the skills needed to take advantage of this sector. This needed project is a collaborative effort between First Lady Sandra Granger and the Ministry of Education’s Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Department. The coordinator of the programme said these words:

“The Guyana we see today will not be the same Guyana in the next 10 or 20 years. Coding technology is already literally everywhere, in every sector, the gold

mining, agriculture and oil industry. What we are doing here is helping to prepare Guyana's youth for the future.”

The President's brainchild of developing a Sovereign Wealth Fund for Guyana speaks vividly to preserving an inheritance for Guyana's youth, present and future.

In conclusion, it would be remiss of me if I fail to mention that, notwithstanding Government's valiant efforts and foresight in presenting this national youth policy, the youth have a responsibility, as Government, to recognise that the future prospects of this country depend on us. The integrity and well-being of Guyana will only be preserved by our young people with unceasing effort, an acute sense of discrimination and an ability to adopt only what is essential and constructive, disregarding that which does not contribute to the goals and aspirations of all Guyanese.

The youths of Guyana must show the leaders of Guyana, the region and the wider world, that with the use of the best of their knowledge, skills, vision and ideas they will rid the scourge of racial disunity among our people, foster social cohesion and national unity. Most importantly, they should not allow political rhetoric to continually divide us from being one people and hindering our holistic development in being economically, socially and culturally free.

This national youth policy's guiding principles and goals have the ingredients to unearth the unseen potentials of Guyana's youth.

I support its passage in this House, a hundred per cent. [*Applause*]

5.46 p.m.

Mr. Dharamlall: I would like to join with the others before me in commending you on the achievements that you have garnered over the past few months and to express the honour of coming back after the recess, having to speak on an important issue, an important segment on our country's youth.

I have a fundamental problem with the national youth policy as it is presented before us. I say this for an important comparison that having read the national youth policy, having studied the national youth policy and having myself being one of the creatures of the former Government

promoting youth development and promoting youth leadership in Guyana, I wish to state that the approach this document has harvest speaks more to the problems affecting youth versus youth as a resource.

I think that this is a fundamental reason why, if implemented as is - whilst I say implemented as “is that” - we do not have a clear indication from what is presented before us what the Government intend to achieve out of the policy, how it would be implemented.

When the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) was in Government and even up to now we always advocated for youth as a resource of this country. However, what we have is a Government which itemises and stigmatises young people and youth in Guyana. In 1992, when Dr. Jagan and the PPP took office, a Ministry dedicated to youth was configured. Last year, 2015, when the current regime took office a Ministry dedicated to the resource called youth was dismantled.

There is a fundamental difference with what our vision for youth is and what the Government’s vision for youth is. Why do I say that there is a fundamental difference? We started off by treating with youth as a priority. The programmes that we implemented, the policies and... Unfortunately some Hon. Members of the other side of the House... This is a piece of paper; this is not a policy. What obtains in here is what a policy is. Reading and holding this and claiming that this is a historic document make no sense. I am sorry if sound disrespectful, Mr. Speaker.

We cannot continue to treat with youth with this arrogant rhetoric, with the condescending attitude of speaking down to them, by alienating them from opportunities in this country, and from alienating them from leadership. Comrade Irfaan Ali spoke about the composition of the Parliament and about the composition of the Government. If there is a real commitment by this Government to work with youth, then why did the Government only consulted with 0.6% of the young people of this country in putting this document together? The document states that 68.8% of the country’s population is between 14 and 35 years of age, the young people of this country. The document also states that there is consultation. There were 52 organisations consulted and there was a questionnaire circulated.

An important segment of our country almost 510,000 people, and if we were to include the pre adolescence it would go beyond 600,000 people in this country, and only 52 organisations. We have no ideas how they were invited, consulted and a survey of 3,000 people. This is what we

have come with. I do not expect any different, because, as I said, from the start, the PPP mandate on youth is that we treat youth as the resource of this country and not as the problem of Guyana.

My general comments, and I wish to simplify them as much as possible.

It is my belief that this document does not zero in on the needs of our young people. I would get into my specific problem to their demographic, to their identity, and to their cultural and historical background. This document is too general to impact on 510,000 people in this country.

This document also purports to be a policy. It is very onerous, and it is ambiguous in its description of youth and young people. It focuses on youth more as a problem, as I said, rather than as a resource. The policy, which I see before me, and that I have read page by page, and I could comment page by page, if you permit me, Mr. Speaker, is geared to quick fix throwing sand on a blaze.

The young people's future in this country cannot be a whitewash. It cannot be a check box because it was promised in the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU)'s manifesto. May I remind you that when Dr. Jagan took office it was under his administration that the National Youth Commission was established. It came out of, not a physical document, the vision that we had for young people. It also resulted in the creation of the President Youth Award Republic of Guyana (PYARG), Youth Entrepreneurial Skills Training Program (YEST), New Opportunity Corps (NOC) and in the Youth Community Interaction and Participation Programme. These still continue on to this day.

The Hon. Member Jermaine Figueira mentioned the adviser to the Ministry of Education, Department of Culture Youth and Sport, on youth is Mr. Aubrey Norton. Since I was growing as a boy I know Mr. Norton to be a senior man. He is the adviser to this Government on young people.

Mr. Speaker, there is also something else I want to tell you. I was involved in a lot working with Amerindian people and in Amerindian villages. I got a message last night from a young Amerindian person who said that he was not receiving his stipend under the Hinterland Employment Youth Service (HEYS) programme. You would recall when we left Government - the HEYS now replaces the Youth Entrepreneurship and Apprenticeship Programme (YEAP) -

that 1972 young Amerindians were immediately terminated upon assumption to office of this regime. That young person in the message stated to me that he went to the Ministry of Indigenous People's Affairs to speak to the coordinator of the HEYS. When I did my research, the coordinator of the HEYS is 54 years old. Are you telling me that we cannot find any young Amerindian in this country to be the coordinator of the HEYS? It is ridiculous with what is taking place.

I do not think that this policy, as I said, earlier focuses on the problems, but it does not reflect special needs, special interest groups, the vulnerable people. I know Comrade Ally is going to heckle me on this, but this document does not speak about the Lesbians Gays Bisexual and Transgender community (LGBT).

It is my personal belief that this document is short on logic. It is short on comprehension of the issues affecting young people. As I said, it was not consultative and therefore it is poor, in terms of how it is constructed. It does not derive itself from profound studies. It does not derive itself from any type of deep research. That is why when the Government seeks to distinguish this document and make it distinctive, we hear of political rhetoric. What is the basis upon which this document has been created? What is the evidence on which this document has been created?

As I proceed, it is my genuine view again that this document focuses more on providing for consultants than providing for young people in this country. I intend to retype it and publish it online so that the young people of this country are going to have a chance to consult this document, because there is absolutely nothing in here that speaks about interventions, measures, and actions aimed and geared at the development of young people.

The document as well seeks to promote the services of a department, as I said, by creating a checkbox, so that we have completed a national youth policy. When the PPP was in Government, we had a cross-sectorial approach; we had a multi-pronged approach to youth development. There are many speakers after me who will speak about our achievements of young people in education from university down to nursery. They will speak about the impact that we had on health, how it was promoted, and how it has served to uplift young people in this country. They will speak about the potential of our country and how we were able to harvest young leaders and make greater than they are when they got into Government.

Again, I would like to echo the sentiments of many of my comrades who had said that this policy, as presented before us, is short on a lot of things. It does not situate the history and the context of youth in Guyana. One of the fundamental problems we have in dealing with issues of our country is that we tend to solve problems rather than address them. This document is seeking to solve a problem rather than addressing it. I do not think many people could understand it, but when project management is studied to the level that I have studied it and logic to the level that I studied it, you would know the difference between addressing an issue and solving a problem. Unfortunately, all the Government is doing is solving problems rather than addressing issues. Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, I am sure you are looking at me, you would understand what I am speaking about, but it is word of advice to you.

Again, as I said, there are not many facts in the document. What we have... The basis of this is conjecture. The basis of this is un-rhetoric. Someone would say something and then we would use that to create a policy without defining what the statistical evidence are and what the data available are to advice the Government on creating a policy that would affect 510,000 people. As we move forward in the next few years to 2020 that figure, hopefully, would increase as well.

As I continue, it is my firm belief that there is no direction given to the young people of this country by what is adumbrated in this document. For me, the document speaks about the Constitution. This is what the Constitution states:

6.01 p.m.

“...the aspirations of our young people who, in their own words, have declared that the future of Guyana belongs to its young people, who aspire to live in a safe society which respects their dignity, protects their rights, recognises their potential, listens to their voices, provides opportunities, ensures that it is a healthy environment and encourages people of all races to live in harmony and peace and affirm that their declaration would be bind to our institutions and be part of the context of our basic law;”

For 17 months of this current regime people have being discriminated against. Opportunities have been taken away from young people, so the very basis of the Constitution has been ignored. The premise of this document, therefore, is unconstitutional. The mere fact that it is disrespectful

of the Constitution, imagine what is going to take place during the implementation of the national youth policy.

The situational analysis speaks about the age structure of the population stating that it do not significantly impact the development approaches adopted and the programmes implemented in Guyana, but that, again, is a wild statement. This is the Parliament of Guyana. This is not the open wide savannahs where there are not rules. Facts have to be provided. Where did these things come from?

Then, the document again, on page 4, on the top paragraph, states:

“...poverty reduction and livelihood creation initiatives seldom specifically target youth,...”

I can confirm that this document hold truth, over the past 17 months, that poverty reduction and livelihood creation initiatives seldom specifically target young people or youth in Guyana. That is a fact, over the past 17 months of this current Government. If you were to delineate and itemise all of the interventions that the former Government pursued targeting young people and youth development from nursery to university and to the workforce, I am going to be here for a very long time standing.

On the next paragraph, it speaks, as well, of:

“The issues of poverty, migration and exclusion of youth in the articulation of youth development strategies also need to be in focus.”

My question is what is the Government’s position on young people in Guyana when there are no jobs, when the economy is in contraction, when crime is at unprecedented levels, when violent crimes, in 2016, are uncontrollable? Every single newscast you read... Only this afternoon I was reading that a young man from Bartica, 20-something years old, a youth, was gunned down and robbed of his gold and earnings. That is the type of leadership that we are providing. That is the level of consultation; that is the level of articulation that we see from this Government.

As well, it states, in the third paragraph, that youth entrepreneurship is in embryonic stage. Time has gone before us and this Government, again, speaks about there is a lack of legislation

affecting young people, that there is limited accept to financial products and credit schemes, but we live in an economy that unfortunately is tax base. The budget of this country is generated largely through taxes. Where are the evidences that this economy is productive? How young people in this country are going to involve in business when the revenue base of this country is generated from taxes rather than creating industries to drive this economy? When all of this is done, it is where are we going to employ these young people and what kind of jobs are they going to be provided with, except that we are going to be reading to them a 25-page document stating that you have a policy before you.

Whilst I am reading here young people are looking for jobs. Whilst we are sitting here they are looking for jobs. To use the same tone that the Government has been using, I could also say that the level of employment of young people in Guyana now is worse than when the PPP was in Government.

The last paragraph, on page 4, states:

“The education system, has remained stagnant, is not responsive to the market. Fails to equip youth with the skills and knowledge demanded by local and regional economies...”

Again, I want to emphasis, by questioning, how is this economy in Guyana described? In the situation analysis that is what you need to speak about. You need to create the context upon which the livelihood of youth, development of youth, must be premised. It cannot be itemising a whole set of wild accusations against young people, if you do not mind me saying so, Mr, Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are wondering whether the Speaker mind what you say.

Mr. Dharamlall: Yes Sir.

Mr. Speaker: The Speaker does mind what you say, so please stay on the line.

Mr. Dharamlall: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker.

Is this document questioning the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC)? Is this document questioning our vocational qualifications? Is this document questioning the much celebrated Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme?

The Government also said, in this document, on page 6, the third paragraph, the last line, “Youth development has being disjointed and sub-optimal.” Again, I would like to say that over the past 17 months youth development in Guyana has been disjointed and sub-optimal. We need more from this Government where youths are concerned and young people are concerned.

Again, it speaks of existing youth development actors and programmes. There is a great pictorial depicting the key development actors, but in the 21st Century - as a matter of fact, in 2016 - we are speaking about growing this economy and revolutionising young people and Guyana. One of the key actors in youth development is technology, but it is missing, one of the actors in this depiction. Yes Mr. Speaker, technology is missing. The special interest groups are missing.

Again, if we were to go to the page that speaks to the vision for Guyanese youth, the first vision is:

“A nation where all young people are safe, healthy and included in a society in which they have access to equal opportunities, participate in public life and are empowered by meaningfully contribute to Guyana’s sustainable national development.”

I would be proud to celebrate this vision, but we live in a country with rampant crime, rampant joblessness and rampant lack of opportunities. We live in a country of rampant blackout too. In 2016, I cannot afford to buy a generator. When I try to make porridge, *blam* the blackout come I cannot make my porridge.

This is the vision of the youth that I just spoke to. Listen to the Government’s vision for youth.

“A nation in which young people are united, educated, trained, safe, happy, healthy and integrally involve n the decision making process ...” *inter alia*.

If you walk this road at any given moment in this country, no one feels safe. At one point in time there was a leader in this Government who said that suicide is the result of unhappiness. Today it is more rampant than any other time in the history of this country. The young people of this country are unhappy, and residents on the other side of the House. We do not feel that young people are fully integrated in the decision making process of this country. I do not intend to use again the classic example of the Cabinet. I do not want to use the classic example of the advisers of the Government. I do not want to use the example classic example of the advisers on then

national youth empowerment. I do not want to use the example of the head of the Hinterland Employment Youth Scheme who is 54 years old, may I remind my Amerindian brothers and sisters.

On the next page it speaks on the initiatives that would follow. This is where I found a fundamental problem. A whole set of things are preached upon our young people. My question is: Why is this Government continuing to use condescending language on our young people, for example, “they should be aware of themselves and know and exhibit self-worth”? What are speaking about? Who do you think you are talking to? Who is more patriotic than me and actively involved in the development of Guyana? Which one of you possesses stronger leadership qualities than the hundreds and thousands of young people in this country? How many of you are well read, well rounded and involved in social activities? Why does this Government continuing to use condescending language on the people of this country, why, especially the young people of this country? It is 2016.

When Bharrat Jagdeo was President, he was 35 years old and that was a celebration for this country. He was a youth. As I am on that note, there is no one from this Government’s side who would ever achieve what Bharrat Jagdeo has achieved as President of this country. There would be no one in this country who would achieve anything under this current Government than what Bharrat Jagdeo has done for Guyana.

This here is a glorious deflection of the incompetence of this Government towards young people of Guyana. I say to you, again Mr. Speaker, and, of course, to our young people of this country, that we need to ensure that this document becomes a real policy, a policy that is going to affect positively on their lives.

The document also speaks to the principles that govern youth development in Guyana. It speaks of adopting a rights-based approach. Mr. Speaker, earlier I was telling you, it is my personal view, that something is unconstitutional on the bases of this document. A matter of fact, there are many young people who are scared to say what they have to say in this country. Thousands of them are scared to express themselves.

“Principle 5: Adopt an Evidence Based Decision–Making Approach”: As I go through here, I would laugh a bit. Mr. Speaker, I hope you do not mind, but there are no evidences, as I said, in substantiating this document, so I am going to grind on this one.

Then “Principle 6: Developing and enabling environment”: I would laugh, again, because the Government said that it would endeavour to create and develop and enable an environment for youth development. I would go back again and say...

Principle 7 states “Advance Good Governance.”

6.16 p.m.

Do I really need to go and expound on this? It speaks about good governance. This is what it states:

“A key component of this approach will be the formation of an Inter-Ministerial Committee...”

Of all the Ministers of Government who sit before us, and maybe those who are not here right now, how many of them will be sitting on this inter-ministerial committee and how many young people will be on this committee? The mere fact that it is inter-ministerial, it is led by an over-aged Minister of Government. This is the opposite of what we want to achieve in this Policy.

It speaks about the Government’s subscription to the tenets of good governance. But I just mentioned that 0.6% of the young people of this country were involved in the consultation. When it speaks of equity and equality, they refuse to mention the Amerindians – a special people, our first peoples of Guyana. Why is this Government scared to mention Amerindians? Why are they refusing? We have an Amerindian Act - not an Indigenous Peoples’ Act - which describes what an Amerindian is. Yet this Government refuses to address the needs of our Amerindian people.

As a matter of fact, I hinted earlier to Hon. Vice-President Allicock that I received a report that four young Amerindians from Tuseneng in the North Pakaraimas walked away from the Government Technical Institute’s programme because there was no money available to them. When they went to the Ministry, no one looked after them. Two days ago, they decided to pack

their traps and to head back to the mountains of the North Pakaraimas. This is what this Government is doing to our young people, especially our young Amerindians. They came here by travelling hundreds of miles against conditions that were totally alien to them. Yet this Government has no respect for them to at least cherish their presence; to deal with them; to treat with them; not an audience of a single Minister addressing the concerns of our young Amerindian people.

The document speaks about youth development policy priorities, youth identity and empowerment. It specifically speaks about arts, sports and culture but refuses to speak about education, about documenting history and to use a term from the Hon. Member, Jermaine Figueira...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, did you rise on a point of order?

Minister within the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs [Ms. Garrido-Lowe]: Point of Order, Standing Order No. 40(a).

With regards to the four youths from Tuseneng, they did come to Georgetown. They all belong to the...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I believe that there would be an opportunity for that. Neither Standing Order 40(a) nor 40(b) allows for another Member to seek an elucidation of something which another Member has said. The Hon. Member, if being misrepresented, and can then seek an opportunity to do that.

Ms. Garrido-Lowe: It is misrepresented.

Mr. Speaker: This is not the moment when the Hon. Member can do that.

I am saying this to the Hon. Member: I recall, at the 7th or 8th Sitting, that there was reason to be concerned about "hearsay". I cannot tell Hon. Members how they must speak to this House. I can merely caution Hon. Members. If you are not sure of it, then you ought not to tell the House of it as if it is certain.

Mr. Dharamlall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I did not invite a comment from you on it. I am simply making that known to all Members. Please proceed.

Mr. Dharamlall: I shall proceed, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Policy Priority 2 speaks of youth employment and entrepreneurship and the objectives to create an enabling environment for the reduction of youth unemployment. Mr. Speaker, what are those enablers? There are no enablers identified in this document. I am asking this question again, what is the Government's policy on employment?

Policy Priority 3 - Education and Market-Driven Skills Development: This speaks about developing an open and dynamic national system of formal and informal education. After 17 months, what will this Government achieve over the next three years and five months while in Government? Certainly, the objectives on Policy Priority 3 will not be met. What are the training needs that the Government is speaking about? What are the challenges affecting young people? I have not read any of those in this document.

There were some other things that I read online where training is taking place for heavy-duty excavator operators. How many excavators do we have in Guyana? My last count was 700 plus. All of them already had operators.

Mr. Speaker, let us be statistically concerned. How many young people in this country live in poverty? I am not the Government. It is the Government's duty to provide that information.

The other question that I have on Priority 4 - Youth Leadership, Participation and Representation - is: why does the Government have only one young person in Parliament? Of the 36 Members of Parliament, why is there only one youth?

Policy Priority 5 - Youth Health Safety and Well-being. I will say, again, to be a Guyanese is to be a scared Guyanese. I have families from Berbice who are refusing to come to Georgetown because they are scared that they will be robbed...

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Williams]: I have observed that the Hon. Member...

Mr. Speaker: Is this a Point of Order?

Mr. Williams: Yes, Sir. The Hon. Member has exceeded the time allotted to him and it is unfair to this side. He is not a Minister or a front-bencher. He is already 40 minutes on his feet and we are objecting to that.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister Williams, the Speaker is well able to manage this Chamber. I must tell you, however, that no time limits have been set. The Speaker will, in due course, impose the time limits.

Mr. Williams: Sir, respectfully, the Standing Orders determine the timing.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Dharamlall, please proceed.

Mr. Dharamlall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be done shortly. I wanted to deconstruct this document so that the young people of this country will know what obtains in it.

They speak of life skills development to promote the incorporation of life skills development in all programmes. What are those life skills that they are speaking about? Are they speaking about swimming, martial arts or military training? I said earlier that there is a lot of ambiguity and the document is very onerous. The document speaks of a supportive environment for the true Guyanese youth. Yet young Guyanese people in some parts of Guyana feel vilified, violated and discriminated against.

I have a fundamental problem again about this youth routinely engaged with adults in public spaces, including local parks, work places, churches and schools. If you want to build cohesion and a united country, then if you mention church, you would also have to say temple and mosque. I would be grateful if that could be included.

The document also states that these things will necessitate a conducive environment for youth engagement and development. There are a few things listed to promote youth-adult relationships; raise awareness of youth rights; encourage programmes, projects and activities that promote family and instil family values; create safe recreational and other youth-friendly spaces, *et cetera*.

This is a policy. It is not a family planning manual. My mother raised me well. I am sure that her parents did a tremendous job raising her. I am sure all the other young people of this country were well raised too. Mr. Speaker, I am almost finished.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 37 minutes. The Standing Orders provides that, after 30 minutes, you do not have the right to speak. I will allow you two minutes to complete.

Mr. Dharamlall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, I will have to go straight to my concluding points. I would like to propose these points to the Government: I would like to see a legislative youth agenda; a youth budget; a policy on information; an integration policy encompassing the sectors of this country; this document based on youth research; meaningful youth participation and not 0.6%; more innovation in this document that takes account of young peoples' creativity and innovation. Finally, as we proceed, I would really like to help this Government and the thousands of young people to create a real policy that will affect their lives and make this Government look good by sending it to a Parliamentary Select Committee so that we can have more time to deliberate on it. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. Hon. Members, the last two speakers spoke in excess of one hour. We still have 10 speakers as listed. I will propose that every Member who wishes to speak will speak for no more than 15 minutes with no extensions.

The next speaker is the Hon. Member, Mr. Rajkumar.

Mr. Rajkumar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to join my Colleagues in congratulating you on your recent achievements.

I rise to support the adoption of the National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, as presented to this House by the Hon. Minister, Ms. Nicolette Henry.

The most important human resource in our country is our youths. We recognise that the youths are the future of our country. The future of our youths and the development of our country lie in their hands. We, as leaders and policymakers must be able to develop policies and strategies that will help to guide our young people towards their personal development and, consequently, make a meaningful contribution towards national development. We, as a nation, must ensure that our

young people are given the opportunities to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about their future.

The National Youth Policy 2015 is not a new concept.

6.31 p.m.

It has been in this Caribbean, and many Caribbean countries have their own National Youth Policy. Countries such as Jamaica, Barbados, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago have implemented their National Youth Policy and the common objective, like our National Youth Policy 2015, is to foster youth development and empowerment.

A Path to a Good Life

Our Government, the APNU/AFC Government, is committed to youth development and has identified youth development as one of the top national priorities. We do have a National Youth Policy and that Policy's aim is to develop our youths. We should all embrace and adopt this Policy because it does address the issues and challenges faced by our youths.

The National Youth Policy 2015 of Guyana is a comprehensive document which seeks to provide policies which are aimed towards youth empowerment and development. It will pave the way for the development and implementation of a National Youth Empowerment Action Plan. It is the product of consultation among youths across the country.

In 2015, after the APNU/AFC Coalition Government took office, additional surveys and consultations were done. The data gathered were used to develop this National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. Over 3,000 youths were engaged through regional consultations with the objective of collecting data on issues affecting our youths. This National Youth Policy 2015 was developed to address the challenges faced by our youths from across the length and breadth of our country in an effort to enhance their wellbeing so they can enjoy a good life. Mr. Speaker, we should all embrace this Policy. It is geared towards development of our youths and the future of our country.

Our youths, today, face many challenges. Foremost amongst these challenges is unemployment. About 40% of our young people in this country are unemployed. Youth entrepreneurship is

considered to be low and unsupported. Key inputs such as incubator skill and actor's credit are inadequate. Youth unemployment impacts negatively on our economy. The limited employment entrepreneurial prospects make it necessary for Government to adopt policies and develop strategies to encourage entrepreneurship among our young people. To address these issues, the Government aims to create enabling environment for the reduction of youth employment through self-employment, entrepreneurship and demand-driven education training.

The issues of youth employment are complex and the Government of Guyana recognises the need to include the youths themselves, the private sector, the civil society and other developing actors to develop a clear strategy and to implement the framework to address youth employment. Government will establish multi-stakeholder youth driven community to oversee poverty reduction for youths through employment and entrepreneurship at community, regional and national levels; divide clear roles for non-governmental bodies such as the private sector and civil society groups in unemployment reduction; foster a greater and deeper partnership – a linkage among Government, trading institutions, private sector, civil society and other development actors.

Employment plays an integral part in the development of our youths. It provides a reliable source of income to satisfy their needs and improves their standards of living. The high percentage of youth unemployment must be addressed. A large number of our unemployed youths are school dropouts and many others do not possess the required passes for employment. These persons need a second chance.

The Government intends to provide opportunities for youths to be trained and acquire relevant skills to be able to function in a working environment; provide opportunities for on-the-job training in both public and private sectors. Youths will be made aware of the needs for skilled training and vocational education in order to satisfy the demand on the job market.

Education and training play a key role towards secured employment. Government intends to provide and facilitate apprenticeship, internship and on-the-job training so that our young people can have the required experience and acquired skills suitable for a particular type of employment.

Our youths must be able to work in a safe and healthy environment. We have seen, in the past, our youths losing their lives in the mining pits of the interior; persons being injured in the construction and other industries. Although employment is critical for youth development, we must be able to protect them from exploitation and discrimination.

Contained in the National Youth Policy 2015 are policies which address these issues of conditions under which our youths are employed. It proposes to implement and monitor laws, policies, and regulations which relate to occupational health and safety; ensure strict enforcement of legislations and policy directives that guarantee equal opportunity, employment and guard against discrimination; support a national drive to educate youths on their labour rights and responsibilities. We must be able to encourage our youths to actively seek employment and assure them of a safe and conducive work environment. The National Youth Policy 2015 contains policies which will guarantee our youths protection against adverse working conditions.

The concept of creating employment through entrepreneurship plays an integral part in job creation for our young people. Entrepreneurship has the potential to stimulate employment. It has the capacity to influence persons, including young people, to start their own businesses, become self-employed and eventually becoming employers. Some may argue that youth entrepreneurship has a low success rate because the youths are inexperienced, lack finances and information, and have inadequate entrepreneurship education. We believe that self-employment is feasible if these challenges can be overcome.

The Government intends to encourage, cultivate and nurture an entrepreneurial culture among our youths by promoting and encouraging the mentoring and coaching of young entrepreneurs; advocating a review of collateral requirements for loans for youth entrepreneurs; and promoting social entrepreneurship among young people, particularly among marginalised and disadvantaged youths.

The potential of entrepreneurship and its capacity to create jobs was demonstrated recently where young persons, who received basic employment skills training through the United States Agency for International Development Skills and Knowledge for Youth Employment (USAID SKYE) and were then given grants through the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurship Development (SLED) Programme, started their own businesses and were able to create

employment for themselves. Standing out from these efforts were Tiffany Peters and Akeem Williams who became successful business persons after attending these trainings and receiving grants.

The Government understands that youth entrepreneurship is not the panacea for solving all our employment problems but it is one of the tools which can be used to create employment and which can eventually lead to economic prosperity for our youths. The policy of creating employment through entrepreneurship is a worthwhile initiative towards youth development and it should be supported.

Our youths must acquire and cultivate life skills which will enable them to interact effectively with other persons and the society at large. Simply put, life skills are skills one needs to make the most out of life. It includes skills which are used in association with managing and living a better quality of life, help us to accomplish our goals, and live our life to its full potential. Any skill that is useful to one's life can be considered life skills, including swimming. These skills are important to the development of Guyana's youth. Our youths must have the capacity to make informed, independent and un-coerced decisions. We must therefore promote the incorporation of life skill development in all programmes that target youth development. These skills are essential for our youths to enable them to express themselves; to enhance their ability to express their opinion; ask for advice and help in times of need and contribute to decision-making and problem solving. It also enhances a positive way in the relationship with other persons with whom they interact. Life skill development is an essential component in the overall development of our young people, and its inclusion in the National Youth Policy 2015 must be seen as an effort by Government to prepare our youths, to enable them to effectively deal with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

Market driven skills is another concept which deals with training and skills development. This idea is to train...

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

Mr. Rajkumar: I am guided, Your Honour.

The idea is to train and develop skills that are tailored for a particular industry or sector. Employers will formally link with institutions, contribute to the design of the curriculum and support job placement for apprenticeship for training. The Government intends to adopt a demand driven approach to school curriculum and skills development programme in education and training to promote greater participation of private sector companies on boards of educational institutions at all levels; support the review, revision and updating of the learning curriculum based on market needs and demands.

The National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana is indeed a comprehensive and detailed plan for youth development in our country and we, as leaders in our society, who recognise that our youths are our future and that we must encourage and support youth development, must all then support the adoption of the National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, as I now do.

Thank you, very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. The next speaker is Dr. V. Persaud.

Hon. Member Ali...

Mr. Ali: Mr. Speaker, I just wish to draw your attention to Standing Order 38(9), which states that no Member should be entitled to speak for more than 30 minutes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, there must be a point to this. What is it? Please tell the Speaker what it is you are interrupting the flow for. You are interrupting the flow of this debate for a purpose. Please tell me what it is?

Mr. Ali: Yes. I am drawing your attention to Standing Order 38(9) which outlines the time permitted for every speaker. You have ruled, Mr. Speaker, that you are giving 15 minutes per speaker...

Mr. Speaker: And are you challenging that ruling, Hon. Member?

Mr. Ali: No, Mr. Speaker, all I am doing is...

Mr. Speaker: Then, Hon. Member, please take your seat.

The next speaker is Dr. V. Persaud. You have the floor, please.

Dr. V. Persaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The message is many times communicated to young people that they have to take over the reins of any country or anything later in life. I want to say that young people have the capability and the capacity to do that at this point in time.

6.46 p.m.

As a country and as a people, we need their creativity, their imagination and their perspective at all times because it is their future that we speak of today. The National Youth Policy is a very, very important thing. It is critical and crucial at this time. However, I must say that, at this time, I find that which has been brought here to this august House seriously lacking in many components and dimensions. It does not address, in many ways, the dynamic and evolving needs of the youth of today's world, specifically youth in Guyana.

When we think of a policy document, there are certain fundamental aspects that a policy document must have. That document drives choices and compromises of every modern government. As such, when it is put into place, it must have timeframes; it must have mechanisms and strategies to achieve things which have been alluded to in the document. It must have enough detail to determine whether it would be impactful. This document is lacking in all of these aspects.

When we think of a national youth policy, whatever is placed in the policy must be founded on sound data analysis, research and evaluation. Again, that is not apparent in this document. There must be structured programmes and initiatives to clearly address all of those who constitute what we term as youth in this country. When I say all of those, I would like to see mention made of young women and differently-abled people. And, not only the mention of but exactly how strategies and mechanisms will affect their lives in a positive way and would impact on their lives in a meaningful manner going forward.

To say that you want to listen to young people is very good, but, if you really wanted to listen to young people, those young people would be in here. Where are those young people? To say that

you want the young people to have a voice, they should be in here. This is the forum where those decisions are made which impact on the lives of youth and young people.

When we think about working on youth policy, we need to look at the framework which exists, the framework which needs to be established and the structure that must be in place to ensure the implementation of what you want to achieve.

When we think of a policy, that policy must be something that is transformative. Is this Youth Policy transformative? I say no. I would like to hear what is being done for equal opportunity for women, what is being done on gender justice, what is being done on domestic violence and abuse. If we look at the suicide statistics, recently, at the Tain Campus in Berbice, there was a paper presented which clearly showed that 50% of those persons committing suicide are young people below the age of 25. Where is the structured programme? Where are the policies outlined in this document that has been presented here that deal with those real problems which confront our youth today? Where are the policies which address young single parents, mothers and fathers? Where are the culturally sensitive programmes for young women so that they can advance in life, so that they can provide for their families or children? Where are the policies which address dropouts from schools?

When we think of training, are there linkages to placement in jobs in the public sector? I do not see mention of that in this document. When we think of training and opportunity, are we talking about accreditation and the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME)? These are real things in this part of the world which affect our youths. I do not want to see the continuation of a brain drain. I can tell you, in the circle of people that I find myself, there is brain drain that is ongoing. We need to halt that brain drain. This is our country and we must keep our young people here. Where are the incentives in this Policy for young people to stay in this country? Are we looking at the incentives in a holistic manner so that, perhaps, there might be less taxation for young people? Are we looking at the incentives in terms of their tertiary education?

I see there is a 5% increase and the young people are screaming. Already they cannot find jobs. Are we now stymieing their growth in the academic field? I would like to see incentives for young people. I would like to see young people owning their own homes and being able to

comfortably own their homes. I am not seeing any provision for that in this Youth Policy. All I see are vague, ambiguous statements in this document.

Young people are very dissatisfied in this country. Even though we might not hear all of them screaming on the road, their silence speaks volumes. It is the silence of people who have felt betrayed, betrayed in such a way that they are now consumed with fear in so many different dimensions. What am I talking about? Young people in this country are not able to go about their business as readily as they want. Is there a provision for crime prevention in this Policy to keep our young people safe and secure? No. We have a very high crime rate. The crime rate is escalating and it is not, in my opinion, going to be put under control anytime soon.

When we think about the world in which our young people find themselves today, when we talk about employment, why are we only confining them to traditional jobs? We have to learn to have policies which cater for the unconventional and the non-traditional avenues for employment and training to position young people strategically to be able to be productive members of society. Yes, young people were consulted, I am told, but a miniscule percentage of young people were consulted. That does not, in any way, reflect the wishes, needs and wants of the young people of Guyana.

I would like to see this document go to select committee because it is that important, that critical, that crucial, moving forward in this country. If we are serious about young people in this country, if we are serious about their future, we really want to hear from them. For us to have an input from young people, I say, take this document back to a select committee. I say take it back to a select committee where we can have more consultations, more discussions and refine the Policy until it is a visionary document which caters not only for the young people of today, but the young people of the future. This document must be one that is enriching for the young people. It must be one that can enrich their lives and not be one that is filled with a lot of ambiguous and vague sentiments which do not have, in any way, how they will be effective or implemented.

When we talk about what happens in this country, there is a moral dilemma, a moral crisis which faces us all in this country. That dilemma has not been reflected in this Policy document. Where is the mention of the religious community? Where is the mention of collaboration with the

religious community so that we can tackle that moral crisis which exists in this country? Where is the collaboration with other entities which can, in some meaningful way, contribute to this dialogue that we want to have which defines what we want to do with the young people and youth in Guyana.

Culture and arts in this country need more attention. There is not enough mention of culture and arts in this country. Young people need to be able to understand that different avenues such as culture and arts are open to them in this country. It should not be seen as a mere hobby. It should be put into the mainstream of employment opportunities for young people. This Policy document needs to address that fact the world is changing, the thinking is changing, and the way in which young people can earn, be visible, and recognised is also changing. Those are some of the things I would have liked to see in this Youth Policy document.

I am happy that the document is here. I am happy that it is being discussed, but I would be happier if the document is taken to a select committee. I think that is where we need to go if we are serious about what we want for our young people.

Technology is vital in today's world. Everyone has a gadget in their hand, and everyone is connected. Technology needs to constitute a significant part in the Youth Policy document. This is the only way that we can think of our youth being connected around the world. The world is a global village and, if technology is not seriously dealt with in this document in a detailed way as to how it can be utilised among the youth, not only for interconnectivity among themselves in a social way, but interconnectivity so they can access different opportunities, whether employment, education or those beyond the boundaries of this country, then the document is lacking.

I have delineated just a few of the things which are missing from this document. There are many more. If we sit in a select committee and put our heads together, consult widely...that is what the committee system is meant to do in Parliament; that is why we have the committee system; it is, to allow us to consult, to get learned opinions, to have the input of many people beyond what we have in this room. Of course, I cannot dismiss political consensus. If there is political consensus, then there would be national consensus because of the influence the political parties and that which politicians wield. If we are not serious about political consensus and we continue to

railroad our way, like bulls in a china shop, then we would not be achieving any of the things that I am sure each and every one of us would like to achieve in this room and in this country.

Governance, politics, national platforms and policy development are not mentioned in this National Youth Policy. Many promises were made in a certain manifesto for the inclusion of youth. But where are those things now in the Youth Policy when we have the chance to have young people at every level in the decision-making forum in this country? Where are they? We do not see enough young people in Government. How can we include more young people? What are the mechanisms and strategies to have young people on more national platforms, more young people in governance? Instead, young people are fleeing from the public sector for many reasons, which we all know very well. There are young people losing their jobs left, right and centre. Where are the protective mechanisms for those young people in this country when they lose jobs?

What about Indigenous peoples? Whether we call them Indigenous or Amerindian, they are very precious to this country. They are our first peoples. Where are the mechanisms to empower, to enable and to give them the equal opportunities of which we speak?

When we think of the PPP/C Government, there were so many programmes which were started for young people. Some of those programmes have collapsed by the wayside because it is felt that, if it is not mine, it is not good. There was the Board of Industrial Training (BIT) Programme. There were so many programmes which were held through the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport that taught young people skills, empowered them and trained them in leadership capabilities.

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

Dr. Persaud: I feel constrained too, as a young person in this Parliament, by not being allowed to speak more. Those are the types of things I am talking about. Young people need to speak; women need to be given a voice. That is what I want the National Youth Policy to have. This is an important document but, equally so, in this Parliament, our voices are important because we represent people who want their opinions to be heard. We represent people who expect us to stand up for them and to ensure their lives are good.

We cannot confine this Policy and debate to just tonight. It means much more. Fifteen minutes to say what is missing is really not a lot of time. But I am sure I am down to two minutes in your books, Sir. So I want to say that, right now, if we are serious, if we genuinely believe that young people mean to this country what I think they mean, if we are genuine in our desire to see them empowered, to see them grow, to see them make a meaningful impact, then we, as a people, need to sit and peruse this very important document, revise it and come up with a format and content that critically gives to the young people.

7.01 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up.

Dr. Persaud: Thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I rise in this august House to make my contribution and to continue to expound on the virtues of the National Youth Policy 2015 of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana.

It was my expectation that Hon. Members of the Opposition would not have lived up to their label of Opposition and oppose for the sake of opposing, but would have some respect for our youth and whole heartily support and contribute, positively, to this debate. It should be noted that Hon. Members had the opportunity to contribute to the many discourses that were held countrywide and they refused.

Further, our commitment to youth is exhibited in our housing policy, as we attempt to change the age before one can acquire a house lot from the age of 21 to 18; this is a commitment that this Administration has made.

I want to draw Members' attention to the nature of the construction of the Kato Secondary School, which was done under the previous Administration. Was that a commitment to the indigenous and youthful people in this country?

The cohort of Guyanese in the youth bracket is over 50%, too many and too significant to be ignored. Little concerted attention was paid to them for far too long. This group is the future of this country and, thus, must be nurtured to be the foundation from which our development is

hinged. This National Youth Policy 2015 is bipartisan, all-inclusive and, despite it fulfils another of our Manifesto's covenant, it should not be seen as a Government programme only, but it should be seen as a national programme for youth transformation.

As a Government, we have done much to date for the youth. We believe that our intention, our vision, and promise to our youth must be strategised and documented. We sought and received much suggestions and inputs and, thus, this National Youth Policy 2015 should be seen and must be seen as a product of all, particularly our youth.

This National Youth Policy 2015 of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, as stated in the Preface, outlines the Government of Guyana's agenda and its priorities for all young people under the age of 35. It represents a stated commitment to improving the situation of young people in Guyana in a manner that is empowering, inclusive and sustained. Importantly, the policy is rooted in the Constitution of Guyana, Preamble 26, which states, and I quote:

“Acknowledge the aspirations of our young people who, in their own words, have declared that the future of Guyana belongs to its young people, who aspire to live in a safe society which respects their dignity, protects their rights, recognises their potential, listens to their voices, provides opportunities, ensures a healthy environment and encourages people of all races to live in harmony and peace and affirms that their declaration will be binding on our institutions and be a part of the context of our basic law;”

The aforementioned and this Policy are well aligned with the United Nations Development Programme on Youth and the UN Policy paper adopted in Brussels, in April 2012. The United Nations Development Programme on Youth, not unlike our intentions, states that youth should have full access to education, adequate health-care, employment, financial services and participation in public life. We embrace these goals and, thus, have outlined, on page 1, the five strategic areas that the policy is centred on:

- Improve the social, emotional and cultural skills of young people
- Produce productive and enterprising youth workforce
- Develop quality education and market orientation skills

- Encourage leadership, participation and representation
- Promote good health, security and safety

Our youth's unique perspective and contribution must be taken into account in order to allow them to fully realise their potential and thus, as a Government, we will fulfil the basic human rights, objectives, and democratic principles by investing in our human capita. This we are assured will prevent many future problems, such as school-dropouts, juvenile delinquency, *et cetera*. Like the UN, we feel that youth are not merely positive beneficiaries but are also agents of change who will often lead by example and employ innovative solutions to complex problems by being creative, dedicated, enthusiastic, compassionate, energetic, technologically savvy, resourceful and capable.

Further, the UN 15 priority areas are condensed in our five strategic areas. As we debate this Policy, the words of Kofi Annan, former and 7th Secretary-General of the United Nations and 2001 Nobel Peace Prize recipient is apt. I quote:

“No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline; it is condemned to bleed to death.”

That was in his address to Ministers Responsible for Youth, Lisbon 1998.

We qualify youth as those under the age of 35 years. We embrace youth as they transition from childhood to adulthood. During this stage the move from students to teachers, from trainee/mentee to mentors, from dependents to independent, this is quite noticeable. If young people are to transition to become productive assets to our country, we owe them. It is our responsibility to craft, with their blessing, a policy to inform them and that we have done. Moreover, that is why, after the analysis of the situation of Guyanese youth and the output of the consultations, it was found necessary to address the following areas as key components of the youth development agenda. They are identity, empowerment, education, skills development, employment, entrepreneurship, safety, health and well-being, political participation and representation.

I will speak to the first three:

Identity - This well-crafted position paper posits that all young people must have the social, cognitive and moral competencies to function in society.

Self-awareness, discipline & interpersonal skills are critical for empowerment. Self-awareness will allow our youth to understand their personalities and be able to use their strengths to maximise the potential, while understanding their weaknesses and have greater control of their emotions as they motivate themselves. As Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man* suggests:

“When I discover who I am, I'll be free.”

We want our youth to be free. Free to innovate, discover and conquer. This ability for introspection enables the weak to become average and the average to become outstanding. Better interpersonal skills will help our youth to embrace our national thrust for social cohesion. Aristotle puts it best when he says:

“Friendship is a single soul dwelling in two bodies.”

As important as the social skills are, our young people need cognitive competencies to function efficiently and effectively in society. They need to be analytical while solving problems to have well-planned outcomes. Sir, problem solving, by analytical methods, is the bedrock of great plans. All plans have two features in common - goals and barriers. Our youth must learn to overcome barriers by achieving their goals. As much as social and cognitive competencies are critical, we firmly believe that our youth must have high morals, which will help in shaping the moral fabric in our society. We believe, as stated on page 18, that:

“These competencies are necessary to successfully navigate complex and potentially harmful situations, environments and practices that result in crime, teenage pregnancy, drug use, and other social ills”.

Further, the proposed policy states that:

“Youths must be provided the opportunity to realise their individuality and identity, contribute to their communities, have high self-esteem, a sense of purpose, realise their potential, and become well-rounded. These competencies are especially relevant among

vulnerable and disadvantaged youth, like young women and girls, youth at risk, the differently-abled, youth who are discriminated against because of their sexual orientation and gender identity, and youth in contact or conflict with the Law.”

We are conscious that our youths are vulnerable, as they more often than not make up the largest percentage of the unemployed and underemployed group. They often times lack the experience or social contact. They are simply at risk, and that is why youth empowerment is a concern that is addressed in the National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana

Education - our Education System has many challenges, it must be retooled and become more relevant and be better designed to address current developmental trends and needs. Our young people, our students, must be taught by teachers who choose the real world over the classroom. Our young people do not learn to live or survive in a classroom. They learn to survive in the real world, so our teachings and facilitation must be aimed at providing our young people with the tools with which to live and breathe in the real world. Fittingly, the Priority on Education states that:

“The Education System is a vital rite of passage for young people and should be staffed, resourced and required to produce people who are equipped to realise their full potential. Young people should see the value of pursuing and receiving an education, and should be the strongest advocates for the delivery of quality education from the early childhood education to tertiary levels across Guyana.”

Among our many challenges are the inadequate stimuli for innovation, excellence and critical thinking. This policy proposes to place greater emphasis on these areas, and we will address these with alacrity. This document points to the need to equip our youth to transition through the various phases of their development, seamlessly, and to promote greater equity. This policy is very dynamic and, thus, embraces support for economic development. That is why we propose to invest in adding value to and upgrading existing sectors such as agriculture, mining and construction, by increasing demand through early exposure and training in schools. We, through these plans, will provide better quality of greater quantity of our youths, being conscious of their unique geographic locations, ability, the indigenous and other disadvantaged youth. Studies

suggest that boys and girls face quite different challenges and, thus, no one shoe will fit all. Hence, education reform has been identified as a national priority.

The policy objective is to develop an efficient and dynamic national system of formal and informal education, which is accessible by all young people. This ensures functional literacy and equips youth with the skills demanded by the market and needed to overcome life's challenges. Sir, this proposal speaks to quality of education and training. We propose to improve the physical infrastructure and facilities required for the delivery of quality education at all levels. The consultation made is known, that an incentive scheme for students, teachers and all educational institutions is necessary to achieve better learning outcomes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have three minutes left.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is widely accepted that inadequate in-school education drove after-school classes, and the policy proposes to tackle this. Continuing education will be addressed through adult education and literacy opportunities. The policy will seek to understand the complementary and supplementary role of private schools, as we regulate and integrate private and public schools at all levels.

The policy, via the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects and foreign languages, will seek to support the promotion of research, excellence and innovation. We are conscious of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in modernising the delivery of information and support innovative learning techniques and, hence, the policy suggests the increased use of ICT.

In order to have our students rounded, the document proposes to incorporate soft skills training in the curriculum to help deal with classroom problems and overcome life challenges.

7.16 p.m.

The policy targets the training of youths in non-traditional trades and vocations, and the accreditation of civil society and private sector bodies to deliver Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) training to increase access for youths in the rural areas to education and training opportunities.

Career Guidance - our consultations points this policy to improving the delivery of career guidance to international best practices, which will be guided by a national comprehensive career guidance programme for both in and out of school youth. The policy further advocates the capacity of training and educational institutions to advise youths on career choices, which is paramount.

The potential benefits that not only the youth but the entire nation will realise, begs the question: Why was it not crafted before? The answer may lie in Mr. George Santayana's statement,

“To know what people really think, pay attention to what they do rather than what they say.”

We have not only spoken of our commitment to youths, but we are doing something. This policy is a framework...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Croal: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, allow me to give some remarks with respect to tonight's motion and, that is, an important document - the National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. This is historic, in the sense of the role our young people play and the percentage for which we occupy in this country, it ensures that we have a say in the future of our country.

So it goes without saying that, when I reviewed the document, my conclusion is that there are a lot of generalities. There are broad-based statements, one that resembles a lot of cut and paste, as if one is taking a theoretical construct and then preparing a policy document. If one would review the document, there are a number of grammatical errors and it just shows. So, I probably would like to know who is the consultant that helped to prepare the document.

We are told about the many consultations that were done. But I would like to ask the question because, at the end of the day, Region 4 is not Guyana. How many consultative processes took place within the regions of Guyana? Yes, the document does states that there were representatives present, but who were those representatives?

The previous speaker made mention about a bi-partisan approach. May I make mention that, we on this side of the House, have a role to play because our representation and mandate in this House was given by the people of Guyana, and so we have a right to make representation and to form and be part of that bi-partisan approach so that it is not only out there.

Unlike a previous speaker who had said that we are here to oppose for oppose sake, our position here tonight is to add value and to show that we, on this side of the House, would like, at the end of the day, to have a comprehensive document, as far as possible, that we could start with. That is why, very early, we have called for this document to be sent to the Special Select Committee, so that we could elaborate, discuss and provide more technical and theoretical information that could form part of the policy document for the future of our country.

The previous speaker and probably the one of the only two, I can say, youth representatives, on the other side of the House, Member of Parliament, Mr. Figueira, made mention of the high level of unemployment of youth inherited by the previous Government. Also, we were reminded earlier by the previous speaker, the Hon. Mr. Irfaan Ali, about the state of the economy for which the PPP/C took over. While the focus would have started to ensure that we pay attention to the infrastructure, simultaneously, with the limited resources available, much emphasis was placed on training and enhancement.

We have worked assiduously to ensure that our young people were provided opportunities, not merely by stating so, but by doing so. That is why I may remind the Hon. Members of our previous Cabinets, where many young people, and the figure was given earlier, as much as six youth, were represented at the level of the PPP/C's Cabinet. That is a manifestation, at the highest level, of where we ensure and believe that the youth should be part of the decision-making process.

Let me go further. They spoke about the Cabinet, but look at our Parliament. Examine on this side of the House and look at the speakers that would have presented positions on the motion, and examine on the other side of the House and it speaks for itself. Let us go further to the Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) and I will give some examples. It will show that we just do not just talk the talk, but we walk the walk. Region 1, Chairman and Vice-Chairman, both of them are in their 20s. In Region 2, the Regional Chairman is in his mid-30s. In Region 5, both

the Chairman and Vice-Chairman are in their 30s. In Region 8, the Regional Vice-Chairman is in his 30s. In Region 9, the Regional Vice-Chairman in his 20s and I could give the exact age, if Members would like.

They are picking from trees that just have one or two ripe apples so that they could just hold on. They are holding on to the Deputy Mayor for Lethem and probably to one Members of Parliament. I am told that the Deputy Mayor is in *absentia* attending the University of Guyana. We spoke about our young people, but just look at today's *Stabroek News* headlines, which states:

“Lethem Mayor evicted two youths from Council meeting”

I did not say that and I could describe further. Look at what happened in Region 5. For over six months, our Regional Chairman was prevented, physically, from functioning and we are talking about democracy, youth representation, youth participation and activism. To go further, I saw that our Deputy Mayor for Georgetown was here earlier. They want to hang him dry because he is speaking the truth. **[Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon]:** So how did he get there? It is not a matter of how one got there, but it is how the young people are being treated in this country. The younger people in this country have ideas too and it is to allow them the space to ventilate those ideas and to allow them the opportunity to act on their ideas.

So when MP Mr. Figueira had said not allow our political rhetoric to hinder our young people. I would like to ask the Government to start within its own political structure and at the highest level of the country. So, while we would have listened to all these good messages, it is to ensure that the good messages are followed by ensuring that we are part of the process and that we do not have victimisation. **[Hon. Member from the Government: We the youth?]** Well, I am young person, so I can say “we the youth”. **[Ms. Ally: But you do not look so though.]** I know that you admire me.

Even if one looks at page four, our young people have limited access to financial products and credit schemes for youth business.

I know that a previous speaker quoted from the manifesto of the governing party, but I would not go there. One just needs to read this and it is stated here, but I will only quote three points from our Vision 20/20.

“It is a focus on our young people that the People’s Progressive Party Civic, while in Government focused on micro–small and media scale enterprises”

That is why input was made into organisations such as the Institute of Private Enterprise Development (IPED). To give our young people the opportunity, those who wanted a start with entrepreneurship. [Mr. Greenidge: Was it started by the PPP?] I never said so. I said that we encouraged. I will continue, just listen good.

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Croal, you are entitled to use your time as you wish, but I must insist that you address the Chair. Any side discussions could take place outside the Chamber. Please address the Chair.

Mr. Croal: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Incentivising our banking system. It was us who had started the process of creating the environment to ensure that our young people could have easier access to loans, so that they could construct their own homes, buy their own cars and start their own businesses.

“Establish revolving funds to assist start–up businesses”. These are types of technical information that we would like to see form part of the policy for the youth of our country. So when one sees page four, which states that they have limited access to financial products and credit schemes for businesses, one need not go far.

Page nine,

“the Government will endeavour to retain its youth population, including its best and brightest young people by providing an enabling environment”.

What enabling environment? By firing, indiscriminately, our young people because they may have, and I would not use myself as an example because I am a proud Member and supporter of

the People's Progressive Party, but by firing young people who are perceived to be supporters of the People's Progressive Party. How are we encouraging our young people?

Page 13,

“The Government of Guyana recognises youth as mentors and innovators”

Where are the youth mentors in the Government? Where are the youth innovators in the Government? I am waiting to see to them. Do tell me.

Page 36,

“Poverty is considered to be the number one issue that affects Guyana's advancement...”

But yet, maybe two weeks ago, we would have heard mention that crime is the number one issue affecting all of our people, more particularly, drug trafficking. So which one is it?

7.31 p.m.

I want to say that, while the reference is made to a National Youth Policy, periodically reviewed every five years, it is we, on this side of the House, who would like to ensure that, when we start with a policy document, we have an all-inclusive, participatory and informatory document that could form part of the policy document for our youth.

In my opinion, the time has finally come for us to have a look at legislative entitlement for our young people. Just as how we ensure that, at the parliamentary level that there is one-third women represented, the time has come for us to look at ensuring that our young people form part of the legislative arm of every sector of governance and every sector of rulership in our country.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up.

Mr. Croal: Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now 7.30 p.m. We will have a suspension for half of an hour and we will return at 8.00 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 7.30 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 8.10 p.m.

Mr. Adams: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make my contribution to the debate on the motion moved by the Minister within the Ministry of Education, the Hon. Member, Ms. Nicolette Henry.

On this side, I shudder to think and sometimes to hear the very persons talking about the importance of youth. We could remember, on this side of the House, that a person had to be 21 years of age to be eligible to apply for a house lot and he/she had to be married with children. Some persons waited for as long as 10 years, which put them at 31 years of age, before they could receive a house lot, and some are still waiting. It is this APNU/AFC Government, with a plan and vision for youth that is now hoping to move a legislation to ensure that the age changes to 18 years of age for our young people - a party and a Government on a mission with vision for youth.

This side of the House and all of Guyana's youth are extremely overwhelmed today, knowing that we have come this far and have crafted a National Youth Policy. We have moved from it being in draft to it being in our possession.

This policy will not be another piece of legislation lying on a shelf. It will be a document that will inform the Government; it will be one that will be a working document to inform us of the needs of our young people and one that will guide us in the right direction to make informed decisions. This policy is long overdue and we are grateful to all those who gave their time and talent to enable us to come to this stage and it is now time for action.

If we are to move forward, we must put our hands to the wheel. All must be involved to bring about the desired results that will benefit all of Guyana's youth, irrespective of race, religion, political affiliation, class or creed. Our National Song, "*Youths are important to Guyana*", reminds us that we must work now, in an effort to bequeath a great legacy for tomorrow's leaders. Today's youth face many problems and if we are to confront them, we must start now. Hence, the National Youth Policy, which will not only highlight the problems, but speak to ways in which they could be addressed, and has detailed the various approaches that could be taken to deal with the problems and challenges that our young people face today.

This policy has various components and, today, my Colleagues and I will expand on them. This policy was created around five areas: improved social, emotional and cultural skills for our young people; to produce a productive entrepreneurial work force; to develop quality education and marketing oriented skills; to encourage leadership, participation and representation; to promote good health, security and safety. It caters for the holistic development of all of Guyana's youth.

As we are aware, Guyana's National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, outlines our Government's agenda and its priorities for all the people under the age of 35. It seeks not only to list their problems and concerns, but also to improve their livelihoods and well-being in a structured and organised manner. Our young people have got dreams, aspirations and ambitions. They have set goals, which they dream of realising and this policy, along with the involvement of the Government and the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) will work assiduously to help our youth achieve their goals. We have listened to thousands of youth. They have made their voices heard and we will work to ensure that we create the framework and the necessary environment that will encourage them to live and work in harmony, to build a better and brighter Guyana.

Our Government is cognisant of the fact that, for our economy to grow and develop and realise its true potential, we must address the various issues affecting our youth. We cannot cater for the needs of our young people with them in isolation. We must include our best and brightest young people as we strive to realise their set goals. This policy was not plucked out of the sky. It was after a series of conversations with the various youth organisations and a number of researches and surveys that a plan of action was carried out. This policy had its root in the Constitution of Guyana. It has not catered for all the needs of our youth and would, therefore, be revisited to find other ways and means to cater for the growing needs of our young people.

The definition of youth varies in every country. In Guyana, we define youth as persons between the ages of 14 and 35, and since 68.8% of our population is under the age of 35, we were compelled to institute a plan of action that would aid in their development. The policy will cater for youth *"From Pakaraima's peaks of pow'r To Corentyne's lush sands."* Youth in every region of Guyana, would be exposed to the same information and skills that will make them suitable and equip to function in almost any sector. They will have equal opportunities.

This youth policy is designed to allow all of Guyana's youth to have the same opportunities. With them being exposed to the same training and opportunities, it will certainly aid in job creation, thus, seeing a reduction in poverty and a reduction in youth unemployment.

This policy will see Government partnering with ministries, departments, non-governmental organisations and institutions, to equip our young people to be better able to function in the field of technology and other areas. Our Government will work along with regional and international organisations on the various fronts, so as to better empower our youth in the field of culture, arts, agriculture, among others.

We will see an increase in budgetary allocations for the various technical and vocational training institutions in every region of Guyana, and for the implementation of this policy, thus, allowing every youth access to the various programmes; allowing the youth in Region 9 to be exposed to the same programmes as the youth in Georgetown and in Region 4. We will see advancement in information technology, agriculture science and other fields. We will see our young being involved in the decision-making process at the various levels, and in so doing, will give them a sense of belonging. Through this policy, we will train several youth and retain them to build the land of their birth. We will no longer train for export.

Our Government recognises that we cannot make the necessary adjustments for youth alone. It is with this in mind that we extend an invitation to all interested organisations, groups and individuals to join with us, as we seek to provide the necessary platform to better equip our young people, to make a positive contribution to the development of our country.

All of Guyana's young people will benefit, irrespective of which area of the country they live, they will benefit and will be a part of this great plan as we move Guyana forward. Mr. Speaker, I would therefore commend this motion to the House.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Charlie: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I rise to make my contribution to this debate on the National Youth Policy. I have listened attentively to the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Education's presentation, which I find, and I must allude to this National Youth Policy that was presented to this august House, as lacking.

It failed to address the immediate concerns and find solutions that really affect the Amerindian youth across the length and breadth of our country. The policy does not represent all Amerindian youth groups, Amerindian special interest groups, our cultures and demographics. We all know that the Amerindian youth are very much vulnerable.

I have perused the pages of this National Youth Policy, and to my surprise, there is an omission of the Amerindian youth as it relates to the subject. Why? Was this an oversight or deliberate? Fix this national policy and have the Amerindian youth inclusive, respectively. The hinterland regions are diverse and it is unacceptable to allude to these regions as indigenous regions. We need a little lesson here, Mr. Speaker.

However, the Amerindian youth, over the last two decades have fulfilled their true potentials and have achieved excellence in their endeavours and despite the challenges, our young Amerindian people have achieved distinction in the chosen field of endeavour under the successive PPP/C Administration.

For example, we have scores of doctors, engineers and many other tertiary graduates contributing, presently, to the development of our country and also, we have seen greater integration of Amerindian youths in the retail and security sectors under successive PPP/C Administrations.

8.22 p.m.

Today, the Amerindian youths are skilled in constructing houses. Mr. Speaker, just take a look at the houses that were constructed in Kwatamang, in the North Rupununi, by village youths under the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and Government of Guyana (GoG) housing project during the time of the PPP/C Administration.

With this, the Opposition calls for the design of a programme that would integrate the Amerindian youth into the national housing drive. Do not leave out the Amerindian youth. We must be respected and we must have a say in the decision-making of our country. Bring the Amerindian youths and employ them, since they are skilled and talented in different fields. And I could allude to this: at the recent Indigenous Heritage Month celebrations in Region 9, the Hon.

Minister, Valarie Garrido-Lowe, pointed out a talented young Amerindian woman who was very skilled in creating costumes.

The Community Support Officers (CSO) programme, with the 1,972 Community Support Officers, was another successful programme under the PPP/C. That was a positive good life, but that is no more. Regarding the now Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) programme, which was supposed to replace the CSO programme, six months have passed and our hinterland youths are crying out, in every corner, about this *limp duck* programme. There have been no timely payments. Students and facilitators were paid yesterday in Region 9, but only for two months – June and July. This Government calls us Indigenous peoples with a true meaning. Then, why are the Indigenous youths not treated with first preference? Do our hinterland youths deserve such treatment? Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC): where was it when this National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana was formulated? I must remind the Government that our country, Guyana, is diverse and the Policy must reflect that.

If a sound mind took to examining the stages of this Policy, one would see that, in the making process, it had limited involvement of a diverse youth population, inclusive of the Amerindian youths. How could we call it a National Youth Policy and pass it when it does not fully address the real issues of all of our Amerindian youths and does not seek to further the greater good for all youths in the hinterland regions?

The National Youth Policy made numerous references but quoted no sources. There are youths in every sphere in our country. Therefore, the input of every local youth group, every village Toshao, every local government head, every Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) with youth interest, every youth group in every church, mandir and masjid, every youth arm of every political party, *et cetera*, were the places where data should have been collected to formulate the Policy. Hence, a youth from the capital does not have the same issues as an Amerindian youth in the hinterland region of our country.

Successive PPP/C Governments had always embraced the vision for Amerindian and hinterland youth development, which was once built on the principles of integration and preservation. Integration from the perspective that every Amerindian youth should have the same opportunities

as a youth from the coastland and must aspire to be whatever that youth aspires to be; and preservation from the perspective that indivisible integration must not come at the expense of or cause the erosion of the unique cultural heritage of our Amerindian youth. Hence, I find this lacking in the National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

Any youth policy should fully focus on employment for youth, including the Amerindian youths. Taking career fairs to the hinterland to bring awareness to the young people on the diverse opportunities of occupation is also what is lacking in this National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. The Amerindian youth must realise their full potential through access to equal opportunities to develop, participate and contribute, as responsible citizens, to a peaceful, prosperous and caring society, but this is also lacking for the Amerindian youth in the National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

In conclusion, since the National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana is a serious business for the development of our youths and our country, inclusive of the Amerindian youth, at this time, it is surprisingly lacking. Fix this National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. I respectfully ask that this National Youth Policy be sent to a parliamentary special select committee. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Anamayah: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I will make my contribution to this debate. I would, first of all, like to endorse what all of my Colleagues have said. There has been quite a bit said. The National Youth Policy 2015 of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana has been dissected by Hon. Member Dharamlall and all of the other speakers.

I would like to start by examining the definition of youth development. It is stated on page 4 of the document.

“For the purpose of this Policy, youth development will be defined as the advancement and empowerment of youth in the political, social, cultural and economic spheres with the aim of placing them at the centre of Guyana’s development.”

It goes on. In conclusion, the document states, on page 36:

“The Government along with all the other relevant stakeholders, will endeavour to work assiduously to create an enabling environment for youth development and advancement,

and to partner with youth as transformative agents of social, political and economic change.”

The document also states that 68.8% of the population is under age 35. My question is: where are they represented on the Government benches? Where are they represented in the Government? Who represents them in this Government? They simply are not represented. The Members on the Government benches could be described by many adjectives but youthful is not one of those adjectives. They cannot claim that title. [An. Hon. Member: Geriatric.] The Hon. Member is helping me. Geriatric might be a better description. Many are of pensionable age and past pensionable age. They cannot speak to youths. They cannot relate to their problems. They cannot represent them.

The PPP Government, as you heard from my other Colleagues, has gone far beyond advocacy and rhetoric in inspiring and engaging the youths of our country. The evidence of this, in successive PPP/C Administrations, is overwhelming. I will borrow what my Friend, Hon. Member Mr. Rutherford, said: you know what they think by looking at what they do. Well, let us examine what the PPP has done. In this House, we have the privilege of having one of the youngest ever Minister of Human Services and Social Security in Hon. Member Ms. Manickchand. She was made a Minister, by the PPP/C Government, at age 30. What did she achieve during her tenure? Every single manifesto promise that the PPP/C made was delivered by that youth at that time – 2006 to 2011. Not only that, she surpassed it and delivered on what was not promised. She surpassed all of the expectations, which the PPP/C promised in its Manifestos, and delivered to the people as a youth. At that time in the Ministry, she also transformed the legislative framework for youths, children and women in this country. That was the work of a youth of the PPP/C Government.

Let us go further. We have in the front bench, our acting Chief Whip for today, Hon. Member, Mr. Irfaan Ali, who was appointed a Minister of the PPP/C Government – Minister of Housing and Water – at the ripe old age of 28. At age 28, the PPP/C reposed the confidence in a youth and gave him one of the biggest Ministries in the country to manage. What did he do for the period 2006 to 2011? He allocated and distributed more house lots than all of his predecessors combined. That is the legacy of the youth in the PPP. It was under his tenure that there was a thriving and vibrant Ministry that transformed the lives of many and led to a construction boom

in this country that was unprecedented. We simply have to check with the local hardware dealers, the contractors and the commercial banks to see what happened during that period. What is happening to the Ministry now? Nothing is happening.

An Hon. Member on the Government side had asked that we name names. We are not ashamed to name these names and name these achievements. It was the PPP/C which gave this country its youngest Attorney General ever in the Hon. Member, Mr. Anil Nandlall; one of the youngest ever Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, who was in his thirties when he became Minister; youngest ever Minister of Agriculture, Robert Persaud, age 32; former Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, Dr. Frank Anthony, was in his late thirties. The list goes on.

Mr. Dharamlall alluded to it earlier. It was the PPP/C that gave this country its first youth President, in Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, at age 35. He was the youngest ever President in this country and in this hemisphere, as a matter of fact. This youth, at that time, was responsible for the financial architecture of our country and has transformed our country. That youth, Dr. Jagdeo, put our country on the international scene. He was named Champion of the Earth by the United Nations (UN) and *Time's* Hero of the Environment. He is internationally recognised and well respected. That is because the PPP/C reposed confidence in him as a youth.

On my immediate right is the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall, who, at age 32, was appointed the CEO of the Caribbean Festival of Arts (CARIFESTA) X, the largest and most successful CARIFESTA in the history of the Caribbean. At age 33, he was appointed as a Permanent Secretary (PS). We have Hon. Member Collin Croal who, at age 30, was the PS of the Ministry of Legal Affairs and later the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs.

8.37 p.m.

We have, as I said, gone past rhetoric and advocacy. We have shown the Guyanese youth and people that we believe in empowering the youth. What does this do? This was a demonstration of leadership by example. This is how we believe that you will inspire and encourage our youths to get involved, be involved and stay involved. They will undoubtedly believe that they have a say in their own destiny. They can control what happens to their future. They can be a part of it. They could be a part of crafting a document, such as this, and bringing it to the House

themselves. Under the People's Progressive Party /Civic (PPP/C) that was possible. We inspire that belief in our youths.

In crafting this document a lot of the background work, which was done by the Hon. Member Dr. Frank Anthony, was simply ignored. As a matter of a fact, it would be interesting, and I challenge the Government to do this, to have an actual consultation to be done now with the youth groups that was allegedly consulted to find out from them if this document actually reflects their views. The answer to that question would be very interesting and very embarrassing for some in this House.

Mr. Speaker, you cannot formulate policy with just broad sweeping statements. There need to be specifics, you would need to have goals and someone has to be held accountable. There has to be some way to measure your progress and what you have achieved. Obviously, this document is defective, woefully inadequate, and was not properly thought out. From all that was said here in this House, there is much wrong with it and it is far from perfect.

On that note I urge that the document be sent to a parliamentary Special Select Committee so that it could be fine-tune and we can have a better product.

Thank you Sir. [*Applause*]

Dr. Anthony: A lot has been said this afternoon about the national youth policy. I think, listening to Members on both side of the House, we have got a sense of what is in the document and we also have got a sense of perhaps some of the weaknesses of the document. What my colleagues have been saying, on this side of the House, is that we feel for us to move forward with the national youth policy, that it would serve us well if we could send this document to a parliamentary Special Select Committee where we could strengthen it. I think that is what this country needs. It would show on, both sides, that we can work on something that is of the national interest.

I have come to this House on many occasions. When I had the opportunity to speak on youth, I had said here that youth is such a big topic and it cannot be constraint to one sector or the other. When you look at what we would have done in the years as the PPP/C Government you would have seen policies and programmes for youth development spread across various Ministries.

While the Ministry of Culture Youth and Sport was established, we also had other Ministries focusing on various aspects of youth development.

One of the things, which I repeatedly heard tonight, was that somehow bringing this document to this body signifies that the Government is going to be doing something about young people in this country. Maybe that is so. I think one of the disappointments, which happened very early in the coalition administration, was when it coalesced the Ministry of Culture Youth and Sport into the Ministry of Education and made it a department. For many of the young people in this country, they felt that it was a retrograde step and that did not live up to the campaign rhetoric and promises that were made on the campaign trail.

Here we are, and we are talking about the national youth policy. It took us some time to get it here but we have heard we are missing a point that there were several youth policy documents, not only sectorial, but there were documents that were developed. Recall in 1993, under Minister Henry Jeffery, there was a national youth policy that was developed. Then, when the Carter Centre came here and we worked on a national development strategy, there was a chapter in that strategy that dealt with youth. Very quickly we would have achieved many of those things that were adumbrated in that strategy and we moved on.

Our attempts, we were revising what was there before, reviewing, strengthening and adding. That is why, with the help of the Commonwealth Youth Programme, we were able to have various drafts that were developed.

Yes, we heard about how many consultations there were, because developing a policy document, you would want to ensure that you are getting the actual problems and challenges that young people face. We do not want to have a document where an adult feel that he or she understands what the needs are of young people and then sit somewhere and craft a document. We went beyond that.

Those 3,000 or thousands of persons who have been quoted and consulted, they were not consulted by you. They were consulted by the PPP/Civic. I want to make that point, because it is coming over as if you went, after the elections, and suddenly you consult thousands of young people to craft a document. That did not happen.

In fact, we having done the work and the document was there, we actually hired a consultant who did 3,000 questionnaires that went out to young people to every single region in this country. Having got back the results of the questionnaires, we also did focus groups in those regions. We were able to deduce from the young people what it is that they want in a document and what it is they want in a policy. That was how that draft came about.

What did you do? When you came in, you had a manifesto promise to deliver a national youth policy perhaps within 100 days, you quickly gathered some organisations at the National Convention Centre and then you had what was called a consultation. After that, you said that we have a youth policy. Where is the consultation in that? Where were the representatives brought in from? Did they represent the regions? They did not. **[Ms. Charles-Broomes: Did you consult?]**

I did consult. What happened was that there is a vast difference between what was done using the 3,000 questionnaires? What was done with the focus group discussion and what we have before us today? There was a vast difference. The priorities, which were identified, some of them were ignored in this common draft of the policy.

Where are we going? The voices of the young people; when we went out there and get from them the information that we need to craft the policy that is ignored now in this document. Something is wrong with our approach and that is why we want to have one document. Let us bring it to the Special Select Committee so that we can strengthen it.

It is not only that. When you look at the introduction of the document, when you are crafting policy, you want to do a situation analysis so that at least we get a sense of what is happening with young people. In this document, which we have before us, a situation analysis was done. If you look at the statistics, which are in there, there is very little about Guyana, very little about our national statistics representing young people. What we did was to borrow statistics from the Caribbean which perhaps might have some relevance because it gives us a certain trend of what is happening in the region, but it does not present the reality of young people in Guyana. That is important, because if we are going to make the wrong diagnosis, then when we are going to treat with the problem, we are going to miss what we are supposed to be doing.

In this case, what you have is not going through the statistics, not doing the homework, not drawing from the previous document, which we have had, and using it to now do a proper

situation analysis, so that we can move forward. Not doing those things can put this policy at a disadvantage. Again, what we are saying and appealing to you for, let us take it to a parliamentary Special Select Committee so that we can strengthen it. That is what we are saying.

We had in the last draft of the youth policy 13 priorities area that were identified by the young people themselves that now have been condensed to five or six, in which you have grouped together. Some of the things, it was the young people themselves have been lost when you try to group them as that, and we need to do something about it.

When you look at the policy response now, that you do not have enough or adequate information in the situation analysis, what is been proposed, then you will see that there are some things that are missing. What is missing? In a lot of the policy's response, or policy solutions that are being proposed, it is very piecemeal. You would wonder if it is actually addressing the problems that were identified or the challenges that were identified in the situation analysis.

If it is going to be piecemeal, then it is going to have very minimal impact on some of the problems that were previously identified. We are not helping the young people to solve some of their challenges and problems. We might very well waste a lot of money and still not be able to fix some of the problems that we have identified.

Then, there is what I would call a mismatch because we identified some problems in the situation analysis and the policy proposals, which are made, do not correspond to some of the things that were identified. Again, this can be fixed, but we need to sit and work on it together.

Then there are some glaring omissions because the young people identified certain things that they want to see in this policy. In the version that we have before us, those things have been omitted. When you go back to some of the original documents you would see, for rural youth, that one of the things they talked about is the creation of agricultural jobs, getting training in agriculture.

8.52 p.m.

That has been there. In this version of the youth policy a lot of those things have gone missing. Therefore I think that the analysis and work that were done, we need to bring them forward and

to put in this document. I do not think that is something unreasonable to ask for because this what young people themselves have asked for.

Then when you look at what is happening today, under the PPP/C Government we had implemented a lot of programmes dealing with young people, but sadly we understand that some of those programmes are being systemically dismantled. Some of my colleagues, on this side of the House, spoke to some of those things. When you look at the policy, or what is being proposed to us today, as policy responses, it talks about some of the very things that we are dismantling, some of the things that were there in place and functioning. Maybe, we need to scale some of them up more, get them out to more communities. Some of those things are being dismantled, yet we have a document before us that talks about all these nice things that we want for young people and what we would be doing for them, but there are these programmes now that we could expand, but we are dismantling them instead.

Then, what is new in this youth policy? Some of the colleagues talked about innovations, some of them talked about using ICT. While one of the Members on the other side of the House spoke eloquently about the need to use ICT, and we fully agree with him, the opportunities that would be presented when there is a vibrant ICT sector, but sad to say when you look at the document carefully that is not included in the document. There are these gaps that are there, things that were perhaps intended to be put in, but somehow they got lost in translation or something. Those are some things that we need to address.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have one minute remaining.

Dr. Anthony: With that one minute there are a couple of things I would say. One, from the last version of this document, one of things that is missing is the mechanisms for governance. When you go to this draft there are about six or seven bodies that would have been created to help young people give their voice or add their voice to decision making, allow them representation, allow them participation. All of those are gone missing in this particular document.

Mr. Ali: I just wish to acknowledge, as a front bench Member, if the Hon. Member could be given ten minutes to conclude what he has to say.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. The Member would recall what I did say at the beginning. The Speaker would remain on that position, that we would seek to finish this tonight and to take our work forward. Hon. Member, please continue.

Question put, and agreed to.

Dr. Anthony: Mechanism for governance is not found in this document, very few. There was one which we spoke about into ministerial committee, but that is the only thing that is there. The mechanisms that allow young people themselves to be part of a board, to be able to bring out what exactly they want to see in the Government's policy, all those mechanisms have been ignored. It is not in this new document.

Because of the lack of information in the situation analysis, one would have thought that the key area that, this policy, would address is research, especially research into the area of youth. We know that in the education system, for example, there is a phenomenon of male marginalisation in which the young males are not taking their education. It is not only happening in Guyana, it is happening across the region and we need to do something about that. Sad to say, this policy does not address any of those things that are there. We need to have the research so we would fine-tune what we are doing to make sure that we are keeping in touch with the problems and challenges that are confronting young people.

When we look at the document, there is not any monitoring and evaluation (M&E). If we are not going to monitor and evaluate what we are doing, how would we know what we are achieving? That is something that we have to look at because nothing of the sort is there for this policy, and that is in the last draft. An M&E programme was in this document. When we look at costing, how much this policy cost us? What would the new measure cost us? It was also referred to in this document. Moving from one version to another version, a lot of important components of the policy was lost. I think we would do well if we can go back to some of the documents, the work that was done and bring them up into this version. One way to do that is that we could go to the Special Select Committee and be able to, maybe, strengthen what we have.

I have many more specifics on this document, but I guess time would not allow. Therefore I would just say that I think there is so much more to strengthen this document. I wish that we would have that kind of a bipartisan approach to making sure that we have a very strong youth

policy because, as was said in the document, 68.8% of this country is made up of young people and they deserve to have nothing but the best.

Thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Minister within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure [Ms. Ferguson]: Mr. Speaker, before I get into my actual presentation permit me on my personal behalf to extend congratulations to you on your recent achievement.

I rise this evening in this honourable House to give my contribution regarding the adoption of this motion of the National Youth Policy 2015 of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, moved and standing in the name of Hon. Member, Minister Nicolette Henry, Minister within the Ministry of Education, with responsibility for Culture Youth and Sport.

Allow me to publicly acknowledge those individuals who included consultants, advisers, persons from religious organisations, youth bodies and other organisations, who worked relentlessly and unwaveringly towards the realisation of this well comprehensive document before us this evening, one which I personally deem as important and timely to the development of Guyana's youth population. That being said, the purpose of this policy would serve as a pathway for our young people.

Allow me to refer to a few comments made by previous Members on the opposite side of the House. Apparently it seems as though they do not understand what a policy is all about. Let me say to the honourable colleagues over there: You heard about measurable; you heard about indicators; you heard about analysis and you heard about assumptions. According to Hague and Harrop in their text book *Comparative Government and Politics*, "the concept of policy is difficult to define precisely, but as a plan of action, a policy covers both an aim and a series of decisions, past and future, design to achieve objectives." They further alluded to a policy containing three components: "one, its intention, two, processes and institutions intended to realise those intentions and lastly underpinning beliefs or attitudes."

I would focus my presentation on two aspects of the policy. One seeking to address youth involvement, that is, youth participation, leadership and representative and the other would be on the youth, health safety and well-being. If we turn our attention to the actual policy document for

these two areas, these two priorities, I alluded to earlier, it gives a broad objective of what these priorities would be. Under youth leadership, participation and representation, this is what it is stated:

“Policy Objective: To ensure that young people are respected and become active participants and representatives in decision-making in the community, national, regional and international policy arenas.”

Just recently, March 2016, when we had our local government elections, young people were encouraged by this very administration to get involved in the local government process. After that we would have recognised that our Deputy Mayor of Georgetown is a young man; we would have recognised the Deputy Mayor of Lethem, Region 9, is a young woman and the Mayor of Bartica, another young person. Sitting in this honourable House, this very National Assembly, there are young people on both sides of the divide. We are here because we were elected by our senior leaders to be the voice of the people.

During the course of the debate, this evening, I heard on the Government’s side that there is no youth representative; it is a set of geriatrics, and all manner of things. Let me tell you something, I am happy to serve under these great men and women. We heard about Ministers or persons becoming Ministers at age 28, age 30, age 32 and age 35, but the reality is, they were high in corruption.

Let me share this: We see crocodile tears...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, another Member is raising. I see other Members are standing. May I enquire who is leading the charge and what is it about? Hon. Member Ifraan Ali, you are aware of the rules of this House and when you rise you will rise on a Point of Order if you are interrupting someone.

Mr. Ali: Yes Sir.

9.07 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Then please do that. Do the other Colleagues on the Opposition benches also wish to rise on a Point of Order?

Mr. Ali: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: My goodness, we will do....will you speak for them too?

Mr. Ali: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: What is your Point of Order?

Mr. Ali: My Point of Order is Standing Order No. 40(a). The Hon. Member imputed that the young Members referred to in this debate on this side of the House were high in corruption. I am asking the Hon. Member to provide the evidence. She imputed a negative motive and again did so. I am calling on this House to discipline her.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the practice is that you tell the Speaker what it is that you are complaining about and you then leave the matter to the Speaker.

Mr. Ali: Thank you, Sir. I now leave it to you.

Mr. Speaker: If you have completed everything, then there is nothing left for the Speaker to do.

Mr. Ali: I said to the Hon. Speaker what has been said and it is now up to the Hon. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: I thank you. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson.

Ms. Ferguson: Did you call me?

Mr. Speaker: I am awaiting the Hon. Member to rise.

Ms. Ferguson: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, there is a complaint that you used language which imputed to the Members on the other side improper conduct, improper motives in office or otherwise. It is not allowed in this House and that should be withdrawn. I await your action in that regard before you proceed.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, I did not call names. I made reference to...*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, I withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I did not hear you. Would you let the House hear what you are saying, please? With respect to language of that kind, it is the House and not an individual that is offended. Please let me hear you.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, if it were misinterpreted, I humbly withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: Are you withdrawing the remark?

Ms. Ferguson: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Please proceed.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, we see crocodile tears for youths under former governments. There was no youth policy. [Mr. Ali: why were you fired?] I was never fired. There was youth punishment. Forty per cent was jobless under the former regime. Youths were forced into criminal gangs. Five hundred were killed during the troubled times. Prisons were overcrowded and youths were betrayed in their name. Guyana became the suicide capital of the world. Guyana was notorious for pervasive corruption. It still haunts us.

There is a report in circulation about money laundering and all manner of things. The headline:

“Maldives Bank refused to accept ‘laundered’ US\$10 million deposit from Guyanese investor.”

Guyana suffered brain drain. Youths were attacked. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are not allowed to quote verbatim from any document which is not available to this House.

Ms. Ferguson: Sir, I will make it available. I will have it circulated.

Mr. Speaker: If you do that, then you must wait until you have done so before you make the comment. I will suggest that if you wish to quote from a document, you can, after giving chapter and verse of its origin. Please decide what you want to do.

Ms. Ferguson: I will quote from the publication.

Mr. Speaker: You will refer to the publication but you cannot quote from it verbatim. We cannot allow that.

Ms. Ferguson: I stand corrected. The Maldives Bank refused to accept laundered US\$10 million deposit from Guyana's investors. This was published on 10th October, 2016 on Caribbean News www.caribbeannews.com. I will have this circulated.

Mr. Speaker: There is no need for it to be circulated. The Chair did not order it.

Ms. Ferguson: Youths were attacked. It was said that this Government was sending home persons. I want to remind the Hon. Members on the other side of the House that young John Adams from Region 9 was cuffed. Young women were slapped and stripped. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, may I enquire whether it is the National Youth Policy that we are discussing?

Ms. Ferguson: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it? Please proceed.

Ms. Ferguson: I was just bringing some clarity. We heard that the document is not a proper youth policy document. I did my research and I recognised that the Jamaican Youth Policy document mirrored what this document is seeking to address.

As I said before, this is a Policy. All that is required is for us to ensure that the issues highlighted in the Policy are addressed effectively to ensure that our young people benefit in the future.

There is talk that youths are not represented. This is not so. On 27th September, 2016, Guyanese youth ambassadors represented Guyana at the Youth Summit in Belize. I can give testimony. We have young people. In the absence of a youth policy, we have young people who are coming forward to be leaders. We have young Dr. Allistair Collins who does leadership seminars, *et cetera*. We have young 19-year-old Jubilante Cutting, former student from Bishops High School

who is involved in designing an animation network. With the absence of a national youth policy document, young people continue to give tremendously to the development of this society.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to conclude by saying that we heard that the Policy is being recommended to a special select committee. We do not support this idea. We believe that this is mainly to stymie the entire process. The youths would have already had their say. The youths contributed tremendously. This is why we have this final product. Therefore, sending this Policy to a select committee is basically to stymie development and to slow up the work of this Government. I would like to support the document in its entirety for passage in this honourable House. Thank you very much [*Applause*]

Ms. Henry (replying): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise to conclude the debate on the motion before this honourable House, let me thank all of the speakers from both sides of the House for their contribution to this important debate.

Mr. Speaker, I really hoped that many more Members would have taken the opportunity to use the time provided to provide remarks directed at the National Youth Policy. Rather, some speakers spoke to irrelevant issues which had no correlation to the Youth Policy, such as the Guyana Marriott Hotel and all the other likes.

As it relates to the issue of context, which was raised by a Member of the Opposition, that Member did put himself into context. He spoke in very derogatory terms which were quite discriminating of persons in the cohort age group of over 35 years, notwithstanding the pejorative presentations from the other side of this House. I trust that the Members recognise the rationale and sobriety of adopting this motion.

As was posited by the Hon. Member, Jermaine Figueira, who spoke of the Government of Guyana's vision for the Guyanese youths, this Government is committed to transforming and empowering youths through this Policy. In fact, youth development has been identified as one of the top national priorities of this Government.

I heard, on numerous occasions, from the other side of this House, the issue of stigma and discrimination. I wish to say that there were some presentations that certainly contained and, in

my mind, was an embodiment of discrimination, stigmatisation and very derogatory remarks attributed to persons and, in one instance, to an individual because of his age.

For any policy to be effective and successful, it must be owned by all those concerned and that includes all of us in this honourable House. May I point out that, on page 6 of this document, it speaks to vulnerable groups like those discriminated against based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. Yet we heard that they were not included. The tone of the presentations, in many cases, was uncharacteristically exclusionary and full of rhetoric. I would have hoped to see some more substance here.

This Policy speaks to all ethnic groups, whether you are East Indian, Afro-Guyanese or an Indigenous youth. It addresses the youth of Guyana. As far as I am aware, all ethnic groups are covered. What is not national about a policy which addresses the Guyanese youths?

We were taken on many excursions this evening. One speaker knows that social cohesion speaks to all religious groups. Yet, that same speaker does not understand that social cohesion speaks to all age groups. That is why we included persons over 35 years of age.

There was some amount of rumour-mongering to the extent that it was stated that four young persons from the hinterland were not paid. This is a fabrication and quite untrue as the four young persons received their stipends and made a conscience decision based on preference.

9.22 p.m.

They decided that they wanted to go back to their community where they can undertake similar training.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to endorse the substantial presentation by the Hon. Audwin Rutherford who spoke on empowerment and education; the Hon. Hemraj Rajkumar who spoke on the issues of skills development, employment and entrepreneurship; the Hon. John Adams for outlining the contextual framework of which this Policy was developed; and the Hon. Annette Ferguson who spoke on political participation and representation.

This side of the House is fully committed to realising the benefits of National Youth Policy 2015 for all young people over the period 2016 to 2020.

As I pointed out a few hours ago when we began this debate, we need immediate implementation based on the recommendations made here today. We certainly cannot find favour in sending this National Youth Policy 2015 to any select committee. Our young people are too important to have them disappointed again and again; delaying this Policy will be a further disappointment.

The bottom line here is that, while we hear of the document not having this or that, no policy was brought to this House by the former PPP/C Government. The Government of Guyana is fully committed to realising the benefits of the National Youth Policy 2015 for all young people throughout the length and breadth of this country. The effective implementation of the Policy over the next five years will not be a priority only for the Government and the Department of Culture, Youth and Sport, but for all those committed to helping and supporting young people, and to shape their own lives and the future. I am confident that, with all on board, the National Youth Policy 2015 will meet and fulfil all expectations.

I wish to express my thanks and appreciation to all those young persons in all 10 regions of Guyana and all stakeholders who contributed to the making of this Policy. It is as much their Policy as it is that of the Government of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, I now recommend this motion to this House for its adoption. I thank you.
[Applause]

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Minister for her statement. I will now put the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Motion carried.

COMMITTEES BUSINESS

MOTIONS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there are two matters which concern the work of the Committees – the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources and the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations of the Tenth Parliament. The intention is to facilitate the continuation of work which had been started in the last Parliament. I believe we can complete this in a very short order.

OUTSTANDING WORK OF THE PARLIAMENTARY SECTORAL COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES OF THE TENTH PARLIAMENT

WHEREAS in accordance with Standing Order No. 104(1), every Committee shall before the end of the Session in which it was appointed, make a Report to the Assembly upon matters referred to it;

AND WHEREAS the Natural Resources Committee, a Sectoral Committee of the National Assembly of the First Session of the Tenth Parliament, was unable owing to the prorogation and subsequent dissolution of Parliament on the 10th November, 2014 and 28th February, 2015, respectively, to conclude the work that was referred to it in that Session,

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That the Natural Resources Committee of the National Assembly of the First Session of the Eleventh Parliament adopt all outstanding work of the previous Committee.” [Mr. Lumumba - Chairman of the Committee on Natural Resources]

Mr. Lumumba: Mr. Speaker, I would like to, at this time, say special thanks to the Chairman of the then Committee, who was the Hon. Minister of Education, Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine, and I want to thank the Members of the Committee. The Members of the Committee on the Government’s side at that point in time were Mr. Odinga Lumumba, Mr. Komal Chand, Mr. Neendkumar and Mr. Cornel Damon as Alternate. On the Opposition at that time were Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine, who was Chairman, Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Joseph Harmon, Ms. Jennifer Wade, Ms. Vanessa Kissoon and Mr. Trevor Williams as Alternate.

The Committee, as I said, met nine times and we could not have completed our work. The mandate of that Committee was derived from Paragraph 3 of Resolution No. 19 which stipulates that the Committee shall, in the discharge of their scrutinising role, examine all policies and administration for each sector to determine whether the execution of government policy is in consonance with the principle of good governance and in the best interest of the people of Guyana.

The Committee worked well. We had the Prime Minister on two occasions and we had the then Minister of Natural Resources, Minister Robert Persaud. We did most of our work but we were

unable to complete our visit to Mahdia. I am asking this National Assembly to facilitate this recommendation so that we can continue our work and hopefully sometime soon we will be able to table our work in this National Assembly.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Minister of State [Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon]: Mr. Speaker, as a Member of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources, I rise to second and adopt the Report that was presented by the Hon. Member, Mr. Odinga Lumumba.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member.

Question put and agreed to.

Motion carried.

ADOPTION OF THE THIRD PERIODIC REPORT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY SECTORAL COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE TENTH PARLIAMENT

WHEREAS in accordance with Standing Order No. 104(1), every Committee shall before the end of the Session in which it was appointed, make a report to the Assembly upon matters it has addressed or were referred to it;

AND WHEREAS the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations appointed in the Tenth Parliament was unable to conclude its agreed upon work programme;

AND WHEREAS the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations of the 11th Parliament reviewed the report of the previous Committee and agreed that it be laid in the National Assembly,

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly adopts the Third Periodic Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations of the 10th Parliament.” [*Ms. Teixeira – Chairperson of the Committee on Foreign Relations.*]

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Third Periodic Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations for the period 7th March to 11th November, 2011 be adopted. This Report highlights its activities over the period 7th March, 2012 to 11th November, 2014 of the Tenth Parliament. This Report includes issues and concerns raised and discussed at meetings as well as the Committee's interaction with Members of the Executive and other Government functionaries. The Report also makes observations and recommendations on matters which came before it.

The Committee held nine meetings during the period 7th March, 2013 and November, 2014 of the Session of the Tenth Parliament. During this period, presentations were heard from the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs on the movement of Guyanese in the Caribbean Region, the restructuring of CARICOM, among others, and the Change Facilitation Team on the status of the Strategic Plan for CARICOM. The Committee also visited the Remigrant Section and the Protocol Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Further, the Committee met with the Suriname Delegation and received a courtesy call from the then Ambassador of the Argentine Republic to Guyana.

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the Committee was unable to successfully complete the implementation of its work programme and adopt its reports.

The Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations of the Eleventh Parliament felt that a report should be presented to the National Assembly on the Committee's work. I hereby submit the motion and the Report for consideration and adoption by the National Assembly.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs [Mr. Greenidge]: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member's report is consistent with our understanding of what occurred during the tenure of the Committee. I therefore rise to support the request that the Third Periodic Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations for the period 7th March to 11th November be adopted.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Question put and agreed to.

Motion carried.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I thank you for your assistance and cooperation this evening. Before we rise, however, I must make mention of the Private Members' Business which is the motion standing under the name of Ms. Gail Teixeira at whose request this motion is being deferred to a convenient time at another Sitting.

I thank you very much. This concludes our business for today.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Nagamootoo: Sir, I move that this House be adjourned until Thursday, 27th October, 2016.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Prime Minister. The Assembly stands adjourned to Thursday, 27th October, 2016.

Adjourned accordingly at 9.35 p.m.