

National Assembly Debates

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006-2008) OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

67th Sitting

14:00h

Thursday 11 December 2008

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (68)

Speaker (1)

The Hon Hari N Ramkarran SC, MP

Speaker of the National Assembly

Members of the Government (40)

People's Progressive Party/Civic (39)

The United Force (1)

The Hon Samuel A A Hinds MP

(R# 10 - U Demerara/U Berbice)

Prime Minister and Minister of

Public Works and Communications- (Absent-

Performing the functions of the Office of the President)

The Hon Clement J Rohee MP

Minister of Home Affairs

The Hon Shaik K Z Baksh MP

(Absent)

Minister of Education

The Hon Dr Henry B Jeffrey, MP

Minister of Foreign Trade and International Co-operation

The Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy MP

(R# 6 - E Berbice/Corentyne)

Minister of Health

The Hon Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett MP

(R# 9 - U Takutu/U Essequibo)

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

Minister of Foreign Affairs

*The Hon Dr Ashni Singh MP

Minister of Finance

The Hon Robert M Persaud MP (AOL)

(R# 6 - E Berbice/Corentyne)

Minister of Agriculture

The Hon Dr Jennifer R A Westford MP (AOL)

(R#7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)

Minister of the Public Service

The Hon Kellawan Lall MP

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development

*The Hon Doodnauth Singh SC, MP (AOL)

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs

The Hon Dr Frank C S Anthony MP

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport

The Hon B H Robeson Benn MP

Minister of Transport and Hydraulics

**The Hon Manzoor Nadir MP

Minister of Labour

The Hon Priya D Manickchand MP

(R# 5 - Mahaica/Berbice) Development

Minister of Human Services and Social Security

The Hon Dr Desrey Fox MP

Minister in the Ministry of Education

The Hon Bheri S Ramsaran MD, MP

Minister in the Ministry of Health

The Hon Jennifer I Webster MP (AOL)

Minister in the Ministry of Finance

The Hon Manniram Prashad MP

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce

*Non-elected Minister **Elected Member from TUF

*The Hon Pauline R Sukhai MP

Minister of Amerindian Affairs

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

Mr Donald Ramotar MP

Ms Gail Teixeira MP

Mr Harripersaud Nokta MP

Mrs Indranie Chandarpal MP, Chief Whip

Ms Bibi S Shadick MP

(R# 3 – Essequibo Is/W Demerara)

Mr Mohamed Irfaan Ali MP

Mr Albert Atkinson JP, MP *(Absent)*

(R# 8 - Potaro/Siparuni)

Mr Komal Chand CCH, JP, MP

(R# 3 - Essequibo Is/W Demerara)

Mr Bernard C DeSantos SC, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mrs Shirley V Edwards JP, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr Mohamed F Khan JP, MP

(R# 2 - Pomerook/Supenaam)

Mr Moses V Nagamootoo JP, MP *(AOL)*

Mr Mohabir A Nandlall MP

Mr Odinga N Lumumba MP *(AOL)*

Mr Neendkumar JP, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

*** Mr Steve P Ninvalle MP

Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport

Mr Parmanand P Persaud JP, MP

(R# 2 - Pomerook/Supenaam)

Mrs Philomena Sahoye-Shury CCH, JP, MP *(AOL)*

Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Housing and Water

***Non-elected Member

Mr Dharamkumar Seeraj MP

Mr Norman A Whittaker MP

(R# 1 - Barima/Waini)

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

Members of the Opposition (27)

(i) People's National Congress Reform 1-Guyana (21)

Mr Robert HO Corbin

Leader of the Opposition

Mr Winston S Murray CCH, MP

Mrs Clarissa S Riehl MP

Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly

Mr E Lance Carberry MP - (Absent)

Chief Whip

Mrs. Deborah J. Backer MP

Mr Anthony Vieira - (Absent)

Mr Basil Williams MP

Dr George A Norton MP

Mrs Volda A Lawrence MP

Mr Keith Scott MP - (Absent)

Miss Amna Ally MP

Mr Dave Danny MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr Aubrey C Norton MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr Ernest B Elliot MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Miss Judith David-Blair MP

(R# 7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)

Mr Mervyn Williams MP

(Re# 3 - Essequibo Is/W Demerara)

Ms Africo Selman MP

Dr John Austin MP

(R# 6 - East Berbice/Corentyne)

Ms Jennifer Wade MP

(R# 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)

Ms Vanessa Kissoon MP - (Absent)

(R# 10 - U Demerara/U Berbice)

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

Mr Desmond Fernandes MP
(Region No 1 – Barima/Waini)

(ii) Alliance For Change (5)

Mr Raphael G Trotman MP - (AOL)

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan MP

Mrs Sheila VA Holder MP

Ms Latchmin B Punalall, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr David Patterson MP - (AOL)

(iii) Guyana Action Party/Rise Organise and Rebuild (1)

Mr Everall N Franklin MP

OFFICERS

Mr Sherlock E Isaacs

Clerk of the National Assembly

Mrs Lilawatie Coonjah

Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

14:08H

PRAYERS

The Clerk reads the **Prayers**

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The Speaker: Honourable Members, there are eight questions on the Order Paper. Questions Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 8 are for written replies.

Question No. 1 is in the name of Honourable Member, Mr Mervyn Williams;

Question No. 2 is in the name of the Honourable Member, Mrs Deborah Backer;

Question No. 3 is in the name of Honourable Member, Mr Raphael Trotman; and

Question No. 8 is in the name of Honourable Member, Mrs Volda Lawrence.

Only two Answers have been received, and these are to Questions 1 and 8 directed to the Hon Minister of Finance and the Hon Prime Minister. The answers are therefore in accordance with our Standing Orders being circulated. We have not received answers to Question Nos. 2 and 3

directed to the Hon Minister of Home Affairs, and to the Hon Prime Minister.

Questions Nos. 4, 5, 6, and 7 are for Oral Replies.

Unfortunately, Question No. 8 was wrongly placed on the Order Paper for Oral Replies, but that is for Written Replies, as said earlier.

Question No. 4 ... Honourable Member Mr. Aubrey Norton, please ask the question.

Mr. Aubrey Norton: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs ...

Could the Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs inform this National Assembly what is the government's Foreign Policy on Suriname?

Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett: Mr. Speaker, Guyana's policy towards the Republic of Suriname is to foster closer relations with that country. To this end, the government continues to seek ways and means of deepening cooperation, mutual understanding, and developing constructive dialogue on matters of mutual interest such as trade, the environment, trans-border crimes and issues relating to the international boundary between our two countries.

Mr. Aubrey Norton: Follow-up question.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Aubrey Norton:

In the light of changes seen since CGX, and more recently, the MV Chandra, and the proclivity of the Surinamese government to act differently to the period before, could the Honourable Member state what changes, since then, have occurred in our Foreign Policy to accommodate the changes that are being made by Suriname in its present approach to us?

Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett: Mr. Speaker, Guyana will continue to work towards encouraging Suriname to resolve issues with Guyana peacefully, and by the application of the relevant tenets of International Law and the Community Law, under the Treaty of Chaguaramas. As the Arbitral Award of 17 September, 2007 has demonstrated, this is not only a viable and successful approach to conflict resolution, but is also our duty as peace-loving neighbors ... At the same time, the Government of Guyana will not shirk its responsibility to secure and defend Guyana's rights, even as we work toward a just and amicable resolution.

The Speaker: Mr. Norton ...

Mr. Aubrey Norton: Mr. Speaker, a follow-up question ...

More directly, it is evident that there have been changes in military capabilities of both societies, and there is a close correlation between Suriname's aggression, and the absence of such capability in Guyana. Could you say if our policy is being structured to ensure there is the capability as a form of deterrent?

Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett: Mr. Speaker, there are various areas that the government is presently looking at; which at this time, I am not prepared to expose.

Mr. Aubrey Norton: A follow-up question ...

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister would know that cardinal to Foreign Policy in International Law is state practices. Could the Honourable Minister say if any action is being taken with the fishermen, who are registering outside of Guyana, to make them conscious of the problem, and to be able to rectify it so that it can redound to the benefit of Guyana?

Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture is not here at the moment. I know they have been working with the fishermen, but as I said, there are other avenues that we are exploring, and at the appropriate time, the House will be so informed.

Mr. Aubrey Norton: One final, final question on this issue ...

I would assume that even if the Minister of Agriculture is meeting them, the Foreign Ministry is responsible as the ministry responsible for Foreign Policy would have given advice. Could you inform this House what kind of advice was given to the Minister of Agriculture, as we attempt to deal with these issues that are cardinal to the territorial integrity of Guyana?

Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett: Mr. Speaker, the advice provided to the Ministry of Agriculture by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would be in keeping with what I said earlier, with respect to the issue of Government's Foreign Policy on Suriname, which the question was based on. I did not expect that the details of fishermen and so on would be discussed today.

The Speaker: Question No. 4, Honourable Member, Mr. Norton.

Mr. Aubrey Norton: I move to Question 5.

The Speaker: 4.

Mr. Aubrey Norton: The Minister does not seem disposed to answer. I dealt with 4 there.

The Speaker: Yes, very well. The Minister is not disposed to ...

Question 5:

Mr. Aubrey Norton: The first part of Question 5 ...

Could the Hon Minister of Foreign Affairs state whether her government's promise to this National Assembly to establish a specific mechanism to implement the CARICOM Charter on Civil Society has been put into effect?

Hon Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett: Mr Speaker, as has been the case with all other CARICOM countries, Guyana has not yet established the mechanism – the National Committee to implement the CARICOM Charter on Civil Society. However, Guyana remains committed to the Charter, and will work to establish this mechanism as soon as possible.

Mr. Aubrey Norton:

Let us assume for a minute that ... let us assume, Mr. Speaker, that Guyana has that commitment. Is the Minister prepared to tell us what mechanism they intend to establish?

Hon Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett: The mechanism as outlined in Article 25 (4) of the Charter.

Mr. Aubrey Norton:

Could the Hon Minister tell this House what Guyana can benefit from the mechanism that is suggested there, and how we approach it as Guyanese, as distinct from the rest of CARICOM?

Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett: Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to; it is outlined in the Charter. I do not know if the Honourable Member would like me to read it out. But it is basically a mechanism of government, state and non-state actors, and I think it could benefit Guyana by us being able to coordinate, in terms of our National Policy, having Civil Society being informed and we have started this, in a way. The President has just had the launching of our position on avoided deforestation, and generally, larger policies can be discussed at this level as well.

Mr. Aubrey Norton:

If, as the Hon Minister outlined, that it is outlined in the CARICOM Document, and it should be simple, could the Hon Minister tell this Honourable House what is preventing Guyana from implementing the said mechanism?

Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett: There is no specific reason for not implementing it as yet, Mr. Speaker, except to say that there have been many other issues engaging the State's attention, and as I said, we are actively considering the implementation or the establishment of this National Committee, and I hope sooner than later we would be able to have this committee up and running.

Mr. Aubrey Norton: One last question ...

Could the Honourable Minister, like the previous Minister, undertake that the civil ... the Charter of Civil Society is important, and that the Ministry will set up the mechanism?

Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett: Yes ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker:

Question 6:

Mr. Aubrey Norton: Mr. Speaker, could you guard me from infantile behavior, or save me, rather? Save me!

Yes, Mr. Speaker, now Question No. 6 ...

Could the Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs tell this National Assembly why her government's promise to this Assembly to convene a Heads of Missions Conference in 2007 was not honoured?

Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett: Mr. Speaker, the Heads of Mission Conference was not held in 2007, because of many other activities that Guyana was engaged in during the year: the Rio Group Meeting; the cricket, the World Cup Cricket; and the Commonwealth Ministers of Finance Meeting, which took up a lot of our time, and resources and attention.

Mr. Aubrey Norton: Mr. Speaker, as you will have observed, it was 2007 that promise was made, and all the events identified are 2007. We are now in 2008 ...

Could the Honourable Minister tell us why in 2008 there was not a Heads of Mission Conference?

Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett: I was answering his question, Mr. Speaker; but let me say that with the improvements in technology at this point in time, it is not always necessary to have everybody in place at the same time. We do a lot of ... we do conference calls and so on. It is less costly to do that. So in 2008, while we did not hold the Heads of Mission Conference, it was not as if we did not hold discussions.

Mr Aubrey Norton: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, Foreign Policy always has things that are very secret, critical to defense.

Could the Honourable Minister tell me how are those issues dealt with when you do not meet at Heads of Mission?

Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett: I travel, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Aubrey Norton: Mr. Speaker, could the Honourable Minister tell this Honourable House how do you get the collective ideas of all ambassadors that are necessary for cross-fertilization? By travel?

The Speaker: That is not a question; we are gaffing now. Yes, Hon Minister ...

Mr. Aubrey Norton: No. It is a legitimate question,

Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member was in the Foreign Service, and I am sure he is aware of how you get those things done from time to time.

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Mrs. Lawrence, you have a question to the Minister of Minister of Human Services and Social Security?

Mr. Aubrey Norton: There is one more part, Mr. Speaker ...

Could Hon Minister inform this National Assembly when the next Heads of Mission Conference will be convened, if one will?

Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett: All things being equal, in 2009.

Question 6:

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Mrs. Lawrence.
[Pause]

Mrs Volda Lawrence: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Services and Social Security, and it reads:

Would the Hon Minister of Human Services and Social Security share with this National Assembly the procedure for pensioners to access exemptions from the payment of water rates to the Guyana Water Inc?

The Speaker: Honourable Minister ...

Hon Priya Manickchand: Mr. Speaker, in Guyana, if a person is 65 years or older, and has lived in Guyana for at least two years, that person is eligible for pension. Eligibility does not mean an automatic grant. That person still has to apply for pension through any of the ministry's offices across the land. Once that person applies and they are granted their pension, they are usually given a pension book within six weeks of application; then they are placed on the roll of pensioners. Once you are placed on the roll

of pensioners, you are automatically entitled to a water waiver in certain amounts. If you are living in Georgetown, the water waiver is up to \$11,880, and if you are living in any other areas, the waiver is \$8,796 dollars. Any excess that is used by the pensioner has to be paid for. There is another condition attached, and that is the meter has to be in the pensioner's name.

Mrs. Volda Lawrence: A Supplemental, Mr. Speaker ...

I am wondering whether the Minister is aware that some persons, who have received the exemptions for water rates, have now been asked to pay this rate ... and I can give her an example: I would like to let the House know that Mrs Florence Kissoon, 90 years old, who previously received exemptions, was written to twice to go and pay her water bill or she will be disconnected, although she made payments. I would like to share this information with the Minister.

The Speaker: Karan Singh was the author?

Mrs. Volda Lawrence: Most likely.

Hon. Priya Manickchand: Let me just say, the water waiver is applicable, and one becomes entitled to it, when that person gets onto the pension roll. Many persons have had arrears, even before they became 65, and even before

they got onto the pension roll, and if they had arrears, the Guyana Water Authority usually asks them to pay those arrears. Now if that is not the case, I am not suggesting at all ... [*Interruption*] ... I am not suggesting at all that GUYWA could not make a mistake. And so we will be happy to investigate that, and if you would allow me, Mr. Speaker, even before we end today's session, I will report back to the National Assembly in this format what is up with that pensioner's water payment; because I suspect it may very well be something just like that, that the person had arrears prior to becoming a pensioner, or that the person used more than the \$11,880, and did not pay for the outstanding amount. But we could investigate that. Hopefully, we will get Mr. Singh to answer that before the end of this session, and I would like an opportunity to answer that later, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

(i) GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION:

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN
OBSERVANCE OF 25 NOVEMBER AS
INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE**

**ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN**

WHEREAS violence against women and children has been perpetuated for centuries, the twentieth century was marked by a strong and vibrant voice at international levels which lead to its international condemnation;

AND WHEREAS as a result, at the end of the UN Decade for Women, the United Nations Convention against the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was born;

AND WHEREAS the United Nations on December 17, 1999 proclaimed November 25th as the International Day dedicated to raising awareness and renewing condemnation of Violence against Women;

AND WHEREAS Guyana signed and ratified the UN Convention against the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on July 17, 1980 and the Belem do Para convention in 1994, and has

been annually observing November 25th for many years;

AND WHEREAS despite global condemnation against violence against women and children and greater public recognition and strengthening of constitutional and legislative frameworks to condemn such violence whether during conflict situations, at social, community, familial and individual levels, the horrific violence being meted out to women and children in our societies continues;

AND WHEREAS the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act is now in its 12th year of implementation and under review for further strengthening and new legislation on Sexual Offences is drafted;

AND WHEREAS the government's policy paper on sexual violence known as "Stamp it Out", has been placed before the nation through country wide consultations with the objective of raising awareness about sexual violence and introducing new legislative provisions addressing sexual violence;

AND WHEREAS new laws recently passed in this 9th Parliament such as the Prevention of Crimes (Amendment) Act 2008, Act No. 11 of 2008, in relation to mandatory supervision for certain acts of violence including domestic violence and paedophilia, and the recently passed Evidence (Amendment) Bill, No. 22 of 2008, will enhance the prosecution of perpetrators of such crimes and give greater protection and support to the victims of violence, especially children;

AND WHEREAS our society is still baffled by the senseless violent murders of women by predominantly male partners, whether past or present;

AND WHEREAS much has been written and researched globally and regionally about this growing level of violence in peace time and in times of civil strife, this social phenomenon demonstrates that there appears to be many complex and profound variables and factors which contribute to its continued presence in modern day societies in this the 21st century.

BE IT RESOLVED that the members of this National Assembly, comprised of men and women parliamentarians of both sides of the House, condemn in no uncertain terms this continued wave of violence against women and children, and, commit themselves in observance of the International Day for the elimination of Violence against Women, to use their influence within their political parties, within their constituencies and at all fora:

- to condemn such behaviour as socially and culturally unacceptable in our society;
- to assist victims to seek help and to use the laws and support systems available to victims in order to protect the victims and prevent further abuse and murders;
- to consciously develop programmes, for and with men, and more particularly young males, to have greater respect for themselves and women as equals and to learn to address conflict situations in a non-violent manner;

BE IT RESOLVED that this National Assembly, calls on civil society, not only Women's groups but the private sector, the labour movement and the religious communities, to lend their voices in openly condemning acts of domestic and sexual violence and to develop awareness programmes and support systems to prevent violence as well as assist victims of violence.

(Notice Paper No. 333 (M83 Govt48) published on 28 November 2008)

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security, you may proceed with the Motion. I would like to indicate to the Honourable Members of the House that I was presented with a list of 17 speakers, just for your information. So this is likely to be a very long and ... yes [*Noisy Interruption*]

Hon. Priya Manickchand: May it please you, Mr. Speaker ... I hope that indicates our interest in eradicating from our land violence against women, Mr. Speaker.

WHEREAS, on November 25th, Guyana joined 174 other countries to observe International Day of the Elimination of Violence against Women; we

have been observing this as a country, Mr. Speaker, for many years, and this was a day designated by the UN General Assembly in December of 1999 by Resolution 54/134.

WHEREAS, Mr. Speaker, for many years Guyana has been observing this day, and other like days, through state and non-state activities. We have had government action; we have had many NGOs doing many things that have proved, while slow, beneficial to the women of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker,

WHEREAS, we are emerging from a place where ... a world where, an era in the world where ... women were generally viewed as inferior to men, and wives as the property of their husbands; we have emerged from that era for a large part and certainly, on paper and academically, we have recognized the value of treating the genders equally.

But many of us have been lazy in translating that recognition into our everyday actions, our everyday policies, or behavior towards each other as different genders. Without doubt, though, we know that domestic violence and sexual violence

have received much attention, not only in Guyana, but across the world; and that attention has led to many different Acts that have taken us out of the era that did not recognize women, as even human beings in some circumstances, and has taken us to a place now where we cannot fail to recognize that the equality of genders, equality of women is important to the world's development.

It appears from all that is written in our documents that, this awareness took off in Guyana and the whole movement against violence against women took off in Guyana, mostly in the early 1990s. We have seen many documents, many studies written. But even before the early '90s, there were calls by mostly women, and women's groups, to move Guyana along into a place where women were treated equally and fairly and as decently as men, and laws addressing the rights of women and the treatment of women, were put in place. We saw even before the early '90s, as I said, there was an article in 1989, where the WPO had written to the then Attorney General, asking for: *the procedures and proceeds of rape trials to be changed to be more accommodating, not to be imbalanced; but to change the balance from there being a preponderance of favour being granted to the defendant, to a more balanced circumstance and environment.* We saw in 1988 Ken Danns and Basmat Shivpersaud researching domestic violence and positing to us in their research that, two of every three women had been victims

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

of domestic violence; and 33 percent of those who had been victims, had been victims regularly. That was in 1988.

Today we see headlines, Mr. Speaker, of women beaten, of women raped, of women murdered, of women battered. We have to ask ourselves if the reports that we see in the headlines today, which were not screaming in the 1980s and even the early 1990s, is a result of increased violence against women; or could we attribute this as a success to those organizations who started the awareness and made us all aware, Members of this Honourable House: members of society generally, bus drivers, and cane cutters, and housewives, and nurses, and doctors, and women? or if we could attribute the increased reporting to the successes of the awareness?

I would like to say that I believe we have had domestic violence in Guyana, as we have had around the world from the beginning of time, and we have had violence against women in the background of where women were inferior, where men are allowed to do with them whatever they wanted, wherever/whenever. We did not see people speaking out against that. So I think the reports that we see now are horrific, and these reports must call our attention to see what we can do to stop them. But I do not believe we can say with honesty that that indicates to us that there is an increase in domestic violence.

We know that violence takes many forms, Mr. Speaker. We know that violence could be verbal abuse: degrading comments, humiliating words; it could be physical abuse: it could lead to murder, it could be rape; it could be the withholding of finances; it could be stalking; it could be the destruction of property; and we know that the results of those actions range from: murder, to maiming, to depression, to suicide. We know that they range from serious health conditions brought on by the violence like hypertension and heart problems, and other conditions that we may not recognize, can be attributed to violence like substance abuse and prostitution.

We know also, there is widespread consensus, that violence against women is a direct result of the inferior position that women still hold, even after all these years, even after all the treaties, and even after all of the discussions and conferences, and even after all the declarations by many governments, including successive governments in Guyana. We know that one of the real causes, one of the underlying factors of violence against women can be attributed to the inferior position that women hold in the world, the disparity in the perceived work of the genders; and because of that recognition worldwide, there have been many, many declarations and international documents and international conferences, that have sought to remove from our midst, have sought to create an environment where discrimination against women and treating women as inferior beings is removed.

So we might not have seen documents that dealt directly with violence against women, but we saw the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the 1979 Convention; we saw the 1993 World Conference On Human Rights, that is the Vienna Declaration and Platform for Action; we saw and signed, as a country, the Cairo Programme of Action in 1994 and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, which is commonly referred to as *the Belmopan Convention*. These have all been signed by the Government of Guyana, whichever government was in place at the time. And I believe that indicates our commitment, at least on paper, our academic commitment that we are going to do all that we can to eradicate from our midst violence against women; and where we could not, that we would do all we can to address the needs of the victims and survivors, as best we could. Like I said, I believe there is much more to be done.

Much action has been taken by the Government of Guyana, Mr. Speaker, and various organizations to arrest the problem of domestic violence, to arrest the problem of sexual violence. Government action alone in this country, or any other, is not going to be enough to deal with this social issue. It is never going to be enough. In this regard, I would like to commend, congratulate and thank the various organizations who have been in the forefront of the struggle, and who have brought our attention,

collectively, to this as an issue that hampers our development.

And some of them, Mr. Speaker, that we can recognize are the women's arms of the two major political parties – the WPO and the National Congress of Women, prior the WRSM; Red Thread, Help and Shelter, Legal Aid clinic, some church organizations, women's organizations, and there would be too many to name; but those are the organizations that have been in the forefront of this struggle. To them we say thank you, we say congratulations for doing what is necessary for your own survival really, because to eradicate from our midst violence against women and children is really to make ourselves happier, and to put ourselves in a position where we can function better.

Having said that, I do not fail to recognize the challenges that must have been faced by these organizations, in even highlighting this issue, and more than highlighting it, taking it across the country and making persons aware of what it meant and convincing persons, who perhaps wanted to pander to uninformed teachings that, there was no intention to breakup families. I was looking at the HANSARD for the Domestic Violence Bill, when that Bill was passed, and I saw some concerns expressed by persons, that persons had expressed to them, that the Domestic Violence Bill was going to break-up families. It feels like *déjà vu*, because we are hearing about that in

other pieces of legislation that we are trying to pilot now. We have not seen families broken up. We have perhaps seen families helped, and saved because of that piece of legislation. I do not believe it was used as it was intended to be used, and I believe there is much work to be done to get us to the place where the framers of that piece of legislation wanted to see us get.

But over the past twenty years, Mr. Speaker, we have directed our collective outrage and concern: government, and NGOs, and churches, and women's groups, into many kinds of actions opposing violence against women. We organized consciousness-raising groups, and discovered that our experiences of dominance and degradation were common and shared. We demanded that the public listen to us by demonstrating in large groups, holding public speak outs and candlelight vigils, creating documentaries and films, radio and TV shows, by doing dramatic productions, and writing books and pamphlets, and newspaper articles and columns. We set up educational programmes for service providers, and law enforcement, and health professionals.

An NGO called *Help and Shelter* opened its doors in 1995, with the specific aim of: counselling persons, making them informed of their rights, making them aware of the services that were available; and providing help and shelter, from then to now, has reached in excess of 30,000 persons, with 13,000 of those being victims or

perpetrators of violence. And in March of 1994, another NGO, the Georgetown Legal Aid Clinic, began their service. They served from 1994 to 2008 Georgetown and her immediate environs. Most of those clients were women, and most of them were also victims of violence. In 2008, we expanded legal aid services to Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and in Region 10, there is legal aid service that is run by a NGO, another NGO, doing fantastic work, called *the Legal Aid Centre*.

In 2008, Mr. Speaker, many pieces of legislation were passed by this Honourable House, some of them not without resistance. Two of which come to mind immediately are the Evidence Amendment Bill, which allows for victims of violence, all forms of violence – rape included, to give their evidence by way of live video link, audio-video link, that is going to allow for an environment that does not perpetuate the fear and terror which the victims are forced to endure. We saw also the Prevention of Crimes (Amendment) Bill, which allows the police to supervise for life, if necessary, rapists and pedophiles and domestic violence offenders, among others.

Mr. Speaker, we also passed in 1996, as a country, the Domestic Violence Act, an Act that Guyana can be justly proud of. We have in that piece of legislation catered for every possible area of violence that can happen to a woman, to a child, to a man, because it is gender neutral.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

The Act defines violence as verbal abuse, as physical abuse, as psychological abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse; and I commend the National Assembly of that time and Guyana as a whole, and all the Members of this National Assembly who sat in the 1996 National Assembly, for recognizing rape as an offence, irrespective of whether or not the parties had been married. So since 1996, Guyana has said that marriage, or relationship – an intimate relationship is going to be no defense to rape. We recognize it as something that was offensive and destructive to our women and to our nation as a whole. We must catch up with this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, and we must undertake to do that when we come here with the Sexual Offences Bill, which should be laid before this National Assembly shortly.

Mr. Speaker, that piece of legislation provided for many different orders that can be made by the court, that would see the protection of the victims and survivors of domestic violence. The courts could order Protection Orders, and Occupation Orders, and Tenancy Orders or other Ancillary Orders that would make those orders practicable and practical for the victim or complainant who was making the application. A Protection Order allows the courts to make any order which protects the victim or the complainant before that court from the abuses of the respondent. An occupation order allows the courts to order that one party, more than likely the complainant before the court, to occupy premises to the

exclusion of another party or several other parties, many times the respondent before the courts, irrespective of whether or not the respondent owns the home or irrespective of who owns the home.

The courts can also make Tenancy Orders which allow for transfers of tenancy, the Contract of Tenancy from the respondent, many times the abuser to the complainant, if necessary, and other Ancillary Orders like custody and maintenance, who must use this piece of property like the car, and when this can all be heard in the Magistrate's Court, and it should be done in a very speedy matter. In fact, the Act specifically says, and that is why I believe ... I think the persons who drafted that piece of legislation, mostly NGOs who have collaborated with the government of 1996, were very clear that they wanted these matters addressed speedily, and so they included that:

*Within seven days of the matter being filed,
it must be heard by a court; it must be
addressed by a court.*

Those of us who are practicing in the courts know that, if that is observed one out of every 100 times, it is plenty. It is not being done, and we are not giving effect to the Act the way the Parliamentarians of that time determined that we needed to give effect.

Mr. Speaker, while we can be justly proud of the Domestic Violence Act, prouder we still can be when we do it as was intended: as a nation, as service providers, as NGOs, as people of this National Assembly; prouder still we can be when we see that Act being enforced in the way that it was envisioned by the persons who drafted it. We recognize that some of our actions have been uncoordinated, and because of the lack of coordination over the years, we have seen perhaps not as much effective service as we can, if we coordinate our activities at various agencies and government departments. To this end, having recognized that we can do more, we launched in June of this year 2008, the Government of Guyana's National Policy on Domestic Violence. It is titled, *Break the Cycle, Take Control*, and Members of this House have a little Christmas package of various pieces of literature we could have accumulated from the Documentation Centre.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, that this document be laid over in the Assembly to form part of the records. The principles guiding the drafting and adoption of this document are listed at Page 7 of that document, and they include:

All Guyanese have a right to live a life free of violence, and threats of violence. All forms of domestic violence are unacceptable in any group regardless of background, culture, religion, gender,

marital status, area of residence or sexuality.

It goes on, Mr. Speaker, to list the various areas, the various principles that guided this policy. The policy has eight thematic areas that address ... areas in government and amongst NGO and commissions that would have to do work to see us in the position where, I believe, the framers and process of the Domestic Violence Act, and all those women and men who came before us today and who addressed this matter, intended for us to be in 2008.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, additionally to coordinate efforts, His Excellency President Jagdeo, on 17 November, hosted a consultation where he invited ... His Excellency invited many Civil Society Organizations, in fact, in excess of 25 organizations, where there were churches, and the Labour Movement, and the Private Sector, and NGOs, and Human Rights Associations, and other persons who have been in the forefront of the struggle for many, many years. He brought us all together, so that we could put our heads together to determine: what is the best way forward for Guyana, and for the women and children of Guyana. And coming out of that meeting, Mr. Speaker, were very many good suggestions, one of which was that men should be more involved in the struggle, and should lead this fight, because this is not a woman's issue; it is an issue, a human issue, it is an issue that will affect us all; because

if women cannot develop equally, then the country cannot develop at the pace we need to develop it. So we need to see more men involved in this.

And a good thing that came out of this meeting was that suggestion, as a result of which was underscored last week, the Ministry of Human Services in collaboration with one of its partners, the UNFPA, hosted a men's forum, where the participants were only men from various sectors of society and all across Guyana, who contributed and participated and determined what would be the best way forward, to remove from our midst the scourge of violence against women. What would be useful to come out of today's Parliament, the National Assembly Sitting, Mr. Speaker, would be if the men of this Honourable House, took up the lead, and said *we were going to form a Male Parliamentarians against Violence*, or whatever you want to name it, and be vocal, and be active, every time you need to be vocal and active,

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, we have sexual violence legislation that is archaic, that is old, and that no longer meets the needs of Guyanese. We recognize that, and in November of 2007, we published a document called *STAMP IT OUT*, which is a white paper containing proposals for the strengthening of Protection against Sexual Violence, reforming the Law on Sexual Offences. And we went all over the country to do two things:

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

- To make persons, that we were going to meet, aware of the issue of sexual violence

as well as,

- To hear from those persons and have them hear from each other the things we can do in our small communities, in our groupings, our church groupings, and our women's groupings and our youth groupings the things we can do, that we need to do as a country, to treat our women with respect once they have been violated sexually, and that consultation exercises which only ended in this year, resulted in many, many recommendations and suggestions being called and put together in a document, which will be published shortly.

That document informed legislation that was drafted, it is drafted, it is called *the Sexual Offences Bill*, and it is presently with the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, awaiting review, or undergoing review ... I hope it is undergoing review, so we could lay it before this National Assembly soon. When we do that, we could provide the kinds of protection that we here as sane adults, civilized human beings have recognized that we need. That is when I was speaking earlier of the Domestic Violence Act addressing rape in marriage, and rape in relationships. We need to catch-up with that. And when we come here with a Sexual Offences Bill, we must ensure as a National

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

Assembly ... we do what the National Assembly of 1996 did, and we pass that piece of legislation so that women, irrespective of their marital status, could be protected.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen, and that is why I am extremely ... I am in awe of the efforts made by the women's organization mostly, and by the persons, the NGOs, and other persons who have taken up this issue. We have seen progress. We have seen that awareness leading to something. We have seen various bodies and organizations determining that they can no longer work in abstract. On Sunday gone, we saw ... we were invited by the Guyana Medical Council, a body ... I believe it is the Statutory Body, to speak to its Members, and inform them about their duties [and those would be medical doctors] their duties towards the victims of violence and abuse. And I think that invitation, and the placing of that item, that subject on their agenda for continuing medical education credit, indicate to me clearly that the doctors understand two things: one, they recognize that they can no longer work an abstract, they recognize it is an issue, and that they understand that as a body, they have to join with the rest of the country in fighting the scourge of domestic violence. I am pleased to see more and more interest by different kinds of organizations. Of course, we have to be careful and guard against interest that is expressed on paper, that sounds good in the headlines; but that goes no farther, to realize any real benefit to the people that we serve. *[Pause]*

Mr. Speaker, much has been done, and much remains to be done – our challenge remains, Mr. Speaker, making persons conscious of their rights, and getting service providers to provide service. Mr. Speaker, every time a mother sends her daughter back to an abusive home, and every time a church leader sends a member of his flock back to ... or a member from his church or mosque or temple, back to her family, and every time a police officer laughs or mocks or scorns or refuses to deal with or address the complaint of the complainant, and every time a doctor says *I do not want to get involved*, or a social worker says *I am too busy, come back* and every time the courts procrastinate and refuses to hear and/or determine a matter in a speedy fashion – every time we do that, Mr. Speaker, we denigrate ourselves as a human race as a people of a country, we dig ourselves deeper in the hole of savagery, and every time you do that; Mr. Speaker, every time we fail our daughters, and our mothers and our sisters, we create an environment and we reinforce an environment where there is little or no confidence in the whole system of protection.

Mr. Speaker, we must acknowledge and embrace the concept that violence in the home is no different from violence committed against a stranger, and that violence against women is not acceptable. We in this House must ensure that our message from this House of rejecting and punishing violence against women is collective and consistently loud and clear, carried to and by all

groupings, sectors, agencies and bodies, including service providers, women's groups, NGOs, government agencies, the Labour Movement, the Private Sector.

We must guard against, Mr. Speaker, pandering to teachings and other uninformed agendas that see us defining violence in the home and violence against women, as family matters or private matters. We must continue to ask for a world free of violence, and a country free of violence. We must proclaim our beliefs in its possibility loudly and clearly. We must work towards a strong network of services, where service is provided for those who have survived and for those who are struggling to survive. We must teach our daughters to expect equality for themselves and others, and demand this, when it is not given freely. We must teach our sons to question sexism and concepts and acts of dominance, to reject violence and to respect women, as equals. We must continue to support one another in protecting women and children. We must offer that support with strength, with persistence, and with pride.

Mr. Speaker, I can see a country, where violence against women is a thing of the past – I can feel that, and I think our children can enjoy it if we here take action, every day in our lives, not just today at this Sitting. Mr. Speaker, break the cycle – we can; take control – we must.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Mrs. Volda Lawrence.

Mrs. Volda Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, today I rise to speak to an old issue, that of violence against women and children; an issue, which the Women's Revolutionary Socialist Movement now the National Congress of Women – the women's arm of the PNC/R-1G is well-known for their activism on this issue.

Sir, the Motion by the Honourable Minister of Human Services and Social Security is itself, in the Forth WHEREAS Clause indicates that, this issue of violence against women and children, was first ratified at the United Nations Convention against the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 1980. Today, some 28 years after, we in this House are asked to speak to this issue, and more so, to condemn the continued wave of violence against women and children, and to extend our concern a bit further, by committing ourselves and using our influence within our respective parties, to carry out the tasks outlined in the First Resolved Clause.

Mr. Speaker, this Motion makes me beg the question: what have we been doing for the past 28 years, and moreover, the last 10 or more years in this National Assembly? If my memory serves me correctly, Sir, we of the People's National Congress/Reform – One Guyana have been condemning all forms of violence, be it against

women and children, boys and men, birds and beasts. Violence must be condemned by all. We have done so, and will continue to do so, for it has been, but a few Sittings ago, we brought a Motion on Torture to this House; and despite the evidence put before this House and this nation, we did not hear a resounding cry from the government, which today would like us to believe, through this motion, that they were concerned about this issue.

Instead, we saw Ministers and colleague, Members of Parliament, playing politics. We were told about *people being roughed up, and more concerned about their barrels – than torture*. What hypocrisy are we about, Mr. Speaker? I believe, Mr. Speaker, the Tenth WHEREAS Clause puts the issue which ought to be addressed in perspective. I quote:

WHEREAS much has been written and researched globally and regionally about this growing level of violence in peacetime and in times of civil strife. This social phenomenon demonstrates that there appears to be many complex and profound variables and factors, which contribute to its continued presence in modern-day societies this 21st Century.

Mr. Speaker, it is useless asking us, Members of Parliament, to only condemn violence perpetrated against

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

women, boys and men. Our energies should be channeled in the direction of addressing these burning issues:

1. What has been done to those men who continue to violate our minors? [*Uproar*]
2. What about the brutality that is exhibited by some Members of the Joint Forces, right in the very presence of our children? What messages are we sending them?
3. What about the clogged court system, which takes years to deal with women brutalized and gives the perpetrators, over and over, the opportunity to continually commit this act?
4. What about our colleague in this Honourable House, who in the media, was seen being a victim of this very violent behavior? [*Laughter – Uproar*]
5. What about the confidentiality of cases reported by concerned citizens?
6. What about those who feel that they are above the law and could commit acts of violence on our women and children, without ever being brought to justice?

Mr. Speaker,

7. What about the deficiency in our education system, which instead of challenging and harnessing the potential of our youths, condemn our young boys to become dropouts, delinquents and perpetrators of violence?

Mr. Speaker,

8. What about the significant role that the church once exercised in molding and upholding the morals in our society?

Sad to say, Mr. Speaker, the state is using the church as yet another football, a political tool for its own gain, thus eroding the important role the church can play in this our violent society. Mr. Speaker ... [*Uproar*]

9. What about creation of jobs for both, men and women, so that:
 - (i) Women could be more independent, and not be at the mercy of these providers who are also perpetrators of violence?
 - (ii) What about to our men, who can regain some status, and be seen as a real committed head of the household?

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

Mr. Speaker, I would have preferred, if instead of wasting time exhorting Members of Parliament to get on a bandwagon, one which they have been riding for some 28 years, speaking out against violence; that we could have been here debating Family Law as a whole, and not in a piecemeal fashion, thus seeking to find real solutions to the many issues facing the family. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, we are happy to receive the several documents, today, from the Ministry of Human Services, and are even happier to know that information on this important issue is being compiled.

So in concluding, Mr. Speaker, I call on all Members of Parliament and every citizen to work assiduously and honestly toward stamping out violence of every form, and thus restoring dignity to our society. Forget about lip service – let the work begin now.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Dr. Leslie Ramsammy.

Hon Leslie S Ramsammy: Thank you, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

Mr. Speaker, this Motion in the House today gives us, as Members of Parliament in Guyana an opportunity to make a very clear, clear statement:

The elimination of violence against women and children is not only a moral imperative, it is a developmental imperative.

And if, Mr. Speaker, we have to say it again and again and again until we have necessary action; then we must say it again and again and again. Our commitment, Mr. Speaker, towards the elimination of violence against women and, yes, against our children, must be robust, and must not be distracted by political divisions, must not be distracted by cultural and religious excuses. Violence against women and children must be unequivocally condemned and rejected. As a country, we joined others in Beijing in 1994, and you will remember part of that declaration that said:

Violence against women both violates and impairs, and nullifies the enjoyment by women ... by women, of human rights and fundamental freedom.

These were the same sentiments expressed a year before that, at the ICPD Conference in Cairo, where Guyana was represented. Guyana joined other countries at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, a year before Cairo. Those were the sentiments expressed. And

CARICOM legislation that Minister Priya Manickchand talked about, the various NGOs are pushing in Guyana, CARICOM formulated model legislation on domestic violence. There has been a global recognition, and I will concede, Mr. Speaker, that there has been much talk – a lot of talk *too many meetings and too many conferences*, whether it is in our country, whether it is in our region and the world. But having conceded that, and confessing that, it does not mean that we have not been taking action. This afternoon, it gives us an opportunity to build on those actions, whether it is things we did in the past, whether it is the STAMP IT OUT Campaign that is now leading to new legislation, we should have solidarity. This is an opportunity this afternoon to recognize that this is a major social and developmental issue, and we have an opportunity, not to introduce other things; this is an issue that deserves specific attention, targeted action, and that is what we are asking for this afternoon in this House, and I hope that we get support from everyone.

This vision, Mr. Speaker, of women leading dignified, safe, healthy lives, is not the result of the last 10, 14 or 28 years; it is not just a recent epiphany. George Stuart Mills wrote more than 140 years ago these words:

The principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes, the legal subordination of one sex to another, is

wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human development.

And now after many thousands of years, and now after hundreds of years of shame, do we want ... how much more shame do we want to accumulate? Mr. Speaker, the sore of violence against women and children is so pungent with rotteness; it stinks to the high heavens. There is a simple truth, Mr. Speaker; domestic violence brings shame to any country. And Minister Priya Manickchand talked about the role of men; this afternoon, all men must recognize that we all equally carry the shame of violence against women, whether we commit violent acts against women or not. We are, without doubt, a part of the problem. We must be a part of the solution.

It is my position, Mr. Speaker, as we as Guyanese men, whether we are Members of Parliament or outside of this Parliament, have not demonstrated enough of a ... credible kind of commitment to being part of the solution. I believe we are abdicating our responsibility by not being more visible in our advocacy. We have been too reluctant to seize opportunities provided to us to be a part of the problem, and in so doing, we have been permissive and have enabled the perpetuation of the abuse in our society.

The presence of women in this Assembly, this afternoon, is an example, because I ask: *Where are the men?* Is it that they are waiting for us, Members of Parliament, to bring them here? Our men have been failing our women;

we have been failing our children. I would like to congratulate, Mr. Speaker, Minister Priya Manickchand and her Ministry for the excellent work they have been doing in highlighting the issue of violence against women and children, including sexual violence, particularly against children; and I extend my personal congratulations to Minister Manickchand.

Mr. Speaker, upfront too, let me state categorically that violence against women and children remains a neglected rights issue. There have been many women, over the many decades that have fought for women's rights, that have fought for the welfare of women, right in this House; we have some of them: the Honorable Member, Gail Teixeira; the Honourable Member, Indranie Chanderpaul have continued the work, started by women such as Janet Jagan, and there are many on both sides that can be mentioned. I want to pay tribute ... I want to pay tribute to them ... *[Interruption]* I want to pay tribute to them ... *[Interruption]* ... You will do so when your opportunity comes.

Mr. Speaker, there have been many organizations, the Minister ... the Honourable Minister made reference to some of these organizations. Help and Shelter, for example, deserves our commendation, deserves our gratitude. Legal Aid deserves our recognition, commendation, and gratitude. Many of these organizations, including the work they do, in

complimenting the work that many of the Ministries do, obtain support from the government. We have been in the partnership with these organizations, and the government will continue, the PPP/C Government will continue to provide support in any way we can to these organizations. We believe this civil organizations ... these Civil Society Organizations must play, and do play, an important role in providing support for all those women and children, who need our help.

Minister Manickchand gave statistics for Help and Shelter, which started in November 1995. More than 8,000 women, besides women who come for other things, have been seriously abused by their spouses, and have gone through Help and Shelter. Importantly, about 300 women have been given support via Help and Shelter, women who were raped, within their homes. At the Georgetown Public Hospital, Mr. Speaker, we have treated, this year alone, more than 4000 cases of assault, cases that resulted from domestic violence. There have been 116 sexual assault cases at the Georgetown Public Hospital, this year. There are similar stories at the Linden Hospital, similar stories at Suddie, similar stories at the New Amsterdam Hospital and other hospitals.

The police, in 2006, reported 1708 cases of domestic violence, 124 rape cases, and I think the member ... the Honourable Member, Volda Lawrence, made reference to the fact that not all of these cases, lead to any kind of

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

meaningful punishment. Indeed, only a quarter of the reported domestic cases end-up in charges being laid.

The fact is that, violence has become far too pervasive globally; it has become a fact of life and touches us everywhere on this planet. Almost 2 million persons globally lose their lives annually, because of domestic violence. More than 1,500 persons die every day, because of violence in the Americas alone. The estimates, as best we could surmise, a baseline study was done in 48 countries, and between 10 percent and 69 percent of women in these countries suffers from violence committed by men.

Indeed if we look at various countries: Colombia, 41 percent of the women suffer from violence by men; in Haiti, more than 27 percent; in Nicaragua, 29 percent; in Peru, 41 percent. Globally, about a quarter of women report violence committed on them by men partners, or by men. In Guyana, the recent mixed survey, the 2006 mixed survey has shown that approximately 18 percent ... about 20 percent of women reported violent acts committed on them by men. And in this case, if we disaggregated the data, in terms of economic status, and you look at the reports for the poorest, 20 percent ... more than 40 percent of them reported physical abuse by a partner.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, domestic violence is a significant developmental issue in our country, a crucial moral

imperative that we face. Domestic violence inflicts, not only physical harm and death related to the actual physical injury; but death also results and injuring disability result from suicide or suicide attempts. Domestic violence and abuse erodes a person's emotional and psychological resilience. Long after physical injuries have healed, the emotional and psychological scars continue to rob the persons of their ability to understand their worth, of their ability to achieve their potential at home, at school, at work, at play – and yes, even at love.

The greatest tragedy is that, it is the emotional and psychological footprints that precipitate the too often witnessed legacy of abuse that is perpetuated from one generation to the next. One of the clear negative impacts of sexual violence is the transmission of sexually transmitted infections. It has been documented, for example, that women who suffered from violence have a greater prevalence of STIs. In Haiti, women who suffered from violence in the last twelve months showed a prevalence rate for STIs of greater than 18 percent, compared to 10.3 percent for women who had not experienced a violent attack in the corresponding period. In Guyana itself, about 10 percent of the women who report STIs also report domestic violence or violence against them by men.

Mr. Speaker, what I say next is not meant to be judgmental or critical of anyone; but we in this House,

almost eight years ago or more than eight years ago, made milestone agreements that made it possible for the establishment of the Rights Commission on the Rights of the Child, Women and Gender Equality. I would hope that the establishment of these Commissions would happen soon. We must add our voices, and we must demand the establishment of the Women and Gender Equality Commission. And I know Members on both sides are working to ensure that we can reach agreement. To those Members on both sides with whom I sit on the Appointments Committee. I know how much work we have done, and the diligence with which we have worked, and I would hope that soon after the holidays, we can complete our work and recommend to this National Assembly those persons that will constitute the First Commission on the Women and Gender Equality Commission.

And although it is important, Mr. Speaker ... this morning, some people approached me, a couple guys from the University of Guyana; I wanted to make sure I said it was the guys, because people want to do research on why abuse is perpetuated amongst women. Mr. Speaker, *why* is important; having insights as to why these things happen is important, Mr. Speaker. But, Mr. Speaker, understanding the *why*, the value of understanding the *why* is in the ability to translate the knowledge into action for change. Insight is not necessarily correlated with change, and perhaps, we will

never fully understand why. The more pertinent question is: What ... What are we going to do about it? We need to do something now, and not wait until we get insights.

The elimination of violence against women and children requires national solidarity, a coalition of individuals and organizations. I would hope, in spite of our disappointments and in spite of what we think each other is doing wrong, this motion would give us the opportunity to work together in solidarity to solve a national shame, to solve a national problem, to solve a public health problem.

And I have heard reference to very many ... the coalition, not only of Government and Opposition Parties, Civil Society Groupings ... I believe, indeed, the church has a critical role to play. They must make this an everyday message. I believe addressing the issue of domestic violence and sexual abuse must be a part of the sermons and the messages coming out of our pulpits, and our mandirs and our mosques everyday, not just talking about Mohammed, about Krishna and Ram, about Jesus; because whilst we talk about these things, women are being abused – physically beaten, killed, and disabled, and children are sexually abused. And these are the things we cannot talk about every time we preach, something is wrong, and we are abdicating our responsibility; and I ask my sisters and brothers in the church to make this an everyday message.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

When it comes to women, Mr. Speaker, we must at least try for equity with men. Women are there to be valued and cherished and loved. Women are not there for us, to be abused. The Beatles asked us to imagine such a world:

Imagine all the people living life in peace.

You may say, like the Beatles *I am a dreamer*, and yes, I am. I hope that we all are dreamers, and you will join me to dream, join us in dreaming of this better world, a world in which all of our women are wanted, loved and safe.

Mr. Speaker, we have done a lot: we have reduced maternal mortality, we have reduced infant mortality, we have provided vaccines; we now want to save our women from cervical cancer. What is the use, if we save them from these things, from HIV and so, and then we kill them, or disable them, make them live with illness because of our savagery, because we simply do not care enough. In Guyana, at our hospitals, in the public health system, we have expend more than \$100 million to take care of women, who show up at the clinics because of physical abuse – and that is just a small fraction of the real costs. I am not talking about the cost to the family, the cost ... the emotional losses and so, it amounts to much more than that.

Mr. Speaker, this Motion is a call to action; and if this call to action cannot move us, if this call to action cannot drive us and accelerate the efforts we already have, for us

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

to consolidate our efforts, I do not know what else can drive us. This is an opportunity, as we approach the holiday season, for us to really, really commit that on this issue, we will have no division, on this issue, we will stand as one in Guyana to eliminate ... to eliminate violence against women and children, to eliminate sexual abuse of women and children. This afternoon, I ask that we all support this Motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Somebody from the AFC ... I do not have a name.

Honourable Member, if you please.

Ms. Latchmin Punalall: Thank you Mr. Speaker.

Mr Speaker, the Motion before this National Assembly, the highest Legislative Body of our dear land, is, and I quote:

*Violence against Women in Observance of
25 November, International Day for the
Elimination of Violence against Women ...*

It is brought for deliberation by the Honourable Minister of Human Services of Social Security, Ms. Priya Manickchand. I congratulate her, for her bold efforts.

In commencing my humble presentation, I must say the AFC stands opposed to all forms of violence against any category of our citizens, whether it is man or woman, boy or girl, old or young. In its recently issued statement on the occasion of *the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women*, the AFC bemoans the fact that here, in Guyana, we have to accept that despite tremendous strides made, women are still vulnerable to abuse, sexual assault, discrimination, and other forms of abuse, which keep them relegated, for the most part, as second-class citizens. As the Honourable Minister said *much more needs to be done*.

Mr. Speaker, in the Motion presented, reference is made to *the United Nations Convention against the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. This is a very historic document, which Guyana signed and ratified on 17 July, 1980. This document was adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly, and came into force on 3 September, 1981. It is described as *an International Bill of Rights for Women*. This Convention defined discrimination against women as:

Any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex, which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women,

*of human rights and fundamental freedoms
in the political, economic, social, cultural,
civil, or any other fields.*

Countries ratifying this Convention were required to enshrine gender equality into their domestic legislation, and enact new laws to guard against discrimination against women. They were also expected to establish tribunals and public institutions to guarantee women effective protection from individuals, organizations, and enterprises. Mr. Speaker, Guyana has an extremely poor record when it comes to violence against women, and we need to act with great urgency to improve this record. This record will not be improved by the mere deliberation and passage of this Motion. We desperately need to match our words with action in this country, if we are to move forward. Thus far, we have been going backwards, and other countries have come from behind and surpassed us. Laws that just sit on paper, neither worth either the paper they sit on, or the ink with which they are written, or printed.

According to statistics released by the Guyana Government on 12 June, 2008, there were 3,600 cases of domestic violence reported in 2007, compared to 1,708 the previous year. This information was carried in the Guyana Chronicle, and the Stabroek News of 12 June, 2008. If we take the hypothetical figure of 1,000 cases per year between 1980, when Guyana signed this Convention,

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

and 2005, mathematically, it is 25,000 cases. Added to the cases for 2006 and 2007, it will mean 30,508 cases. What is more appalling is the fact that many cases go unreported and unrecorded. Many suffer silently in their homes without telling anyone. It is like an iceberg, which has its major portion submerged. It is there, but it is unseen. This problem is many times more serious than it is reported to be. According to the US Country Reports of Human Rights Practice for the year 2007:

Domestic violence in Guyana is widespread. At least one in three Guyanese women has been a victim of domestic violence.

Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons why we have so many cases of domestic violence in this beautiful country, is because we have closed our hearts to the wisdom of the intellectuals. We seem to have lost important values. Values are like maps in our lives: when we do not have them, we go astray.

Let us look at what some of our intellectuals of yesteryear had to say on violence. Mahatma Gandhi, peace advocate, said:

Victory attained by violence is tantamount to a defeat, for it is momentary.

Julius K. Nyrere, politician and first president of Tanzania, said:

Violence is unnecessary and costly. Peace is the only way.

Martin Luther, religious leader, said:

Nothing good ever comes out of violence.

Albert Einstein, scientist, said:

Degeneracy follows every autocratic system of violence, for violence inevitably attracts moral inferiors.

Science has proven that illustrious tyrants are succeeded by scoundrels.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, philosopher, said:

All violence, all that is dreary and repels, is not power, but the absence of power.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to refer to just three cases, where women were abused onto the grave:

- Do we remember the case of Sade Stoby in November 2007? This 9-year old child was returning from school, but never got home alive. She lived at Mocha, East Bank Demerara. She was attacked, raped, and murdered. Villagers say that young men on drugs would often climb the mango trees and pounce upon innocent women as they pass by. Sometimes they will be successful in fighting

them off. Little, Sade Stoby was certainly no match for three young men.

- Do we remember the name Nateesa Khan? This 22-year-old mother of three was knifed to death on 13 October, 2008 by her 34-year-old reputed husband. She lived at Goed Fortune Squatting Area, West Bank Demerara. Neighbours related that she was often abused by her husband, who was a heavy drinker. They related that just prior to her demise, they went to the welfare department at Vreed-en-Hoop and were told that *the department does not have the vehicle does not have a vehicle, and thus could not help them.*
- Do you remember Craiglyn Thorne? On Thursday, 27 November, 2008, her bloated, partly decomposed, half-naked body with fished out of a trench at Thomas Lands in the vicinity of the National Park. Her body was spotted by a cattle farmer, who was grazing his cows near the trench.

There are many more instances of violence, Mr. Speaker; the daily newspapers tell these real life stories of violence.

Mr. Speaker, if our aim is to eliminate violence against women, we must do certain practical things; unless we

can take a course of positive action, this Motion, which will be passed today, and many other pieces of legislation which may already be in existence, will not benefit one single woman in Guyana. My purpose in mentioning the three foregoing cases is to bring us to these practical steps. Those of us, who are considered to be leaders, in our country need to set an example worth emulating. *[Applause]* I mean, some of us who even sit in this assembly, too many of us live by the foolish proverb:

Do as I say; but do not do as I do.

If Almighty God was to flash our lives across the screen, what will be seen? Will we see some of our men here as women abusers ... *[Interruption – Yes]* ... heavy drinkers ... *[Interruption – Yes]* ... irresponsible husbands ... *[Interruption – Yes]* ... men who sleep around? There must be a concerted effort to curb alcohol consumption in this land. Young Nafeza was killed by a drunken husband. Every effort must be made to end the sale and consumption of mind- dandling and mind-controlling drugs: such as cocaine, marijuana, etc. Why is it that almost every village in Guyana has a drug yard? Sade Stoby and many others like her lost their lives to men, who were known to be on drugs.

Mr. Speaker, the First Resolve Clause on Page 3, calls on this National Assembly:

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

1. To condemn such behavior as socially and culturally unacceptable in our society.
2. To assist victims to seek help.
3. To consciously develop programmes.

Mr. Speaker, it does not require resources *to condemn*. Anyone can do this. However, to assist victims, and to develop and execute programmes, calls for human and financial resources. Is the government of the day prepared to spend in this area? Will shelters be built to help victims? When the government signed this Convention, it committed itself *to establish tribunals and public institutions which can protect women against domestic violence*. After more than two decades of the signing of this Convention, our innocent women are still languishing in bloodshed ... *[Pause]* ...murders and other forms of brutality. Will we see some concentrated measures taken to lift our country out of this state of disrepute and achieve some state of respectability? Success in this area cannot, and will not, come if we only speak and write about this matter.

Mr. Speaker, my most important submission is reserved for last. According to Biblical teaching, one of the most heinous sins man can commit is the shedding of human blood, worse yet the blood of women. In Romans, Chapter 3:15-18 in the Holy Bible:

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

*Their feet are swift to shed blood.
Destruction and misery are in their ways,
and the way of peace have they not known.
There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

When men lack the fear of God, they will not think twice to shed the blood of innocent women.

Mr. Speaker, with or without this Motion the AFC stands in support of the elimination of violence against women. May God bless the men, women and children of our beloved country Guyana.

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Dr. Desrey Fox.

Hon. Dr. Desrey Fox: Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this Motion as it pertains to violence against women. Mr. Speaker, this is a very challenging topic, particularly because it is part of human nature, and because of that, the predictability of human behaviour is sometimes very complex; and because of that, therefore, one-time stopgap legislation or policy will have to be ongoing as it relates to the reviewing of such pieces of legislation and policies.

Mr Speaker, violence is associated with such terms as aggression, fighting, hostility, violent behaviour, brutality, cruelty, sadism and bloodshed. It is within this context of any of these nouns that the act of violence

against women is examined, to show why it should be vehemently condemned with sustained attempts to curb such behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, the statement *Violence against Women* is a technical term, used to collectively refer to violent acts that are primarily or exclusively committed against women. Similar to a hate crime, this type of violence targets a specific group with the victim's gender as a primary motive. The United Nations General Assembly defines violence against women as:

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

The 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women noted that:

This violence would be perpetrated by assailants of either gender, or family Members.

Mr. Speaker, violence against women is contextualized within domestic violence, also known as *domestic abuse* or *spousal abuse*, a situation which occurs when a family member, partner or ex-partner, attempts to physically,

psychologically, dominate another. It also refers *to violence between non-married, intimate partners and cohabitants*.

Mr. Speaker, domestic violence occurs in all cultures, and peoples of all races, ethnicities, religions, sectors and classes can be perpetrators of domestic violence, and can be meted out by both men and women. This kind of violence presents itself in various forms such as physical violence, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, intimidation, economic deprivation, and other threats of violence. It is criminal, when it manifests itself in physical assault, for example, by hitting, pushing, shoving, or sexual abuse: for example, unwanted or forced sexual activity and stalking.

Mr. Speaker, it is shocking to know that the Caribbean has one of the highest violence rates in the world, and violence against women is widespread. The reason given is *the harmful stereotype of masculinity that exists in Caribbean culture* – This is a UNIFEM Report of 2005.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to go back a little into history. Violence against women has its origin in the early economic role that affected gender stratification. In one of her cross-cultural studies, Peggy Sandy, in 1974, pointed out that:

Gender stratification decreased when men and women made roughly equal

contributions to subsistence. On the other hand, gender stratification was greatest when the women contributed either much more or much less than the men did.

This finding is mainly applicable to food producers. In foraging societies, for example:

Gender stratification was more evident when men contributed much more to the diet than women did.

This was true for early northern tribal people such as the Inuit, who were hunters and fisher folk. By contrast, in the Amazon, among tropical and semitropical foragers, gathering supplied much more food than hunting and fishing. In this sense, gathering was women's work. When gathering was prominent, gender status tended to be more equal, than it was, when hunting and fishing were the main subsistence activities.

In addition, gender status was more equal when the domestic and public spheres were not sharply separated – *Domestic* meaning within or pertaining to the home, and *public*, meaning the outside world, which includes politics, trade, warfare and work. When domestic and public spheres were separated, it was usually the case, and this is so even today, public activities had greater prestige than domestic ones. This led to the promotion of gender stratification, because men were more likely to be

active in the public domain than women. Cross-culturally, women's activities tended to be closer to home than those of men.

In horticultural societies, women were the main producers. In the studies done by Martin and Voherin, 1975, a sample of 515 horticultural societies, representing all parts of the world, showed that:

In 50 percent of those societies, women did most of the cultivating. In 33 percent, men were the cultivators. In only 70 percent, men did most of the work.

Several variables were considered for the conclusions, and these included *descent and post marital residence, the percentage of the diet derived from cultivation, and the productivity of men and women.*

As horticulture developed into agriculture, women lost their role as primary cultivators. Certain agricultural techniques such as ploughing were assigned to men, and during this period, women were cut off from agricultural production for the first time in human history. This resulted in the need for women to stay at home to care for large numbers of children that is typical of agricultural societies, than in less labour-intensive economies. New belief systems began contrasting men's valuable extra-domestic labour with women's domestic role, which is now viewed as inferior. In addition, changes in kinship

and post-marital residence patterns began to hurt women. This is because descent groups and polygamy declined with agriculture, and the nuclear family became more common. Therefore, living with her husband and children, a woman was totally isolated from her kinswomen and other protecting members of the family. Female sexuality was also carefully monitored and supervised in agricultural economies, and men had easier access to divorce and extramarital sex, reflecting a double standard in the relations between men and women. This kind of economy also set the stage for *patriarchy* and violence against women – this term, which describes a political system ruled by men, in which women have inferior social and political status, including basic human rights.

Mr. Speaker, this year, 2008, has probably seen a shocking and a horrifying constant rise in the worst and cruelest forms of violence against women in Guyana, and it spans the range in mode from physical, social, psychological, sexual and/or other social attacks. The data presented in the Guyana Times, Tuesday, 25 November, reported that 22 women have been killed from January to October, 2008, and the main causes for domestic violence are given as *alcohol and infidelity*.

Mr. Speaker, as if this was not enough, the month of November 2008 continued to record more violence against women. Guyana Times, Sunday, 23 November

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

2008: *Woman remanded for beating nurse.* This is the case of a woman, who beat a nurse for not getting quick medical attention at the New Amsterdam Hospital.

Mr Speaker, I am just trying to show the diversity of the kinds of acts of violence against women. Kaieteur News, 24 Monday, 2008: *Woman peeved at police for releasing alleged rapist, claims suspect raped her 11-year-old daughter.* Stabroek News, Thursday, 25 November 2008: *Shot woman discharged from hospital.* This was the case of the 22-year-old Sophia Pitman, who was shot in her chest by an angry ex-boyfriend. Stabroek News, Wednesday, 26 November 2008: *UK man jailed for fathering seven children by daughters.* While this case is not from Guyana, the story gives an international flavor to the topic at hand. *A British man was sentenced to life imprisonment, yesterday, for repeatedly raping his two daughters over a 25-year period, fathering seven children by them during years of violence and abuse.*

Guyana Chronicle, Thursday, 27 November 2008: *Son-in-law remanded as wounded victim remains hospitalized.* This is the case of Kowsilla Singh, who was chopped several times by her son-in-law, because she intervened on behalf of her daughter, who was being physically assaulted by her attacker. Stabroek News, Thursday, 27 November 2008: *Woman found in river drowned, Autopsy finds. Daughter suspects, foul play.* This is the case of Camilla Singh, of Corentyne.

Finally, Kaieteur News, Friday, 28 November 2008, Front Page: *Girl, 26, found with throat slit - Boyfriend in custody*. On the same day, the Guyana Chronicle gave a little bit more details on this, and the caption read, *MUTILATED BODY OF CHARLESTOWN WOMAN FOUND IN CANAL. The corpse was clad only in her underwear and a vest. Her throat was slit; mouth stuffed with an unidentifiable object, nose cut off, eyes dug out and head shaven.*

All of the cases that have been presented are reflective of gender-based violence, and the victims are all women. Mr Speaker, this is not surprising, as this fits into the known pattern of violence against women and girls. The data from a UNIFEM Research points out that:

Violence against women and girls is a problem of pandemic proportions. One out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime and the fact is the abuser is usually someone known to her.

In the Guyana situation, it is evident from the data that domestic and intimate partner violence continues to be rife, and women are at risk of experiencing this kind of violence in intimate relationships more than in the past. This trend is not only true for women in Guyana, but for women in many parts of the world. For instance, out of ten countries surveyed in 2005, by the World Health

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

Organization, more than 50 percent of women in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Tanzania, reported that they were subjected to physical or sexual violence by intimate partners, with the figure reaching a staggering 71 percent in rural Ethiopia. Only in one country, Japan, did less than 20 percent of women report an incidence of domestic violence.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, based on several other surveys from around the world, half of the women who die from homicides are killed by their current or former husbands, boyfriends, or partners. In a study conducted in Sao Paulo, Brazil, 13 percent of deaths of women of reproductive age were homicides, of which 60 percent were committed by the victim's partner. In Afghanistan, and this is a UNIFEM Study, out of 1,327 incidences of violence against women, collected between January 2003 and June 2005, 36 women had been killed, and in 15 cases, that is 14.4 percent, by their intimate partners. This situation is true for many of the women who were murdered in Guyana in 2008. They were either killed by their current husbands, ex-husbands, current or ex-boyfriends, and reputed husbands. It is evident, therefore, that women are often killed by people they know.

Mr. Speaker, just a little bit of diversion, but a different approach: Trafficking in women and girls is also another approach used by organized and other types of crime to promote violence against women. Trafficking involves

the recruitment and transportation of persons using deception, coercion, and threats in order to place and keep them in a situation of forced labour, slavery, and servitude. Persons are trafficked into a variety of sectors of the informal economy, inclusive of prostitution, domestic work, agriculture, the garment industry, or street begging and other activities. The data shows that estimates of the number of trafficked persons ranges from 500,000 to 2,000,000 per year. While women, men, girls and boys are all victims of trafficking, the majority of the victims are female.

Mr. Speaker, this shows that various forms of gender-based discrimination increase the risk of women becoming affected by poverty, which in turn puts them at a higher risk of becoming targeted by traffickers and violence against women. Thank God, in the situation of our country, this situation is not alarming. Trafficking has developed into a highly profitable business throughout the world, and generates an estimated US\$12 billion per year. The focus here today, in this issue, on this issue, is because of the concern that the Caribbean is listed among the countries of origin of this activity.

In this sense, our government as usual, is vigilant as it relates to this issue, and at the time of this reporting here in this Honourable House, that we do not have an overwhelming number, or we do not have at all, the trafficking of persons issue in our society. Mr. Speaker,

many different theories have been presented to pinpoint the causes of violence against women and domestic violence. The answers have always been highly theoretical. Either they are psychological, which considers personality traits and mental stability of the offenders, or social theories, which considers external factors in the offender's environment, such as family structure, stress, and social learning; but there is no single approach to cover the analysis of why there is domestic violence, and violence against women.

Personality traits such as a sudden burst of anger, poor impulse control, insecurity, poor self-esteem, and other personality disorder are factors that are likely to push an individual to violent behaviour. In another sense, it is proposed that the abused experiences of a child, lead some people to be more violent as an adult. One of the social theories is *the Resource Theory*, which argues that *women, who are most dependent on their spouses for their economic well-being, find it difficult to leave their spouses. There are fewer options for them, and few resources to help them cope with or change their spousal behaviour.*

Mr. Speaker, another theory is *power and control*. In some relationships, violence against women arises out of a perceived need for power and controls, a form of bullying and social learning of abuse. Abusers' efforts to dominate their partner, in this case, is due to low self-

esteem or feelings of inadequacy, unresolved childhood conflicts, the stress of poverty, hostility, and maybe resentment toward men, women, genetic tendencies, and sociocultural influences. Generally, any strategy or approach is used by the perpetrator to gain or maintain power and control over the victim.

Mr. Speaker, what should be the response to violence against women in Guyana? Since, historically, it has been viewed as a private family matter that needs not involve government and criminal justice intervention. Well, the view is that our government must seriously address the social issue by developing policies to deal with the issue. This is being done now, and I think my colleague Minister, Honourable Priya Manickchand, was talking there, and outlining all the things that the government has done.

The campaign by the Ministry of Human Services in the Regions and in Central Georgetown is a perfect example of one of the attempts to curb violence against women at different levels, and I think this Honourable House was also able to share with NGOs and governments before us, have all ... have all made a commitment to deal with violence against women. And I know that Guyana has ratified over seven different international instruments to deal with this issue as well.

A commendable part of this, as it relates to the consultations that have happened in the past weeks, a

commendable part of this is the consultation with the men on this issue and their response to be advocates. There is also evidence to show, that our local law enforcement has been sensitized, and some Members trained to deal with domestic violence. They now have a better understanding of the scope and effect of domestic violence and violence against women, and are getting there to bring about changes in the criminal justice system's response.

The Government of Guyana, through the initiatives of many of the sectors, particularly in the Ministry of Human Services, has also established legal aid centers in Central Georgetown and the Regions, in addition to the Help and Shelter to alleviate some of the problems of women, who were abused. Although these are very good initiatives, in addition to those that I repeated before; there is still more to be done, and we recognize that, so that the following recommendations would reflect this. I feel the first one as it relates to the education of our children ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Honourable Member, when we return after this break, you will continue, with your recommendations. Before you raise, Honourable Members; Honourable Member, Ms Manickchand, you wanted to conclude your answers to a question already asked.

Hon Priya Manickchand: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

To the question that Mrs Lawrence asked earlier, and I am sorry that we are going to be disclosing this; but through your question the name of the pensioner was disclosed. That person owes as arrears even after the exemptions for 2008 have been deducted, \$31,460 as arrears. The letter that was sent to her is the letter that has been sent to everyone. The GWI has specific instructions from the Ministry of Human Services not to disconnect pensioners before they speak to us, because we believe that sometimes arrangements can be made. But we have to be clear in our message, both you and us, that this is a water waiver for a certain amount, and anything you use over that, you have to pay, or else the wrong message gets sent. We have been saying that over and over again.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Hon Member

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Honourable Member, Dr. Fox, you may continue.

Hon. Dr. Desrey Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker with all the very good initiatives that have already been outlined, and are up and running, I feel that there is still more to be done, and what we have to do

rests with the commitment of our government. The first one I would like to recommend, as a Minister within the Ministry of Education, is to continue to promote and accelerate the teaching of values pertaining to conflict resolution, respect for other humans, sexism, and such things as anger control.

I know that the process has started, because the HFLE Programme – the Health and Family Life Programme, is now being rolled off in the schools, and teachers are being trained to do this. In addition, I am aware that there is a task team that is looking at the development of moral education to be taught as a special subject in school, just to support the HFLE Programme. This should be done at the nursery, primary, secondary, and other tertiary institution levels. Also, I think a serious problem is that we should be able to look at the censorship of violent movies on our television stations and the cheap sale of DVD movies, which is not controlled. I know that with our commitment to the work that we are doing at the school level and with other law enforcement agencies, that we will be able to have heavier penalties for those who are breaking the rules as it relates to this; stiffer penalties for perpetrators of violent behaviour at all levels ... I think this is also taken care of, and today, as we debate this particular topic, we know that from the outline of what my colleague Minister was saying, that there are many things that will have to be reviewed as they relate to

the legislation and policies, pertaining to violence against women.

Our commitment to encourage more dialogue between males and females on the issue of violence against women, and visa-versa; and again we see this process has started, because the Government of Guyana is committed to curbing this social disease from our society. The traditions related to the socialization of males and females in our Guyanese society needs to be examined, and maybe we need to have some studies done and research as well. This is because we want some advice from our grassroots people in Guyana and other peoples, and we should have consultations, so that we can look at varying reviews of our policies as it relates to violence against women.

Parental education at all levels is needed, and I know that through the school system, we can also work through the Parent/Teachers' Association. We can also have outreach programmes to speak to parents about how they can cope, or give them the skills to deal with their children at different levels. There should be a national dialogue with all stakeholders on the subject of violence in our society, and this is something I think we need to do at the national level.

Mr. Speaker, as a woman and a strong advocate of peace, and a citizen of a developing nation, I want to call on all citizens of Guyana inclusive of, not only women's

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

groups, but the private sector, youth groups, labour movement, and all religious organizations to raise their voices to denounce violence against women in Guyana. I therefore support this Motion in this Honourable House.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

16:12 H SUSPENSION OF SITTING

7:17H RESUMPTION OF SITTING

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Dr Norton.

Dr George Norton: Mr. Speaker, if it pleases you, I rise to contribute to this Motion before this Honourable House, on violence against women, in observance of November 25th International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Mr. Speaker, we from this side of the House, particularly from the People's National Congress/ Reform – One Guyana, have been lending our voices and actions in no uncertain terms, and as tangibly as possible, in openly condemning all acts of violence, including acts of domestic and sexual violence, especially against women and children. We from the PNC/R-1G will continue to do so, be it by writing to the press, speaking about it on

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

national television, moving motions here in this Honourable House, or persistent peaceful and legitimate street protests. We have always been, and are willing to support development of awareness programmes and support systems, to prevent all forms of violence, including extrajudicial killings, torture, or even roughing-up of detainees.

The PNC/R-1G has done it in the past, and will continue to make recommendations of these programmes, projects and systems to assist victims of domestic and sexual violence; we most vehemently, and I repeat, do condemn such violent behaviour against women and children as socially and culturally unacceptable in our society as a whole, and in the Guyanese society in particular.

This Motion, Mr. Speaker, was carefully examined with all its clauses evaluated, and it is true that while the motion made mention in one of its WHEREAS Clauses of the Domestic Violence Act, the Prevention of Crime (Amendment) Act, Act No. 11 of 2008, and the Evidence Amendment Bill No. 22 of 2008; Mr Speaker, Guyana's modern legislation has consistently failed over the past decade to gain traction with respect of violence against women. This is so, Mr Speaker, in spite of the fact that with the passage of the proposed Sexual Offences Legislation in the near future, on the international scene, Guyana will enjoy one of the most progressive legal

regimes on women's rights in the Americas, along with Cuba and Canada.

However, Mr. Speaker, progress on the ground, on all fronts, is crippled by the impunity with which men, at all levels of society, still routinely perpetuate lethal violence against women. Mr. Speaker, I say *men* because, while violence against women can be perpetrated by women, it is only a small fraction of that which is perpetrated on men. And it is a fact that sexual violence crimes are overwhelmingly gender-based, that is, assault by men on women and girls; and this can be borne out by statistics, which will show that around the world, at least one in every three women have been a victim of violence perpetrated by a man in her lifetime.

Mr. Speaker, if we are serious, and are bent on eliminating this scourge of violence against women in our Guyanese society; then we here as men, beginning in this House, must be prepared to self-assess and take stock transparently, rather than in a self-serving manner, of the particular ways we as men do contribute to and/or need to confront, violence against women and children. And to help us, all men here in this House, I would like to point out some of the characteristics of profiles of male perpetrators, especially of domestic violence and sexual offences. These men, Mr Speaker, can be found in all socioeconomic circles, and we only have to remember recently what took place in the Charlestown area, where a

rich businessman was accused of sexually violating children. These perpetrators are in racial, in cultural groups, in any group, regardless of age, and we can remember the 70-plus year old man who had 43 children, and was accused of violating a four-year-old girl in Bartica.

Men who perpetrate violence against women, Mr. Speaker, can even be men with disabilities. And I remember carefully of one case where a vertically challenged man, probably three feet or more, who had to climb on a chair to get onto the table in order to slap his wife in her face. [*Uproar*] Mr. Speaker, there is another case where a patient of mine, who lost one of his eyes through a motor vehicle accident, and had the other eye damaged and completely lost in a domestic violence act that he was perpetrating against his wife, and she defended herself.

Mr. Speaker, these men become very angry for trivial things: the clothes their partner wears; either the stiletto heels were too high, or the spaghetti straps were too thin and they became angry. These men try to isolate their partners. I say this, so that we can examine ourselves; these man who perpetrate violence against women, they try to isolate their partners from friends, family, and they feel jealous if other men may want to talk to their partners, even if they are known to them. And one other cause, Mr. Speaker, another characteristic, that we find

very common, is that these men generally feel sorry after an attack, and generally forget that they have promised to change.

Focusing, Mr. Speaker, on the implementation rather than law reforms, quickly reveals that responses to violence against women are infected by society's deeply ingrained, ambivalent attitude towards violence in general. Unless confronted by a coordinated and sustained national strategy, violence against women will continue to be underestimated. This national strategy must be promoted by the leadership in all sectors of our society, especially those that are controlled by males. And we refer to these sectors as in public, in business, in media, in religion, in government, entertainment and sports, for they can forcefully condemn violence against women; but they will fail to appreciate how steeped in chauvinistic attitudes these sectors remain in nurturing violence against women and children. Male religious leadership, in particular, Mr Speaker, seems to be in denial, or unable to come to terms with their historic responsibility of the powerful religious rationale for creating and sustaining the subordination of women and girls to men, which underpins violence against them.

Mr. Speaker, I remember that, as a Toahoas in my village, I visited with an Anglican priest, the home of one of the female villagers, a victim of domestic violence perpetrated by her husband, who was a staunch member

of the priest's congregation and whose regular tithes filled his church's coffers; and in that instance, I remember, Mr. Speaker, the words of the late President Forbes Burnham, who on one occasion said: *slight my surprise, but great my disgust ...* and that was the feeling I had, when I heard how the priest was rebuking the lady for complaining to her mother, who in turn, complained to him – the priest.

Subordination of women to men, which really is the root problem of violence against women, is so commonplace and ingrained in everyday habits, that it is now difficult to recognize it for what it is. Probably, Mr. Speaker, this is one of the reasons why women remain in abusive relationships. Of course, there are other reasons, which I would like to mention here, Mr. Speaker, in this Honourable House. Women stay in abusive relationships because they may feel that they can help their partners, or they may expect their partners to change. They may fear that they may be blamed for the violence, they may fear for their own as well as their children's safety, so they remain in these relationships. They may feel that is an economic necessity, or probably they love their partners and do not want to hurt them.

Mr. Speaker, these women may remain, because they believe that children need both parents, or according to their religious beliefs, that is where they belong. Many of them remain because they have nowhere else to go. Mr. Speaker, the ambivalence in attitude to violence on the

whole is at its highest level here in the Guyanese society, and was typically illustrated only recently, where on one hand, the President had a meeting with Civil Society Organizations to mobilize against violence against women. This was laudable, commendable; it must be congratulated; but Mr. Speaker, he was also recently interviewed supporting the retention of the death penalty. Likewise, in the Ministry of Education a recently announced new Education Act retains corporal punishment. These official positions certainly do mirror the inclination of a wide cross-section of the male population in Guyana. A great deal of the problem here in Guyana of violence against women, lies in the culture of the police force and the judicial system, that is including the prosecutor, the magistrate, the judges and lawyers. Changes in this culture are necessary if domestic violence and sexual violence are to be reported to the police, in the first instance, so that charges can be laid, a trial can take place and be completed, with a conviction attained, and the perpetrator punished.

Court processes in Guyana are dominated by men. You have male tradition, male culture, and male attitudes. While it is a fact that the number of females are increasing into this profession; they can only challenge, rather than adapt to this legal culture that exists now, after a very long time should pass. At this point in time in Guyana, citizens in general have little confidence in the administration of justice. As a consequence of the

perception of corruption in the legal process, and distrust of lawyers, and more so of the police, women do not want to go to report abuses to the police, for a series of reasons: police stations in Guyana are not civilian friendly, they are more akin to barracks, bare, functional and impersonal, if not scary; furniture is at a minimum, sometimes only a waiting bench is available; security is a major concern in recent years at the stations; and some, stations even have their gates closed. The long counter separating the general public from the station staff symbolizes the siege, between the police and the local community. These situations, Mr. Speaker, need to be changed urgently, if we are to effectively have an impact on the elimination of violence against women.

Likewise Mr. Speaker, we need to change the attitude of the police who, as a strategy, most times highlight the difficulties the victim will encounter if she continues with a charge, so that she might drop the charge. Another feature that will influence whether the victim will continue with her complaint is ensuring that, the police are competently trained. We must eliminate the approach that *any policewoman will do*, and ensure that there are always trained female personnel available.

Mr. Speaker, we can probably take the example of Brazil who, since 1980, they have created more than 300 women's police station, and this has been so effective that it was followed by other Latin American countries and

Asian countries because they found that, not only is it so effective; but it also had some economic benefits. It was found to be less expensive to have these stations rather than to build shelters. And as I said, Guyana needs to follow along this line. In Guyana, we need to change the judicial system to a more victim-oriented one; rather than the one we have the moment, which reduces the victim to an evidence provider. The only person representing the victim is the prosecutor, whose paramount interest is not the welfare of the victim, but a conviction. So, the victim is important, only because she is the best source of information to secure a conviction.

Besides, an impression of inequality is created in the mind of the victim when she looks at the unknown police prosecutor, dressed in police uniform, as compared to a famous, top-ranking, high-cost, expensively dressed and well-articulated lawyer. In Guyana, the relationship of prosecutors to victims is minimal and suffers from the following:

- No attempt is made to explain the court process or what is to be expected of the victim.
- Most prosecutors barely speak to the victim.
- Prosecutors allow excessively intrusive questions from the defense lawyers.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

- No information is given to the victim regarding the accused.
- No concern is shown for the difficulties that may arise from the victim having to attend court on numerous occasions, which may include losing her job, loss of school hours, etc.

Police prosecutors in Guyana are seriously deficient in training. Victims are snapped at constantly shouted at to speak up, or not to repeat themselves. No apologies are offered for delays. Victims and witnesses are treated as if their time is of no consequence. They are not included in consultations over new dates. They are expected to be available whenever it suits the lawyer, regardless of the cost, loss of job, schooling or inconvenience. Explanations are never offered why cases are abruptly adjourned, by no one, to the victims or their relatives. .

These conditions and situations need to be corrected if we are to succeed in our battle against violence against women. This problem, however, Mr. Speaker, seems to be rooted in a large national culture, resistant to a modern role for women, and a reluctance to abandon violence in all its forms; and of course, the mentioned chauvinistic attitude in all sectors in nurturing violence against women.

An indication of how entrenched the chauvinistic approach remains, finds expression in Section 31 (1) of

the Criminal Law Procedure Act, which provides that the judge may any time, on the application of the prosecutor or accused, or at his own instance, order that the jury shall be composed of men only. This, Mr. Speaker, needs to be changed. Changing the culture that supports violence against women, in addition to effective legislation, requires changes in values and attitudes such as manifests in the following:

- The sexualization of nearly all forms of advertising, and we talk about from of the Brazilian Polar beer cans, to the cars, to the Carib Girls, and Digicel is not so far behind.
- The absence of protective mechanisms against explicit visuals, and the Honourable Minister spoke about videotapes mushrooming all over the City.
- Obscene lyrics, and I imagine most of us might have hummed, if not danced and enjoyed, the Mighty Sparrow with:

*Black up they eye, bruise up they
knee, every now and then lick them
down, they love you long and they
love you strong.*

- Other things on the TV, and the graphically violent photos in the press. We cannot forget, on one of

the front pages of our dailies, the separation of a head totally from its body;

- We have religious opposition to women's reproductive rights and sexuality, and the religious rationale of subordination of women to men.

And what is more important, Mr. Speaker, is the willingness of most Guyanese, especially those in decision-making positions, to condone some form of violence, whether it is corporal punishment, beating of our children, death penalty, extra-judicial killings, gay-bashing, roughing-up of detainees, torture, pornography, etc. All the above contribute to an environment conducive to violence against women.

The term *Violence against Women* is used generally to cover domestic violence, sexual violence, and trafficking in women and girls. It is a fact that violence against women has been perpetrated for centuries, as is stated in one of the WHEREAS Clauses of this Motion; but efforts to address this issue have been overwhelmed and outpaced by the scale of the problem, both in Guyana and the world at large. In Guyana, current laws and procedures on sexual violence breach the government's constitutional obligation: Article 149 (F), *the Right to Freedom from Discrimination*, and Article 154 (A), *International Obligations to be Upheld*.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

All states, Mr. Speaker, have a legal duty under International Human Rights Law, to take effective actions to prevent, investigate, and punish violence against women. Failure to comply with these international obligations cannot be justified by reference to social, cultural, or economic considerations. Apart from the fact that responses to violence against women has been slow, halting and sporadic factors and variables, as was described in the Motion, continue to invigorate the problem, and are not been recognized or addressed effectively and to its full context.

One of those factors is the way rape, as violence against women, is looked at in our society. The Domestic Violence Act can protect a woman, among other abuses, from sexual abuse or sexual harassment, including forcing the victim to have unwanted sex. We cannot address sexual abuse without facing squarely that odious crime of rape. No stone must be left unturned in our battle against rape by all and sundry, beginning of course from the top, that is, at the level of the state and its policing system.

Viewed in its entirety, Mr. Speaker, sexual violence against women constitutes a crisis of law and order, as well as public health. The public health crisis embraces physical injuries, psychological trauma, post-traumatic disorders, sexually transmitted infections, emotional injuries, disabilities, negative effects for reproductive

health, and loss of life. To these long-standing consequences in Guyana, we can now add the little effort and the effects of the fact that HIV Infection of females is occurring at a higher rate than men. So if we change all that which was mentioned before, especially that which will prevent males from coercive sexual connection with women, we will reduce greatly that gamut of health-related consequences that I just mentioned.

Because, Mr. Speaker, medical testimony in a rape case, from a registered medical practitioner, confirming evidence, is a standard requirement in the courts of Guyana. It is so necessary to be examined by medical practitioner, who should be competent and informed. Of course, that is what is referred to as *corroboration of evidence*, and this in itself should be eliminated completely; because what this actually implies, is that women are inherently untrustworthy, and that is why they have the official police form, on which this examination is recorded, short and not sufficient. That form expects the examiner to focus exclusively on whether or not during rape penetration occurred. And this brings us to the actual definition of rape, which has to be much more defined, so there could be no doubt as to whether or not a woman was violated.

That form which the medical practitioner is supposed to fill was described by a trial judge recently as *a scrap of paper*, and prevents any detailed report being provided at

the moment. It is more convenient for us here, in Guyana, to adapt the protocol that is used in South Africa, which coincides with pages upon pages of information, at times totaling up to 16 pages. And this form used in South Africa has a detailed list, a checklist for forensic specimens, and the necessary treatment for pregnancies, STIs, and HIV. These both ensure that the victim receives all necessary treatment and care, and that the best possible evidence is gathered. We in Guyana need to develop a national medical protocol specifically for rape victims.

The fact that a medical examination can add to the trauma of the victim in any country, shows that the issue is not determined by resources, or level of development; but by education, proper procedures and attitudes. Medical evidence is critical to the case of rape, since it may be the only other evidence apart from the victim's statement; for generally, in a rape situation, there are no other witnesses. For this reason, as much evidence as is possible must be obtained covering all aspects of sexual violence.

Doctors in Guyana are sometimes asked to conduct medical examinations of rape victims that, really and truly, should ... actually, in Guyana, we find that you will have overseas doctors working here in Guyana, and they may be asked, or sometimes required to conduct medical examinations. Due to delays in our legal system, at times these doctors leave Guyana before the case turns up in

court. To avoid such a situation, a list should be drawn up in each police station, of approved doctors who agree to take up referrals of rape victims, and these doctors should be in sufficient numbers, so that there should be no delay for the victim in receiving medical attention. Of course, training must be provided for all medical personnel who examine rape victims on how to provide the best care for the victims.

Sexual violence is a high-risk mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS, because the use of condoms is very unlikely, and the violence of the act increases the risk of transmission. Post-exposure prophylaxis medication, which can reduce the risk of developing HIV/AIDS by at least 80 percent, is not always available and is not always discussed by the medical examiner. Guidance and training must also be provided to the police to ensure the victims are taken for medical treatment as quickly as possible, as required by the National Policy on HIV/AIDS in Guyana. Clear and prominent reminder notices can be placed in relevant areas of the police station, for example they could have in bold letters, SEXUAL OFFENSE ALLEGATIONS AND HIV TREATMENT SHOULD BE STARTED WITHIN TWO HOURS ... *[Interruption]*

Mrs. Deborah J Backer: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Honourable Member be given ten minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carreed

Dr. George Norton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Intelligent policing can be extremely successful in reducing the incidence of rape; allowing police resources to be targeted most effectively; ensuring research and the gathering of statistics of violence against women is one part of Guyana's obligations, under the American Convention on the Prevention and Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women – The Convention of Belem Do Par.

Research in Guyana came up with the following data:

- One in three females in Guyana is subjected to some form of sexual violence in her life.
- Only 1 percent of rape complaints to the police in Guyana end in conviction. Low conviction rates in rape cases are not inevitable, and are not determined by resources or level of development. Latvia and Hungary have the highest conviction rates for rape in Europe, but are far from being the richest countries.
- 69 percent of all cases are out of the judicial system by the end of the preliminary inquiry, and
- 70 percent of all sexual violence cases involve victims under 17 years of age;

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

- 66 percent of sexual offenses occur in the home of the accused or the perpetrator;
- 76 percent of family related sexual offences are committed by fathers, stepfathers, or father figures.

Mr. Speaker, the culture of both the police and the courts still insists the notion that domestic violence is a judicial, rather than, private matter. Mr. Speaker, the scale of the problem here, in Guyana, requires a coordinated and integrated effort, promoted with the highest level of support to ensure public, private and social sector participation in this exercise to confront violence against women. Such a national initiative, promoted from the highest level, should ensure delivery by the state of integrated support and rehabilitation services to victims of violence; effective mechanisms of prosecution and provision of adequate and sustained resources. This initiative should aim at creating a widespread understanding and reform of the systemic nature of violence against women and the different forms it takes, and to encourage all sectors to self-assess and take stock of the particular ways they contribute to and/or need to confront, violence against women.

Mr. Speaker, before I close, I would like to appeal to all of us, and I say this remembering the words of our national poet, Martin Carter, who said:

All are involved, and all are consumed.

And while I know for a fact that most of you might have heard of this before, might have read it yourself; I still think it is appropriate that I close by reading this poem:

I GOT FLOWERS TODAY

I got flowers today ... It was not our anniversary or any other special day. Last night he threw me into a wall and started to choke me. It seems like a nightmare. I could not believe it was real. I woke up this morning sore and bruised all over. I know he must be sorry, because he sent me flowers today.

I got flowers today. It was not Mother's Day or any other special day. Last night he beat me up again, and it was much worse than all the other times. If I leave him, what will I do? How will I take care of my kids? What about the money? I am afraid of him, and scared to leave. But I know he must be sorry, because he sent me flowers today.

I got flowers today. It was the day of my funeral. Last night he finally killed me. He beat me to death. If only I had gathered enough courage and strength to leave him, I would not have gotten flowers today.

- Anonymous -

[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Mrs. Indranie Chandarpal.

Mrs Indranie Chandarpal: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Honourable Members.

This debate on violence against women is most welcome, since it provides an opportunity for all of us as policymakers to denounce this deviant type of behaviour which is prevalent in our society. Domestic violence is a very sad reality, and has been with us for a very long time. It exists in every society, in one form or another; but has generally been unacknowledged, or perhaps, it has been silently accepted. It has no borders, no class, no religion, nor ethnicity. It exists at every level of society, and continues to be the single most devastating barrier in

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

preventing women from enjoying their basic human rights and freedoms.

For a long time, and even within the women's movement, domestic violence, and particularly violence against women in the home, it remains behind closed doors. Because of the very nature of violence, it was treated as a very private thing, and was not treated as a criminal act. Rather, it was supposed to be a very personal and private matter. Women advocacy groups around the world have been working to draw more attention to the physical, psychological, and sexual abuse of women, and to stress the need for action. The Women's International Democratic Federation - I am sure that many of you do not know about this organization, but it was called *WIDF*, of which the WPO, the Women's Progressive Organization has been an executive member - has taken up this problem of violence against women since the early '70s. Unfortunately, other international institutions did not see it fit, at that time, to pursue this issue. Nonetheless, we are happy that, in 1993, the United Nations General Assembly passed the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women UN Resolution.

At both the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, and in 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, women's organizations from around the world, advocated ending gender violence as a high priority. The Cairo Programme of Action

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

recognized that *gender violence is an obstacle to women's reproductive and sexual health and rights*, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, devoted an entire session to the issue of violence against women. Mr. Speaker, I had the distinct honour of leading Guyana's delegation to the Beijing Conference, and being a part of that discussion.

In March 1994, the Commission on Human Rights appointed the First Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, and empowered her to investigate domestic abuse. Her report to the Fifth Commonwealth Ministers Council responsible for Women's Affairs provided some random statistics:

Every six minutes a rape occurs in the United States of America.

In Bangladesh, malnutrition was found to be three times more common among girls than boys.

In Africa, 18 million women have undergone female genital mutilation.

In Pakistan, 99 percent of housewives are beaten by their husbands.

In South Africa, every one and a half minutes, a female is raped, which amounts to about 380,000 each year.

These are just a few statistics, but they are enough to cause us to become quite alarmed, especially when statistics show how vulnerable women are in relation to sexual harassment, trafficking, sexual slavery, bonded labour, dowry related murders, genital mutilation, and forced prostitution.

In 1994, the Organization of American States negotiated the Inter-American Convention to prevent, punish, and eradicate violence against women, known as *the Belmopan Convention*. So far, 33 countries, including Guyana, signed on to this Convention. In 1996, the 49th Assembly adopted a Resolution declaring *Violence, a Public Health Priority*, and sponsored a collaborative study on women's health and domestic violence. In 1998, the IDB brought together 400 experts from 37 countries to discuss the causes and cost of domestic violence, and policies and programmes to address it. In 1998, the United Nations General Assembly took a decision to commemorate International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Why was this decision taken?

The commemoration of this day, originated during the First International Feminist Meeting in Colombia, in 1980, when the representative of the Dominican Republic proposed this day in honour of the three Dominican heroines: Patria, Minerva and Theresa Mirabel, who were brutally murdered by Trifilus Terrani, on 25 November 1960. From 1995 to 2002, four regional meetings were

held by the Organization of American States to scrutinize and analyze what was being accomplished, and to determine how successful strategies were in eradicating violence against women.

In 2002, a meeting of experts of the Caribbean Sub-Region was held in Guyana to look at violence in the Americas, a regional analysis, including a review of the implementation of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women. What were some of the main findings? I would just like to refer to four.

The first: Most countries in the Regions have agencies that address violence against women. Most have collaboration with governments and non-governmental organizations. Most countries provide legal assistance, counseling, education, awareness promotion, shelters, hotline services, and training. Acts have been developed in many countries to protect against domestic violence, to promote equality, and discourage sexual offences.

That meeting, Mr. Speaker, provided the opportunity for sharing of common concerns, as well as looking at best practices. It also provided the knowledge that the problems we face in Guyana are not unique, since statistics from the Caribbean and further afield reaffirm the universality of violence against women. Reference was made the actions that were taken by the government in response to the issue of domestic violence in Guyana.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

It is necessary, Mr. Speaker, to remind Members that, we signed onto the Convention in 1981; but prior to that, the only national document we had was the White Paper on Women, presented in 1976. I am not sure whether it was debated.

Unfortunately, domestic violence was not addressed in the Desiree Bernard Committee in 1985. This only became a reality in 1996. Apart from the Domestic Violence legislation, we also have the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill, another piece of important legislation for women; As well as, we adopted the national policy on women. We never have that before. In addition to that, we set up the leadership institute for women. We never have that before. As well as the women's leadership ... as well as the establishment of the National Resource Documentation Centre for Development, and Members, Mr. Speaker, copies of the document that have been annually or quarterly prepared by the Documentation Centre on Women Power here, is very informative, because it provides a lot of information on violence, and I would like to use this opportunity to congratulate the center for the work they are doing.

As well as the Leadership Institute and Documentation Center that I referred to, I also would like to refer to two government properties that were made available, two NGOs, and these were facilities for battered women, and even government had ensured that financial resources

were made available to facilitate the running and the management of those entities. We also created the Difficult Circumstances Programme, where an attempt was made to improve the conditions of women, as well as the extension of the Legal Aid, could not only Georgetown alone; but the different regions. And we can all ... I do believe, as was stated before, it is still not enough, and there is much more work that we need to do.

However, Mr. Speaker, I wish to refer to a research that was carried out by the Shivpersaud/Danns, in the late 1980s. It stated that two out of three women surveyed reported experiencing at least one incident of domestic violence, and that domestic violence existed among people from all socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Almost all of us would have during our younger days, and even now, had the opportunity of seeing and hearing various stories, of violence perpetrated against, not only women; but children and parents. It is so commonplace that we tend to live with it and hope and pray that the perpetrator will be dealt with by a stronger person to the family, and if that person does not exist, we then turn to the police.

The socioeconomic practices, that reinforce the values about male power and control, and female subordination, abound. These start in the home by mothers themselves, who have never bothered to question some of the cultural or traditional values that seek to promote male dominance

and female subordination. Some of these are passed down innocently as a way of life. The cliché that is most popular is women are the weaker sex, and thus they need a male to protect them, or the male is the bread winner of the home. There is recognition that a new approach must look at the causes of violence against women, with particular attention being placed on an examination of gender socialization, practices in the home, and the education system, which reproduce or reinforce negative sex stereotypes and rigid gender roles.

A research done by the Centre for Health and Gender Equity on ending violence against women referred to a framework for understanding partner violence by examining what was called the ecological model of factors associated with partner abuse. These factors are:

- Individual perpetrator being male – Witnessing marital violence as a child, absent or rejecting father, being abused as a child, or alcohol use.
- Relationship – Marital conflict, male control of wealth and decision-making in the family, in-law conflict, and lack of privacy.
- Community Poverty, low socio-economic status, unemployment,

association with delinquent peers,
isolation of women and family, and

- Societal norms, granting men control over female behavior, acceptance of violence as a way to resolve conflict, notion of masculinity linked to dominance, honour and aggression, and rigid gender roles.

The study found that by combining individual level risk factors with findings of cross-cultural studies, the ecological model contributes to understanding why some societies and some individuals are more violent than others, and why women, especially wives, are so consistently the victims of abuse.

Mr Speaker, the Beijing Platform for Action in the Chapter dealing with Violence against Women has provided governments, governments around the world, international organizations, and civil society organizations, enough guidance on how to proceed to make the required changes. The Government of Guyana and the PPP/C, has signaled its political will from the onset on this issue, and from then to now a lot has changed, in terms of awareness and responses. I recall numerous initiatives that were taken by various stakeholders to familiarize women with the Law. Help and Shelter was set up, and received total support from

the government, since we recognize the critical role Civil Society can play.

The Guyana Association of Women Lawyers, in 2000, printed a booklet captioned: *What You Need to Know about the Law and You*. That document, Mr Speaker, was reader-friendly, and the Women's Progressive Organization had used it effectively in its advocacy work among women, and I am sure other organizations would have done it as well.

From my own experience and knowledge, women activists who work with communities are very much aware of the problems related to women's insubordination. I recall occasions when Members of the WPO had to speak to spouses or fathers before they could get the go-ahead to attend meetings organized by women for women. Our work, whether as Members of Parliament, women activists, or community workers, would have brought us face-to-face with numerous instances of abuse against women, children, and parents. Today, there is greater awareness, and we need to acknowledge the important contributions that were made by women's organizations, such as the WPO, NCW, Red Thread and others, in educating women about their roles and their rights. But still, we have a lot more to do. While we reject the frequency and incidents of violence, we need to remind ourselves that to change of culture that is ingrained in our society is a monumental task. The

references to the international response, though late, are gaining some ground. We have a unique opportunity to accelerate that response by bringing all concerned on board.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the initiative by the President in bringing stakeholders together was indeed welcome, since it indicates there is political will and commitment at the highest level by the administration to work towards the reduction of violence. The President also referred to the abuse of alcohol, and its link to violence, and he called all those who were present to take action in their respective groupings to help in reducing alcohol intake in particular. The religious leaders were asked to offer counseling and other interventions to reduce violence, including programmes to assist male perpetrators with anger management.

In this regard, I wish to refer to the final BE IT RESOLVED Clause, that calls on the National Assembly, and all Civil Society, not only women's groups; but the Private Sector, the Labour Movement, and the Religious Communities, to lend their voices in openly condemning acts of domestic and sexual violence, to develop awareness programmes and support systems to prevent violence, as well as assist victims of violence.

We believe there is need for stronger action, in terms of enforcement of the legislation, and we hope that the law enforcement agencies will ensure that perpetrators are

dealt with condignly, so as to prevent others from going down that road. There is a dire need for more men to become involved in various initiatives to help other men who are neglecting their duties as fathers. There is need as well, for mothers to reassess their role in bringing up their children, by encouraging at an early age the need for equity and quality among the children, in her role as the nurturer of the family.

When we look at the statistics, we tend to become disillusioned, but we need to recall that activism is only recent, while the problem is centuries-old.

I would like to express my wholehearted support for the Motion, and call on all Members for their unstinted support as well.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Mr. Everall Franklin.

Mr. Everall Franklin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to support this Motion; I doubt any member of this House could, or would, do otherwise. We have a very enthusiastic Minister, who carries out her work with passion, which is so necessary when dealing with issues

such as this. But I must say that it is a well placed and timely Motion, not only because of the battering which we have had in the House over the past few weeks with other Motions; but this is one that comes up now that will have general support, because it is worthy of that support. So I must congratulate the government on setting an agenda that will allow us to continue without bleeding.

Subsequent Governments of Guyana have worked to reduce the differences between men and women, and all these governments must be commended. We indeed, in Guyana, have come a long way and if we compare ourselves with many countries within the Region, and some outside of the Region, I think we have done well; but violence persists. Many primitive societies were based on a matriarchal system, where women indeed ran the villages and organized a lot of the work in those *primitive* systems. The moral authority that women had was great, and apparently, as we develop, we have become more primitive in our behaviour to the fairer sex.

I think legislation is necessary; but it is not enough. We can legislate against murder – we still have murders. We legislate against many things that are unlawful, but they still persist. And something as serious as violence against women requires a fundamental shift in morality and the way we view one another and ourselves. The state and other agencies must provide more facilities for abuse and pre-abused women. I say *pre-abused*, because sometimes

it is much too late to be dealing with an abused person; if we could put a lot more into preventing the abuse, which calls a shift in how we behave, and a lot more work has to be done in that regard. Organizations such as Red Thread, and Help and Shelter must be strengthened with tangible support. By *tangible*, I mean we have to put resources into these organizations that could mirror the type of input that you get, say, like when we are fighting AIDS. But a lot of the input comes from abroad, yet this is our problem. We have to find some of our own resources to deal with our problem and not just rely on external sources. If it is indeed such a big problem, then we have to put more resources towards fighting it.

But because it is a behavioural change, and because men are mostly accused of perpetrating violence against women, we must also look at the scarcity of male role models. If we go into our schools, from kindergarten right up to university, there are fewer and fewer male teachers, male role models, and we have worked tirelessly over the years to promote and strengthen women and women's organization, and what they can achieve; and sometimes, I feel that we have forgotten that the men are falling behind. We need to look at this problem in a holistic manner, and we cannot achieve what we want to achieve without all of us rising to the occasion.

I feel that our churches, our mosques, temples, must do a lot more in presenting alternatives to troubled men,

troubled youth, and troubled young women. We have to look at the situation of alcohol and drug abuse, has was done to many communities, and it is not alcohol abuse just with men. Recently, my young daughters have been telling me that it is a fad for women, young girls, to be drinking and holding their liquor, and apparently, they have been doing it much better than the men. And therefore, sometimes we look at this situation as if it is a male problem. It is not. It is a problem within the entire society that our young girls, in particular, are drinking just as hard as young men. And this also, makes them vulnerable.

We cannot also forget that poverty plays a role, but it is not the sole factor, because we have violence being perpetrated at all levels, as many of the speakers before have stated; and therefore we have a moral obligation, this has to be a behavioural change, and this is not something you can just legislate away. Legislation is necessary; but the real work is with the individuals, changing the way they behave, and the way they view the world. And that is not just the work of the state; that is the work of individual communities supported by the state.

We also have to look at how the state exercises power. Some speakers brought it up, and I am not going to go back over that. Corporal punishment, what is that? It is an exercise of power, to coerce, to make someone do something, or behave in the way you want them to

behave. So we beat them. And that is the state saying that this is acceptable. And it is debatable, but if we want a holistic, if we are taking a holistic approach and we want a solution that makes sense; then we cannot exercise brutality, no matter if it is sanctioned brutality, and expect our citizens to behave in a manner that is pleasing and gentle. It just cannot work.

Therefore, we must examine what it is, if we want to be coercive by argument, or if we are going to deal with a big stick. So we cannot on the one hand shout violence against women, because most of the time it is coercion *you are not doing what I want you to do*. We are not debating if it is bad; we are saying the state has to decide if in our schools, in particular, where the minds of our young people are being formed, if this is a method that we are going to use in our schools, and expect them outside of that to behave in a nonviolent manner – I do not think that is possible.

But in all of this, I am someone who has daughters, who would always think about how they will manage their relationships; and I ask myself the question: where are the fathers, the brothers, the uncles, and friends of abused women? And I will send out a message to any future husband or boyfriend, that you have somebody else to deal with. That message, I do not think has been extended, and somehow people have gotten away with doing what they want, without any consequence, from the

local level, from the village, from the ... *[Interruption]*
... This is about support for people, who are weaker than you are. And I am saying that something is wrong, not just men in support against violence; but men have to stand up for those who are abused. These women, all of them, have brothers, uncles, some of them even have fathers, and that is why I am saying *you cannot just legislate*; there must be other deterrents that are there to deal with it on the spot, because legislation deals after the fact, after the abuse has taken place that is when the legislation kicks in. I would want our men to act as a deterrent to other men who feel that this is the way to go.

Therefore, I think there is no need to harp and go along and to rehash some of the points which have already been made. This Motion obviously will get the support from our party. It deserves the support, and we do hope that this is not just another exercise in futility; that out of this Motion, because it has widespread support, more resources, and a commitment of the state actors and civil society, to do much more to prevent, I am more interested in prevention rather than the cure or the remedy after the fact, because most of the time that is already too late – remedy. It is prevention we are talking about. Thank you, Sir. Therefore with that note, I would like to support prevention as the remedy. That is what I want to say: to support this Motion.

Without further ado, thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Member, Ms. Pauline Sukhai ...

Hon. Pauline Sukhai: Good evening, Mr. Speaker; everyone - Seasons' Greetings.

Contributing to the debate on the Motion before us, I would immediately lend support, and endorse the position as outlined by the subject Minister, Hon Priya Manickchand, and the previous speakers. I wish, however, to highlight Guyana's recognition and active promotion of the internationally declared day, 25 November, as International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The national acceptance and observance of this day is a significant intervention by government, and the people for highlighting the violence that continues to pervade our society, and by extension, it also demonstrates our government's serious and engaging approach in addressing violence against women.

It also provides another manifestation, and that is the continued support, which I would want to be recorded, for the contribution made by the non-state actors, institutions, NGOs and groups, which continue to encourage the eradication of violence against women, and who have provided valuable support to victims. I agree with the

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

Motion that there was a global condemnation of this pandemic, and voice the fact that despite collective international instruments and positions, the atrocities of violence against women, and the rise of femicide, continue to be a global challenge.

It is with the same level of passion as my colleague on the subject of violence against women that I add, or I wish to add, to the remarks to the effect that Guyana as a nation continues to struggle for a violence-free environment at various levels. However, for direct references to the eradication of violence against women, the Motion admittedly stated that:

Our society is still baffled by the senseless violent murders of women by predominantly male partners, whether past or present.

We can point to, with alarm and disgust, the frequency with which the incidences of murder of women by their partners appear to have spiraled, within the past few weeks. As a government, we must admit, and we are being courageous to admit, that violence is pervasive at all levels, that it affects both genders, and that when violence is perpetuated against women, we also recognize that the transferred impact extends to the children, families and particularly children who, I want to mention, carry the deep scars of this crime.

With reference to the Motion, where it notes:

The efforts by government to address this challenge by the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act of 2006 ...

We must record this as a legislative achievement in the struggle against violence against women, in the first instance, while we must also mention that it offers opportunities for all victims and vulnerable individuals.

I am encouraged by the expressed intention by the subject Minister of tabling proposed amendments to strengthen the existing domestic violence legislation. However, we must also recognize that there are some major criticisms to the inability to effectively enforce the Law. However, I suppose with greater support, increased resources and capacity for implementation, we will be able to improve and to provide judicial benefits to the victims of violence.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish that this House takes note of the other supporting initiatives which our government expects to improve, and also expects that when they are improved, will enhance the position of women. And I want to draw attention to the government's National Policy on Domestic Violence, *Break the Cycle, Stop the Violence 2007-2013*. This document is a total review, and I am very happy that it also speaks to the medium term, whereby we are prepared as a government, and it has been alluded to already, that we have a very enthusiastic and energetic Minister, who has been pursuing these reforms and initiatives that would lend support to women

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

moving away from a position ... of a level where they can move away and probably minimize the instances, to get out of the cycle.

I want to come back to the domestic legislation regulation. I say so, because I understand that the Minister has worked and engaged a number of stakeholders in developing amendments, and that is it is her intent also to provide and to craft regulations, domestic violence regulations, which is expected to arrive in this House very shortly. And I would want to say when those amendments and regulations come to this House; I expect that we will all, where would we will altogether support these legislations, because it will augur well.

I want to also draw attention to the STAMP IT OUT Legislation. Again, this is another piece of important legislation, which is being reviewed, and I would like to say it is in keeping with our signatory to the Belmopan, and that the Minister in her wisdom ensured that there was full consultation and engagement of all stakeholders. This legislation, I am very hopeful, will revolutionize the Sexual Offences Act. And I further expect, that some of the proposals contained within that review will be established, for example, the establishment of friendly comfort centers, where all of the services will be available for victims of rape.

I also wish, Mr. Speaker, to draw my attention to this particular piece of amendment, which will be coming

shortly to the House, because it also has had the favour, or the participation, of consultation of women from the Hinterland, whereby questions and proposals were raised. I do expect that with the review of amendments that will come to this House, that it will also help to improve the access of Hinterland women to easier services available, since we know that many times victims of abuse and violence are usually handicapped by the geographical and logistical difficulties in which Hinterland women find themselves.

Another important piece of legislation, which I think is remarkable, will lend some support to removing women to a higher level, and also moving further away from the vicious circle of violence, is the Trafficking in Persons Legislation. A number of speakers before me have already mentioned that they feel the linkage is very close and direct. I wish to say that I too add that, it is one step further in bringing some form of relief to the very minimum of victims, which I would fall under the category of trafficking in persons. I want to also allude to the fact that the Inter-Ministerial Committee responsible for monitoring trafficking in persons has recently laid the report. Mr. Speaker, I think that these are some of the very good initiatives by the subject Minister, her Ministry's team and our government, to try to cover the gap which sometimes goes unnoticed in relation to help, to support the eradication of violence against women.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

Another very important approach which our government has taken, and I think it will be ... it should have been mentioned somewhere in the Motion; I am not asking for an amendment, but the fact that we and our government have continued to consistently provide capacity building and public education and information to our country, and the nation, and I think I would wish also to say that that has had tremendous impact on some of the resulting evidences, that today women are much more enlightened and empowered as it relates to violence, and whether they should accepted it or not.

Another very frequently mentioned initiative is the free legal aid services. However, I would wish to say that, members of the Hinterland will also wish to welcome, maybe in the shortest possible time, easier access to these services. Because every day we still find, Amerindian women, who make up the majority of women in the Hinterland are faced with the issue of not being able to adequately access such support, which the government is providing, and therefore, that is another area which I think we need probably to advance on.

One other important initiative, which I think all of us are benefiting from, is the fact that our country is way ahead, in terms of representation of women at the political and decision-making levels. This has actually, directly, I would want to say, contributed also to the enlightenment and the education of Guyanese women; that the scourge

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

of domestic violence, or abuse, or violence in any form, is not an acceptable situation. Therefore today, more and more women at various levels of decision-making bodies can make a very direct impact on the female population of our country.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to say that as the early advocates and champions of violence against women, and I mean here governments, past governments, women's organizations, NGOs, political women's organizations, civil society, have actually contributed to where we are today. Maybe we can vividly remember that our legislative initiatives, which I have just mentioned, and the capacity building, have actually been a product of all the struggles and the input by these key players. I am also hopeful, and expectantly so, to look forward to when we can have much more harmonization in the approach of the police force, particularly in the Hinterland areas, where transportation is always an excuse; and the victims, Mr. Speaker, are usually even less endowed where they do not own private transport, or public transport is not readily available or at a very high cost. Many of the victims of domestic and violence perpetrated on very vulnerable individuals are left to the vestiges of the elders or the leaders of the community, and Honourable Member Norton clearly demonstrated a particular case, one that is present here today.

Mr. Speaker, I would want to say that again they are left to the qualms and the traditional ways of handling abuse situations, and thereby they remain perpetual victims. I will draw to your attention the case where most times in some communities, the elders will advise the victims that, you will have to reconcile; that is the only way, that is the only solution, and thereby the scars of being a victim remain perpetually with the female, or the victim, whether they are male or female or children.

Mr. Speaker, I therefore at this moment wish to add support to the Motion, and call upon all Guyanese to courageously stand up against violence against women, children and all victims, and to be vocal and action-oriented to curb this destructive practice perpetuated by those in the position of power, who continue to inflict violent means of control against the vulnerable. I therefore add my support to the Motion, and ask that everyone in the House do the same.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you.

Honourable Member, Ms. Judith David.

Ms. Judith David-Blair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the Motion before this Honourable House, in the name of the Minister of Human Services and Social Security. Mr. Speaker, I want to begin my brief presentation by giving the definition of violence.

Violence takes place, when someone uses their strength or position of power to hurt someone else on purpose, not by accident.

Violence includes threats of violence, and acts this could possibly cause harm, as well as to those actually do. The harm involved could be to a person's mind, their general health and well-being, as well as their bodies. Violence also includes deliberate harm that people do to themselves, including killing themselves.

Mr. Speaker, whatever the violence might be, it is the duty of any government to ensure that prevention, protection, justice and awareness programmes are present in society. Mr. Speaker, according to this Motion in the Fourth WHEREAS Clause:

Guyana has signed and ratified the UN Convention against the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, on 17 July 1980.

This, Mr. Speaker, was done under the caring government of the PNC. This was an era when the PNC thought that women must play an important role in society. They must

have a say, and move away from the role of being the housewife.

Mr. Speaker, then came the Domestic Violence Act of 1996 which was assented to by Dr Cheddi Jagan in the same year. This very important piece of legislation, like many others tabled in this Parliament, is being used in a very haphazard way. We are seeing crimes committed, and the Domestic Act remains a piece of paper, and it is very disgusting to know that it is twelve years for this Act, and I think it is only about two-plus years now, we are really hearing about violence against women and children in Guyana being stirred up like the meat from the bottom of a pot of cook-up.

Mr. Speaker, these pieces of legislation did not eliminate violence. The most visible acts of violence against women is when they are sexually abused by their male spouses, and left as a single parents to provide for their families. Then there is the other act of violence, when the government is aware of the situation and want to behave like the Good Samaritan, jump up and make promises to single parents, raising their hopes very high, and they never deliver on these promises.

Mr. Speaker, women who are victims of violence are made to face embarrassment in their communities, and are often left in the wilderness when they chose to reports these incidents. This type of response meted out to them are very prevalent in our Hinterland District, where they

are still told by police officers that *there is no transportation, no police officers to send to their assistance, come back tomorrow, or go home and make up the story.*

Mr. Speaker, women are assets in this world we live in, and must be respected all times. Women are made to love and be loved. They are the strength in our society. When violence is descended upon women in the family circle, it has a great impact on the children of that family. Women are left to choose: if I must go, or if I must stay. Is it because of my children? Do I want the best for my children? Do I want my children live with both parents? Do I run and leave the children, so they can have a better life with their father? These are burning issues that women in the 21st Century have to face all by themselves, and answer.

When it occurs in the community, it affects the lifestyle of that community. The Law should ensure that the perpetrators of violence against women must face the full force of the Law, regardless of their position or power in society. Our men folk need to be educated and counseled, they need to play a more active role in their families. But, Mr. Speaker, frustration and depression have been taking over our society, because of the lack of jobs and development, especially in the economic sector of not only the family, but the country as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, I now come to one of our most burning acts of violence against our women and children, and that is the less fortunate and those living on the street. These women and children are often molested by the opposite sex, who is also living on the streets. The government has failed in taking care of and changing this situation. There is an urgent need for more homes for those people.

It is known, Mr. Speaker, that when women speak out on issues in their homes, or otherwise, they are violently attacked, either verbally or physically. Violence against women is present in actually every forum and level. Mr. Speaker, who is to be convicted for the violence meted out on Donna Herod in the presence of her children? Has the government ever thought about counseling for her children? Mr. Speaker, acts like these have to be stamped out. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, taking away house lots is an act of violence against women and children. And as I stand here, yesterday our Honourable Minister was supposed to visit Bartica, the acting Minister of Housing – Mr. Benn, to either take away the house lots, or to give more threats to the residents there about taking away their house lots. Mr. Speaker, we have to stamp that out too. *[Applause]* Mr. Speaker, 16 percent VAT is violence. We have to stamp it out.

Mr. Speaker, I know that it is very surprising to some people, especially on the other side, for the angle I have

taken to deal with violence against women and children; but this, Mr. Speaker, shows I am in steady contact with the grassroots level of people. *[Applause]* And I am standing in this Parliament, not to represent my cause; but the cause of my people. Discriminating against women at their workplace, and sexual molestation by bosses is violence, and we have to stamp it out. Mr. Speaker, there are many other violent acts in our society that time does not permit me to mention, that have to be stamped out, especially compensating a sexually molested victim out of court.

Mr. Speaker, to eradicate violence against women, we have to deal with what are the causes of violence. We need to hear from the perpetrators and abusers how they feel, and what we can do to change this attitude. We have to ensure that they too receive counseling, if, and when, they are convicted. Mr. Speaker, I cannot see us, as Members of Parliament, moving forward to eradicate violence against women, if we cannot have access to visiting these abusers and perpetrators at the lockups.

Mr. Speaker, November 25th is the date for observing violence against women internationally; but Guyana has to work continuously all year to ensure that this act of violence is eradicated. This Motion, Mr. Speaker, is asking in the First BE IT RESOLVE Clause for the commitment of Members of Parliament, to condemn this continued wave of violence against women and children,

and to commit, themselves in observance of this day. Mr. Speaker, my first question to Members of Parliament of the opposite sex, if they can be truthful to their hearts today, to tell this National Assembly today if they have ever been involved in violence against women; and they can do so by indicating with their hands, if possible.

Mr. Speaker, the Members of Parliament in the People's National Congress/Reform-One Guyana have always been observing violence, and speaking out against it, especially coming from the services that are supposed to protect and serve the people. Mr. Speaker, do we call that administrative violence?

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would like to reiterate that poverty breeds violence, and unless this government improves on job creation, making discrimination an act of the past, provide a comfortable livable salary for public servants, and eradicated poverty, we will continue to see violence against, not only women and children; but all citizens of Guyana.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Mr. Norman Whittaker.

Mr. Norman Whittaker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Motion in the name of the Honourable Minister of Human Services and Social Security is commendable. It acknowledges the existence of domestic violence; it looks at existing legislation and regulations to deal with the issue of domestic violence; it acknowledges that in spite of legislation, in spite of education and awareness programmes, domestic violence continues to pervade the society, both locally and internationally. Then it seeks to examine some of the factors that contribute to this violence, and very importantly, Mr. Speaker, it calls on us in this National Assembly to condemn domestic violence; but having said that, it also carries in the Resolve Clause a commitment – a commitment that comes, not only from government; but a commitment that has to come from the broader Civil Society to seek to remove this scourge from our society.

Mr. Speaker, at a time when available statistics attest to a disturbingly large increase in the number of sexual assault and cases of domestic violence against our women and children and Guyana; I join my colleagues in this National Assembly in condemning what must definitely be one of the greatest human rights violations of our time: violence meted out primarily by our men folk, regrettably, against our women and children. It has been emphasized, Sir, by several of the speakers before me,

that is disturbing level of violence against women and children, continues in spite of the intensified efforts, led by our energetic Minister of Human Services and Social Security, to rid our society of this scourge, and although we may wish to take some solace in the fact that we have made progress, more so recently, in the areas of legislation, public education, and awareness programmes, and also the extension of services to victims of domestic violence, we still have a lot of work to do. And so, Sir, I ask myself the same question that any decent, nonviolent human being would, and that question is: what do we do next?

Do we regale and squabble and babble over perceptions and allegations of roughing-up, a little roughing-up, or do we focus on a concern that threatens the very foundation of our society, the very fabric of our society, the family? Do we use this forum as an opportunity to relive and infuse old issues that bear no relation to the Motion before us? Or do we as concerned citizens, as legislators, demonstrate a depth of concern that drives fear into abusers?

Mr. Speaker, like my colleagues on this side of the House, I take the latter route. And so I repeat the question: what do we do next? Mr. Speaker, there is an empirical evidence to support the view that while education and awareness programmes are no panacea to

domestic violence, it is the key, to try and reduce and ultimately eliminate domestic violence.

Our government's policy paper on domestic violence, *Breaking the Cycle*, the proposed Sexual Offences Bill, the STAMP IT OUT, certainly creates the kind of awareness that aims at reforming the Law. And who do we target, Sir, under the education and awareness programme about which I speak? I hasten to say, Sir, everybody; but more so the largest group of perpetrators of these beastly forms of abusive behavior, our men folk. Our education and awareness programme must be intensified and target our men folk from among whom most of the abusers can be found.

They seem not to get the message, Sir, and that message must certainly be that women's and children's abuse, in any form, must be unacceptable. That the use of violence to settle any issue is wrong: the beating up of spouses and girlfriends do not make you a man; but is probably the symptom of serious psychological disorder that can be treated. And so, we must take this education and awareness programme, where the abusers and the potential abuses are, and where is that? Everywhere! In the churches, somebody say, *yes, they are there*. Why can we not find 15-20 minutes at each church service to speak to the issue of domestic violence, and other forms of violence? They are in the clubs, they are in the bars, and therefore, perhaps, we would wish to look at the civil

responsibility of those who manufacture, and who wholesale, and who retail these alcoholic beverages that we so often imbibe.

They are at football games, they are in the work place, and perhaps, labor unions need to make tremendous efforts, or more efforts, to deal with this issue, even at the level of the union. Mr. Speaker, men everywhere must understand that they have a responsibility to individually and collectively work for the eradication of violence against men, and against women.

Until now, Mr. Speaker, our campaign against domestic violence has focused on the victims, our womenfolk. This has had its positives, for in so doing; we have had a lot of them to come forward and speak about their abusive relationships, and also to stand up against it.

That time is now, that we need to focus on getting our men to stop that form of behavior. Equally disturbing, Mr. Speaker, for each male abuser in the home, there are probably a number of young males witnessing and exposed to some of the worst forms of domestic violence. In time, Sir, they are led to believe that such behaviour is acceptable, because it is perpetrated by a dad, an uncle, or by a bigger brother – it is acceptable behaviour. In time, Sir, they feel that it reflects the macho image that is portrayed on television, and it reflects also the male dominance over women, whom they have been led to believe belong to the so-called *weaker sex*. These

assumptions, Sir, ultimately contaminate the minds of our young men, and if not urgently addressed, will see them grow to be the abusers of tomorrow. So it is not only about the abusers of today, but also for those young men and women, especially the young men, who are exposed to these forms of violent behaviour, who are led to believe that it is acceptable, that it is the norm, and who may very well become the abusers of tomorrow.

Consequently, Mr. Speaker, in condemning both domestic violence and its perpetrators, we must appeal to all Guyanese, parents, teachers, they come to mind readily, to be good role models, the teach our children values of love and respect and discipline. Teach them about respecting the views of others, about the equality of rights for boys and girls, and I am happy to learn that at the school level, the Health and Family Life Education Programme, for which a number of our teachers have been trained, allows our students to access that kind of information, that kind of knowledge. We need to extend it to embrace many other schools.

Show our young people alternative strategies for controlling anger, and for forging mutual respect for each other. Let them not think that to *turn the other cheek* is to behave effeminately, or unless they behave violently they are not man enough, and some mothers are guilty of that. *He hit you; you come home to tell me? Go back and slap*

him. Our youngsters must never feel that this is an acceptable behavioural pattern.

Mr. Speaker, many young people believe that love and abuse in relationships go hand-in-hand, and that abusive behaviours are indications that their partners love them. The goodly doctor almost sang the song: *every now and then cuff them down*, Sparrow said that. I am sure that he meant that in humour. But people make a difference. They must be educated about their role and responsibilities in ending man's violence against women. In so doing, Mr. Speaker, our young people are less likely to experience violence, and to be violent.

Mr. Speaker, the Motion speaks about *the factors which contribute to its continued presence in modern-day society*; regretfully, I must say that there must be a bigger role for the media in this continuous campaign against domestic violence, a role that goes beyond merely reporting on acts of domestic violence; but allows them to take initiatives that will help to bring about the change we seek. Surely, Sir, the violence to which some of our media daily expose our young people, and may I say that this is often violence perpetrated against women, causes many of our youngsters to view this as acceptable behaviour and lifestyle, especially if their favourite star, their favourite sportsman, is the abuser.

The music, Sir, that vilifies our women, seeks to paint them as chattel, the bad boy image of the young male

singer or rapper, is portrayed daily, and many of our young people seek to copy, to portray the same violent behaviour in their relationship with their partners, because their star, their role model, does it.

This is a challenge for the media, because this is everybody's business; this is not just about the government. The media must work to remove from its programmes and pages, the negative stereotyping of women, and replace these with items that instill positive changes among male abusers. This is a challenge for the media. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, one of the more common strategies employed to counter domestic violence is through legislation, and that is quite apart from education awareness. While our government has been proactive in strengthening the legislative framework as it relates to the issue of domestic violence by introducing legislation to combat it, 1996, this year too, and by working towards comprehensive review of the laws and policies on sexual offenses, I need to commend again the Honourable Minister and Team for doing this, and also the Guyanese public for their contributions.

We need to emphasize the need to enforce the existing Law, and have a more effective response from all sectors. I need not labour the call for the police to see domestic violence as being more than private, it is public. I need not go further into that. Mr. Speaker, women ought never

to live in fear of physical, psychological, emotional or other forms of abuse by men. This is unacceptable. The culture that perpetuates the view that if you love him, take the licks, and if you love him why report him, why jail him, must no longer find acceptance in our society. The point I am stressing is that women are equally contributing to the lawlessness that we call domestic violence.

Mr. Speaker, our men must know that most Guyanese condemn this form of behavior. Our men must stop and consider the negative effects on spouses, children, and even they themselves. Our men need to be part of the thousands of agents of change, if we are to arrest and treat what can best be described perhaps, as a form of psychological disorder, and as some previous speaker said, a public health concern. Our men must move from being contributors, to being helpers and supporters in this fight against domestic violence. Mr. Speaker, government's efforts to arrest the rise in the incidence of domestic violence was never intended to eradicate this abhorrent form of behavior overnight, but through a mix of education and awareness, legislating and regulating, prosecuting of perpetrators, supporting the extension of the network of services for victims, the aim is to assist legally, medically, and economically, so that victims do not need to return to the same abusive environment.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

Mr. Speaker, violence against women would not stop until men become an integral part of the solution; so while we seek to protect our women and children, we must deal with our men. As pointed out at the recent forum for men and this is commendable, that forum I want to commend, men must become change agents in curbing violence against women. One of the speakers emphasized that point at that forum.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I wish to say that domestic violence in our society has to be tackled at all levels of the society, and I am happy that our President, Bharrat Jagdeo's encouragement, and the recent stakeholders' consultation, where, among other things, a \$15 million fund for domestic violence intervention was established. This, Mr. Speaker, speaks volumes about the extent of the challenge, and government's concern and willingness to face these challenges urgently. It is just a beginning, Sir. If you show you can manage little things, bigger things will be added unto you. The effort continues.

Let us together, as legislators, help to create solutions. We are all involved. Let us lend our voices and our energies to the fight against domestic violence. Let us not feel that this is to be restricted to today's Debate; but let us see a continuous cry to action to stop domestic violence. Your support of this Motion, our support of this Motion, will indeed send a clear message out there to

perpetrators that we condemn what they do, and to victims that you are assured of our support.

I commend this Motion to the House. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Mrs. Holder.

Mrs. Sheila VA Holder: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I need to immediately distance myself and the AFC from two points made by the last speaker, Honourable Member Whittaker. I disagree that legislation is *a panacea to dealing with this scourge in our society*, and I hope to show in my presentation that other methods have been successful in other jurisdictions, and I also want to take umbrage with one point which you made, the other point which you made where you very flippantly ... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Norman Whitaker: Mr. Speaker, I wish to correct the Honourable Member. I said that *it is not education and awareness; though a measure, it is not a panacea*. I did not say it is ... *[Interruption]*

Mrs. Sheila Holder: I did not refer to *education* at all, I said *legislation*. You referred to *the value and the*

importance of legislation. What I said is, I hope to show in my presentation later on that this indeed is not proven to be a panacea in other jurisdictions.

I also want to take umbrage, Mr. Speaker, with another comment he made, dealing very flippantly with *a bit of roughing-up*. I want to reinforce the point that was made by Honourable Member from GAP/ROAR that, *you cannot operate with a level of double standards when dealing with violence, and expect to deal with the scourge of violence against women.* You cannot expect to countenance violence of any sort, and justify it, and then hope at another level that the society will ignore it. You are wrong, Sir, and I think it is my duty to point that out to you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, the records will show that unlike the government benches, the Alliance For Change has extended support to this government, where support was deserving, and where, from our perspective, our party's principles will allow us to lend our support, particularly in instances where the welfare of the people of this country is at stake. We therefore unequivocally support this Motion, because the Alliance For Change is opposed to all forms of violence, be it directed at men who are in custody, or against women whose paramours, husbands, and lovers ought to be taking care of them, but in a drunken stupor, or in some male macho occasion, metes

out violence against women, or indeed, against children in the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, we are relieved to note that the Motion moves beyond the government's customary propensity for being exclusively condemnatory, to being action-oriented in calling for victims to seek assistance, utilize support systems where available, and develop programmes for enrichment to reverse the unusually high incidence of violence against women. I cannot help but also remark that it is wholly unacceptable that this government should choose today to conveniently recognize the fact of Guyana's ratification in 1980 of the UN Convention as it pertains to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, and recognized the Belmopan Convention in 1994, when it was only a few days ago that they chose to ignore Article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, chose to ignore the International Convention on Political Civil Rights in relation to their denial of the rights of citizens of Linden and of Region 10 to access views and opinions emanating from the local private television stations. The convenient recognition of conventions signed and ratified by this country does not bode well for Guyana, or for the government's ability to govern this country effectively and legitimately.

As-a-matter-of-fact, in fact, what such double standards do, is provides a living example of the social

phenomenon referred to by the Honourable Member in her motion:

The many complex and profound variables and factors which contribute to the continued presence of violence in modern-day societies like ours ...

As she stated in the Tenth WHEREAS Clause of the Motion

These complexities and profound variables referred to could be argued to be the manifestations of various forms of injustice, and that being visited on Linden and the Region 10 Communities by this government; because injustice bigots frustration and in our society, we often see how frustration and anger of some in our society make them become violent. And we also know women and children are frequently the targets of such violence, even when they themselves are not the cause of the anger and the frustration. The Family Violence Prevention Fund states:

One out of every three women worldwide will be physically, sexually, or otherwise abused during her lifetime, with rates reaching as much as 70 percent in some societies. This type of violence and abuse ranges from rape to domestic violence, and

*acid burnings, to dowry deaths, to so-called
“honour killings.*

Mr. Speaker, we support the view that violence against women and girls is a human rights violation, a public health epidemic, and a barrier to solving global challenges, such as extreme poverty, HIV/AIDS, the attainment of such targets as Guyana’s Millennium Development Goals. Violence devastates the lives of millions of women and girls in peacetime and in conflict, and knows no national, cultural or class barriers. Given these realities, we commend the Honourable Minister for the proactive way she has been tackling this particular issue.

We however urge her to go beyond gaining support for this Motion, to persuading the government she serves to make the required paradigm shift on the policy of utilizing the state media for the role of political aggrandizement, to taking on the task of changing social norms to reduce the incidence of this scourge here, in Guyana, as has indeed been done in other jurisdictions rather successfully. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to recommend to the Honourable Minister two such successful interventions:

- (i) From South Africa, called *the Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication.*

It says here,

In a country where domestic violence is described as endemic, Soul City integrate Social Education into Entertainment, using prime time television drama, radio drama, and print media to reach more than 16 million South Africans.

This format allows viewers to identify with the main characters who serve as role models, helping to effect social change and on multiple levels, the individual, the community, and the sociopolitical environment. Soul City fourth series addressed gender-based violence, including domestic violence and sexual harassment, HIV/AIDS, through a 13-episode primetime television drama, a 45-episode radio drama in nine languages; three informational booklets with the nationwide distribution of one million copies each. The series was particularly popular with young people, with 79 percent of 16-24 year-olds having watched Soul City's television programme.

Exposure to Soul City media was shown to both increase knowledge of specific resources, and to reshape attitudes. The programmes advertised: a Helpline for Victims of Violence, where 16 percent of respondents who had no access to Soul City had heard the telephone hotline elsewhere; 61 percent of those who had encountered Soul City's television and radio programming, and had seen

the written materials, knew of the helpline. Exposure to the programme also led to a 18 percent increase in respondents disagreeing that domestic violence is a private affair, and 93 percent of those had seen and heard all of Soul City's programming agreed that no woman ever deserves to be beaten.

- (ii) There is another programme from Rio de Janeiro that deals mainly with men, and they are called *Program H*, and it focuses on helping young men question traditional roles, and promotes more equitable behaviors, which reduces the risk of HIV and partner violence. The programme includes six months of interactive group education sessions, led by adult men, and a communitywide campaign organized by young men to protect against HIV infection.

To evaluate the programme's success, researchers developed Gender Equitable Men's Guild, referred to by the acronym GEMP, which measures attitudes towards gender norms as it relates to HIV prevention and partner violence. Initial surveys show that those agreed with inequitable norms was more likely to have elevated risks for HIV/AIDS. Young men who participated in both the group education and the communitywide campaign, more likely to support more equitable norms, a change that was

maintained at the one year follow-up session, and it was associated with a decreased risk of HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister has indeed been very proactive. We commend her for the work she has been doing in this area, and offer her our support wherever possible.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Mr. Seeraj ...

Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members.

I would like from the onset to congratulate Minister Manickchand and the staff of her ministry, for their steadfast leadership in the struggle to eliminate all forms of violence against women in Guyana. I would also like to acknowledge the many women, and the not so many men, across Guyana, whose contributions are helping to reduce this scourge from our country. I firmly believe that this type of primitive behaviour has no place in the modern world. This harmful practice that endangers the lives of women and children has no place in modern Guyana, and must be eradicated from our society.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

This Motion, therefore, has given us an unprecedented opportunity to affirm our disapproval of violence against women and children. According to the United Nations Population Fund, the State of the World Population 2005 Report:

- Worldwide, an estimated one in five women will be a victim of rape or attempted rape, in her lifetime.
- one in three will be beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused, usually by a family member or an acquaintance.
- violence kills and disables as many women between the ages of 15 and 44 as cancer.
- the toll of violence on women's health surpasses that of traffic accidents and malaria combined.

I want to add to this list, Mr. Speaker, emotional harm, because of the capacity of women to love and forgive, which is their ultimate strength; but which most often proves to be their greatest weakness, as it is this capacity to love and forgive that oftentimes constrains the process of prosecution against their male partners who batter them, sometimes near to death, which often consequences their death. These women need to be protected from their own vulnerability to their tormentors, and the guardians of society need to take cognizance of that, as Honourable

Minister Rohee said, at the launching of the National Policy on Domestic Violence *they are the last line of defense for these women.*

These statistics clearly paint a horrid picture; but can you imagine the world before the UN Convention and Proclamation for the International Day of Violence against Women? With the declaration, Mr. Speaker, and the ratification of the Conventions that preceded it, the UN has upgraded the issue of gender-based violence from one of indifference, to one of consequence. It has helped to shatter the culture of silence that has shrouded this pervasive problem across the world. It has helped to create a multilateral framework where the cries and pleas of the vulnerable can no longer be ignored. Some fathers beat their children, including their girl children, to the point of brutality, as a deterrent to what they perceive as unacceptable behaviour. The result could very like be a thoroughly submissive daughter, who will accept battery from any authority figure, even into adulthood and marriage. The self-confidence that should be engendered by a bond of mutual love and trust, which is predetermined by the very nature of the relationship between father and daughter, one of the strongest relationships in the human equation of interrelations, will be forever destroyed and leave the victim susceptible to subsequent abuse by other dominant figures in her life.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

These deviant fathers often create victims of society, while raising their daughters within the fallacious framework of their mistaken guidelines for parenthood, and this also can be interpreted as blurring the line between normal and criminal behaviour. Participants at the recent Forum for Men were urged, by Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, Mr. Trevor Thomas: *not to passively condemn; but to aggressively pursue initiatives that can respond to and stamp out gender-based violence in our society.*

I am pleased that Guyana has been consistent in its commitment to eradicate violence against women. At the international level, we have participated in drafting, signing, and ratifying the main conventions dealing with the issue, as noted in the several WHEREAS Clauses in the Motion. At the local level, a concerted effort has been made to create an enabling framework to prevent gender-based violence. To give effect to policies, several initiatives by government and nongovernmental organizations have certainly contributed to the reduction of violence against women.

However, progress has been slow and uneven. This is primarily because we are trying to uproot practices that we grew up witnessing, accepting, and in turn, practicing. We are socialized to accept a symmetrical power relationship, between man and woman. Women generally have deferential access to and control of resources, social

participation, and capacity for decision-making. In some cultures, they are socialized to be passive and subservient. Men on the other hand, are socialized to live up to certain stereotypes, expectations of manhood. In some cases, the ideal of masculinity includes aggressive and violent behaviour, and risk taking, while concealing their fears and emotions. These ideals are given tacit or explicit approval by parents, peers, and society as a whole. Mr. Speaker, society comprises of citizenry, no less responsible for the care and welfare of the vulnerable within communities. Lawmakers, and I do say law enforcement personal do not have eyes and ears everywhere, so the average citizen has a duty to report crime, even if they prefer to do so anonymously, and it is also the duty of the police to immediately and thoroughly investigate those reports, and then act according to their findings, because some calls can admittedly be hoaxes or crank calls.

Compassion and a sense of responsibility should hallmark the actions of men and women living within communities. Our fore-parents set impeccable standards of behaviour, from which many of us have diverted so far from, that we have almost become deviants. Women can themselves, instead of being each other's keepers and protectors within society, can be so bereft of human compassion, even to the point of being selflessly merciless. And I have recently witnessed the tragic repercussions of one such scenario, where a woman was so victimized by her

neighbours, mostly female, at the instigation of one particular female, that she suffered a mental breakdown, to the extent where her relatives had to sell her house and move her away from the neighbourhood. This too ... this too is abuse, and these neighbours are culpable for the destruction of this woman's life.

If we are going to reverse domestic violence, and ultimately eradicate it, we have to wage a relentless battle against these entrenched attitudes and beliefs. A lot of work has been done by women, and this caused many women to become more empowered; but this is only one side of the equation. Mr. Speaker, the rare male, who recognizes that providing support within and without the home to his domestic partner, because of his sensitivity to and appreciation for the value and contribution of that special person, is displaying real maturity and strength of character. He displays a commendable level of understanding of the fundamental need for shared responsibility and mutual respect, and caring in order to achieve real happiness and optimum cooperation for enhanced lifestyles, where the entire family, inclusive of offspring, will enjoy a home and a life of contentment and joy.

However, the Guyanese society predisposes men to a delineation of gender-based rights, with the advantages supremely skewed in our favour, and it would take someone with a high moral fiber to supersede and

transcend those entrenched modes and restructure their lifestyle to accord genuine equal rights and opportunities to a female partner. We should accept the challenge to be harbingers of change, because while we are responsible for our actions, our behavior can catalyze to our younger generation of males to a predisposition to act in ways that would impact positively on themselves, their families, their communities, and society in general.

On the other side of the equation, working with men and boys, it is not about blaming men. It is about redefining masculinity; it is about redefining societal expectations of men. We must create a new value system to encourage men to be more involved and to share responsibility in all areas of family life. We have seen the difference that supportive fathers make in enriching the lives of their wives and children; while on the other hand, we have witnessed the psychological, social and cognitive damage that can be inflicted upon families of paternal abandonment and lack of support. The repercussions of paternal abandonment can condemn children to a life of unfilled potential and misplaced values, and the cycle can continue. It is not enough to champion change. We must ensure that change starts with us, our attitudes, our advocacy, and most of all our actions: our actions at home, and in our communities, and most importantly, with the young.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

This Motion, Mr. Speaker, sets the framework for collective action. It deserves no less than our collective, unconditional and total support.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Honourable Members, the time for suspension is past. We will now suspend for fifteen minutes.

19:50 H - SUSPENSION OF SITTING

20:15H - RESUMPTION OF SITTING

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Mr. Ramjattan ...

Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of the fact that most of the points, if not all the points I had wanted to make, were made by previous speakers, I will be very short. I would not take the advice of Donald to take my seat; because I do have some suggestions, because indeed what we have here is very important, and I want to commend Ms Priya Manickchand for raising this Motion, so that we can have

the deliberations we have had, and what I regard as good quality arguments on both side of the House in support of this Motion.

Fundamentally though, we must appreciate that legislation in matters like these, legislation are not going to be the exclusive panacea in the resolution of violence against women. However, it is going to be very important in the context of shaping behaviour; but the shaping of behaviour also, through legislation, must come with the enforcement of legislation.

We heard very many instances that have been, in a sense, sensationalized in the press, and it was given by literally all the speakers. But what we would have to do, more than that, is at the individual level of ... and I speak here of males, at the individual level, ensure that our conduct and our behaviour, our norms, our socialization, our cultural attitudes to this problem, be changed. Notwithstanding the most modern domestic legislation, it comes back down to what, as individuals, we do; how we act; how we behave. I am happy to learn this afternoon that very many people are of the opinion too that the socialization process, especially in the context of cultural values that make the gentler gender subservient, and the stronger gender dominant, is what proliferates in this community. And we have to change that, because unless we do so, that culture which creates and causes the problem of domestic violence is going to be the factor

which is going to allow it to stay and persist. It is important then, that this lesson that we change habits start, as early as possible.

When we had passed the legislation some 12 years ago, I was of the opinion that lots more prosecutions would have occurred. But what is coming forth, from especially those policemen who indicate why it has not been coming out, is because of women being weak to the extent of the economics of their present situations, indicate to them that we want to withdraw charges because, of course, the male is the breadwinner, and if we were to send him to jail, what would happen to the children? We have to come up with probably better solutions as to how we could change. One important aspect is to, in the socialization process was raised by the previous speaker, Mr. Seeraj, Honourable Member, that it has to begin at home; it has to begin at the schools, where this unequal power relationship between male and female would have to be equalized, as it were, equalized through the socialization process that we respect females more to the extent that they are equals. At the educational level, we notice the females being dominant in the results of CXC and the other examinations, they are doing very well at tertiary institutions, and we know the capacity of women. They can very well dominate in every sphere of activity, they can be the best. But somehow in our communities, we feel that that dominance denigrates masculinity, and this denigration of masculinity is what sometimes creates the

problems socially; so to hit back and to hit out, males, and especially young males, become very violent.

As to how the paradigm shift will occur, I will honestly tell you that I have not the answer. It is going to be a difficult thing, because the sociologists and the psychologists, and all those other professionals who have written on the subject, they themselves have indicated that it is an extremely difficult problem. As Sheila, Honourable Member, indicated: it cuts across race, it cuts across cultures, religions, it cuts across class, and it is important then that we start at least coming up with solutions. One of the important aspects I want to bring to the House's attention has to do with our ambivalent approaches toward violence. Violence in all forms must be condemned. Violence can take very many forms as you know, Mr. Speaker. The aggressiveness that we see sometimes in relationships whilst walking down the road, going into a state institution, violence not necessarily physically; but the aggressive behaviour of some state officials, employees within commercial enterprises, even in schools, add to that dimension that creates in the minds of especially young men, that we have to be aggressive to get along in this world. And that perpetuates this dominance that perpetuates this arrogance, the aggressiveness that then is the seed, the root for men wanting to exhibit their masculinity by beating up on the gentler sex.

We are also, in the Alliance For Change, stating that more has to be done in relation to getting the fear out of women, that causes this problem too. It is not only the aggressive behavior of males, through the circumstances that make them, man by nature, as Donald taught me Accable is a product of his circumstance, and indeed that women, too, sometimes, are products of their circumstance, because of the fact that indeed the fear driven into them, that you must submit, submit to the men ... It happens, and I know neighbours and relatives who have indicated to their daughters, who have been badly battered: *what you want me to do? How long you will stay home here? You got to go back to the man.* And then further battering happens, she becomes helpless, the battered-woman syndrome comes into being, and then it has absolutely no solution thereafter.

We also have to do something more about our police force that can ensure that there are successful prosecutions, and the publicity that goes with those prosecutions, so that men are going to know that there are sanctions around, and that they have to start making different behavioural patterns to be dominant rather than that which now persists. It is important, and for that reason, I am not going to repeat the arguments; they have been well done. I concur, largely, with what Sheila said; but I want to state that some of the things that should be done should include lots more than this little check list that I have.

And that checklist goes this way ... I may be controversial; but I think we have to bring this thing out:

- First of all, we must establish some database on men who are convicted of violent assaults on women, something like what we have seen countries do in relation to pedophiles; men who assault their partners, be their common-law wives or legal wives or girlfriends, they must be, in a sense, available to the public. It will have a deterring effect, especially when they know that there will be public opprobrium.
- Secondly, there must be a public education which increases an understanding of the nature of domestic violence and its various manifestations. It is not only physical; it is psychological; it is sometimes social isolation of the women, and that is a form of abuse, and of course, even non-consensual sex, rape within the marriage circle – all of that.
- Thirdly, a study by our University about the correlation between domestic violence and alcoholism. It is from what I know, and I speak here of my knowledge from relatives, friends, neighbours that you see, alcoholism is a direct cause of domestic violence and on that score, again, I want to make this as an important point;

we have to do something, even if it is called *a levy on liquor*, to ensure that we can then out of that levy for liquor, get some money, because government never has money for shelters and all of that, that could go directly towards the ... you could call it *the liquor abuse tax*, or some tax, and it will be useful, something that is extracted. I have gone to overseas countries, where liquor is extremely expensive in the local stores. Why? Because we understand, it is regarded as a luxury item, and an item that has a tremendously high tax. In Guyana, somehow, we have allowed it to be a staple, literally, and to that extent, then, whatever monies are accumulated ... but it must go directly towards women's shelters or to help in that process of helping them in this domestic violence situation.

- Fourthly, an improvement in information to women and the support services available. I have known of situations where the information about support services is sometimes not available. Some policemen have indicated to me that that is indeed so. They do not know generally the telephone numbers, the places that the women have to go, and moreover, as I noticed in this Motion, the publication of booklets; also the setting up of training agencies for purposes of ensuring that women can know about these things, and they can

quickly go and have at least the responses necessary.

To also ensure the equality at the concrete level, and of course this is largely an economic issue now, women must find themselves jobs. When there is equality as to income ... it has been noted, where there is equality as to income, indeed you still have domestic violence, but it is lessened, and lessened tremendously. Some more jobs for women ... that should be a policy in which there will be a help in the reduction of domestic violence. And again, it could be very much related to the levy I am talking about, an expansion of government funding to give a capacity for all of the above, and not only for government institutions to be funded in that regard; but also the government funding going towards women's organizations that have been helping, more women's organizations all across the country.

We also have an educational aspect to this thing. And it is finally educating women so that they can find their self esteem, their identity in this community, that will hold them in equal status with men. That is a checklist that I think will go a far way, in addition to having legislation, and the sanctioning that comes with legislation. We have to do these so that we can have a stop to the violence that has so many negative, adverse effects on our community, and the earlier we do so, Mr. Speaker, I think we can have a reduction of this domestic violence.

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Mr. Clement Rohee

...

Hon Clement J Rohee: Mr. Speaker, I, like my colleagues join to congratulate the Honourable Member, Priya Manickchand, who is at the head of the flagship Ministry on the question of domestic violence and violence against women; a number of new pieces of legislation that are in the pipeline to come soon to this Honourable House, which will change the entire aspect in respect of a number of social issues that affect children and women in this country, and I personally look forward with great anticipation to the laying of this Bill in the National Assembly, because I believe it will do great good for our country and our citizens.

I also join in congratulating the Minister for the excellent work she has been doing in mainstreaming; this is an important dimension of ensuring that this question of violence against women is kept in public focus, and to the attention, not only of the stakeholders, but even those will pretend not to be directly involved in this matter.

Mr. Speaker, Minister Manickchand started out by putting the question of violence against women in a particular context; explained to us the genesis of this phenomenon, both from a global and a national perspective, and I

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

believe that is important, because sometimes we tend to examine these issues in abstraction, and do not relate them to our own realities in Guyana. I believe, what was important also in her contribution was how she was able to explain to us how we come to be where we are today on the question of violence against women.

Mr. Speaker, the significance of this Motion could only be appreciated when we look at the number of, and they have been cited to us already, I would not mention them, but I have to emphasize the number of international gatherings and foray that have been organized to make this matter what it is today. I make this point, because if the organizations, particularly of the United Nations, had not involved themselves in making and in playing an important role, stewardship of this matter in the global corridors, we obviously would not have accomplished a lot of achievements in respect of violence against women.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, for want of a better word, the beauty, the significance and the political correctness of this Motion, lies in the fact that this very genesis of violence against women began at the grass-roots level, at the grassroots level; it did not begin in the universities, it did not begin in the colleges, it did not begin in the hallowed halls of the United Nations, or some of these other of the global common, so to speak, as they call it. Championing the cause in respect of violence against women began at the grassroots level, where a number of

grassroots women's organizations, non-governmental organizations, were making their voices heard long before, long before, the United Nations and many of these other bodies started taking up this cause.

And I make this point, because while we speak in these glowing terms about domestic violence, while we pontificate, and while we say we need to think globally and act locally, and so many other statements, we must never forget that the genesis of domestic violence, or the campaign against domestic violence, the genesis of the campaign against violence against women, started at the grassroots level. And Guyana was not peculiar in that sense, Guyana was not peculiar. We had our own grassroots organizations in this country, such as the Women's Progressive Organization that was championing. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ramjattan, the Honourable Member, said in very emphatic terms, to use his exact words *we have to bring this thing all*. It has already been brought out. It has already been brought out. I have to speak with a passion on this matter, because I feel very passionately about it, I feel very passionately about it. I have my own way of putting over it; you put your own when you are speaking. Mr. Speaker, we have already brought this ... whatever it is defined *thing*, and I suppose he is talking about violence against women. This phenomenon has already been brought out, as a result of the human work

done at grassroots level, and as a result of the long march by many organization resulting in the United Nations taking the positions that led to the mobilization, global mobilization of women on this question of opposing domestic violence.

Mr. Speaker, the new ministry, or the Ministry of Human Services, is an exemplification of the extent to which Guyana has moved with respect to the call against domestic violence, or violence against women. Mr. Speaker, attempts have been made to link the question of violence against women to a number of erroneous, extraneous and irrelevant matters. Attempts have been made to link violence against women to a number of extraneous issues. They mentioned torture; they mentioned absence of TV channels, VAT, inability to visit lockups. Even the Speaker had to wonder *where we are going*, at certain point in the debate ... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, they attempt to link violence against women to all these issues. It was obviously an excursion into the political wilderness, to try to score some political points as they usually try to do; but unfortunately, using violence against women as a political football to score political points. And this is most unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, this is most unfortunate. Because, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the document that came out from the United Nations General Assembly, in respect of the meaning of domestic violence, it states that:

Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women, by men, and to the prevention of the full advancement of women.

We have to stick to this definition, if we are discussing violence against women, and not go into a wild and wide excursion on issues, which have no relevance whatever to the subject of violence against women. Mr. Speaker, we recall the days here in Guyana and women could not go to a party public meeting. We recall the days here in Guyana when women could not vote, and we recall the days here in Guyana when women were mere tools to be used at home to accomplish certain domestic objectives.

Mr. Speaker, this situation was exemplified on one occasion many years ago, when a murder accused, when questioned by the police, said *Ah me pickney. Ah me mek am, ah me mind am, ah me kill am*. But a clever lawyer was able to change this around to make it sound as it was a question. But this was a manifestation, Mr. Speaker, of the type of cultural patterns that existed, and practices that existed in our country in those days, not to mention or not to forget, what the Honourable Member, Mr. Whittaker, referred to in the famous Sparrow calypso, or calypso by Sparrow, when he sang, *every now and then you have to cuff them down, black up their eye, bruise up*

their knee, then they would love you eternally ...
[Interruption] I was not here when Norton spoke.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this matter of violence against women requires total unity and unanimity on the part of this House. We do not need to engage in political skirmishing to score cheap political points. We need total unity and unanimity on the subject of this type, in order to send a strong political message to the wider society and even beyond the shores of Guyana, to show that this Parliament, this National Assembly, stands foursquare, behind the campaign against: one, domestic violence, and two, violence against women.

Mr. Speaker, to bring a Motion like this, of this nature, to the National Assembly, is in fulfillment of what is called a responsible government. This is an act that must be seen on the part of a government, that sees its international obligation and commitment in a responsible manner ...
[Interruption] We never made the point ... I do not know why this confusion is being created in the other side of this House. We never said, and we can never say, that legislative initiatives are the panacea for ending violence against women. Because if that is the case, how do you explain that in developed democracies, or advanced democracies, which Mr. Norton described as *some kind of democracy that is found in some kind of book handed out by the US Embassy*, still have cases of domestic violence in those countries. Mr. Speaker, we are having this

debate, because in our society, our society has reached a level of maturity, and a level of consciousness that makes it possible for such a debate on such a Motion to be brought to this House for debate.

The downside of that, however, Mr. Speaker, is the unquestionable fact the violence against women is increasing in our country, and steps have to be taken to address that. I do not agree with the mistaken view ... I do not agree with the mistaken view that, the culture of the police is to treat violence against women as a private matter. The police have moved a far way from this view, which is held by those who are stuck in a rut. I am not saying that the police have not moved, I am not saying that the police have not moved at all. I am saying that the police have moved significantly, and in respect of that position that was expressed here, that the police view violence against women as a private matter, that is certainly not the case. If a policeman, or if another policeman, singular, states that, it does not mean to say that is the position of the Guyana Police Force, so do not use an example of what you may have heard by hearsay, do not take what you may have heard by hearsay, that you hear a police say that this is a private matter, and say that is the position of the Guyana Police Force. Because it is certainly not the policy of the Ministry of Home Affairs and it is certainly not the policy of the Guyana Police Force, to view issues related to violence against women as private matters.

Mr. Speaker, the police stations ... [*Interruption*] ... Why do you not formulate a question and send it to me? Police stations now have desks, have specific desks [at least they have something] where persons who have complaints to make with respect to violence against women and domestic violence, they approach that desk, and there is a specific compartment at the police station, which provides for a high degree of privacy for persons who come to the station to make such complaints. In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, there is a specific domestic violence or Violence against Women Occurrence Book, where these occurrences are recorded, separate and apart from other occurrences that are reported to the police station.

And one thing I can say that we ought to be proud about it, is a small but very significant thing, and I think we need to be proud about it, is that there have been no cases where violence has been perpetrated against women, while in police custody. In some countries, women in police custody are subject to violence, but I am happy to report to this House, that there is no case, no known case, there is no known case. If there are others, I will be happy to receive the evidence; but if there are any, I am happy to report that there is no case of any violence perpetrated against women held in police custody. And that is a marked achievement, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the police have reported that, between 2003 ... I heard a lot of statistics were quoted here, but they

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

never said what the sources were, they quoted from Stabroek News, they quoted from the Kaieteur News, I did not hear quotations from the Chronicle or the Catholic Standard, but people seem to have a penchant for quoting from the Stabroek News and the Kaieteur News. But I want to guard you against quoting from those newspapers. I want to guard you against quoting from those dispute is, because you might end up in a situation from which you will find it difficult to extricate yourself. I am saying, Mr. Speaker, that between 2003 and 2008: we had 36 women, who were stabbed by their male partners; 11 women, who were shot by their male partners; 3 women, who were strangled by their male partners; 9 women were beaten by their intimate partners; bringing a total to 59. In terms of murder of women by their partners, Mr. Speaker, between 2003 and 2008, there were 911 murders.

The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that what excites the media, or what excites those who sit on the Opposition Benches, are figures that are imaginative, figures that cannot be grounded in either reports at police stations, or cases in court. And I would wish those who want to challenge these figures, Mr. Speaker ... *[Interruption]* ... Please publish your own; publish your own.

Mr. Speaker, I have to confess that there are certain challenges posed by violence against women to police investigation. I have to admit that there are certain

challenges. It will be mistaken of me, and these challenges, Mr. Speaker, include cooperation, getting cooperation of the victims, particularly in cases where the suspect is the sole or significant economic provider of the home. The second is interviewing the victims who are highly traumatized and require specialized training, as well as an environment that provides for comfort and confidentiality. This is what we have managed to achieve to a large measure within recent times. .

And another challenge, Mr. Speaker, is the perception of some ranks that marriage is a sacred bond, and therefore law enforcement intervention will result in futility. This is a challenge we have to work patiently and consistently to overcome this; we have to overcome this. Mr. Speaker, I ask: how can the Guyana Police Force protect a victim who is unwilling or unable to cooperate, because you have instances like that? To my understanding, Mr. Speaker, the cooperation of a victim is vital to the successful prosecution in many cases, and I think that is a given. But if, for some reason or other, the victim does not express a desire to go to court, or desires not to proceed with the trial of the suspect; then the Protection and Tenancy Order can be obtained.

Mr. Speaker, the police can also pursue cooperation of the victim by getting the victim's relatives, social workers, as well as health-care providers, involved; then, Mr. Speaker, there are the high-risk cases that may well result

in murder or murder-suicide. There have been several situations where high-risk cases have emerged, and proceed to the possibility of leading to a murder or a murder-suicide. The question is: how do the police deal with such situations?

The first thing we have to accept, Mr. Speaker, is that assessing these risks cannot be done in any standardized manner. Usually some background information on the individuals and their relationships will help to guide a decision on the risk level, and provide answers to questions such as:

- Does either party have a history of violence?
- Was physical harm or suicide threatened?
- What is the cause of violence and when did it start?
- What other responsibilities and support each party has?

These are questions which need be posed by the police in order to assess the high-risk cases, and the possibility of such high-risk cases, leading to murder or murder-suicide.

Mr. Speaker, the police force has a very important role to play in this question of violence against women. In many of the presentations by Members on that side of the House and even on this side of the House, constant

reference was made to the role of the police. Police need to improve here; police need to improve there. Police see violence against women as a private matter, they do not intervene. So the police as I see it, is a linchpin in seeking to address this question, because too often you hear, and someone said it, that a vehicle was not available, a police rank was not there, and then we start with the usual beating-up on the police which is quite traditional for the opposition benches.

So, Mr Speaker, I say that the subject of violence against women has to be looked at and the effort to reduce the occurrences of violence against women, has to be looked at one, in the context of what has been achieved internationally; what has been achieved nationally, and what has been achieved in so far it as one of the principal change agent of this matter, which is law-enforcement headed the Guyana Police Force. I think it is very important as we support this Motion, Mr. Speaker, that we recognize that apart from calling on the private sector and a number of other nongovernmental organizations to play their role, as they say, to develop awareness programmes, and support systems that prevent domestic violence, it is also important, even though it is not mentioned here, that every support be given to the Guyana Police Force. The Ministry of Human Services is contributing this regard, every support be given to the Guyana Police Force in the effort to address violence against women, whether it is local or overseas training, or

what the case may be; because I know as a fact that any incident with respect to failure to respond, failure to respond with quickness and alacrity is are always there to put the blame on the Guyana Police Force.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Mrs. Backer ...

Mrs. Deborah J Backer: Thank you.

I thought the Honourable Minister would chat for a little while. I did not realize he was finished. Mr. Speaker, I feel almost like a night watchman. I know that the West Indies are playing in New Zealand. But you know sometimes a night watchman comes in, he make a few runs, he spends a few minutes; but sometimes he can be annoying, and nagging, and he can stay there for the entire night and come back the next morning.

I am tempted, Mr. Speaker, to be that latter type of night watch-person. I cannot call myself a *watchman*, but *watchperson*; but that would be another level. I am not sure ... too sure, Mr. Speaker, as I stand here, whether the word is *violence* or *violence*, because I have heard both pronunciations; but I can see from your nod, Sir, that you prefer, like me, the pronunciation *violence* and with your

permission, Sir, I will use that, be it right or wrong. We are in the minority, Sir, but minorities also have rights!

Mr Speaker, the history of violence is as old as the history of the world. Sir, when persons are deemed to be unequal, violence against them is not only perpetrated; it is seen and recognized as being lawful. We only have to look at slavery, the Jewish holocaust, segregation in the United States, and how women have been treated in various parts of the world throughout our history, because there was this unequal, legal inequality, in the status of women *vis-à-vis* men. It therefore follows, Sir, that the first task in any country would be to make women legally equal, that is, legally entitled to the same benefits and responsibilities as men. Our Supreme Law guarantees this by the virtue of Article 149 (F) and we have, Sir, a raft of legislation, beginning in, and perhaps there would be some before; but beginning with the removal of all forms of Discrimination against Children Born out of Wedlock, as far back as 1983, and culminating in a few Acts that were passed this year. So I would say that, by and large, Sir, women have, by and large, because there are still pockets where we need improvements; but by and large, women legally have attained equal status as men in Guyana, and all would agree that is commendable, and we should all be proud of that fact.

The more burning issue, Sir, is: why with all this legislation there does this actual inequality, this violence

against women – why does it persist? And of course that is the question, that is what continues, I think somewhere in the Motion it speaks about *baffles and perplexes us*. Why it continues. But before I share with you, Sir, a few suggestions ... because I think that I am Speaker No. 16, so in fact, I would not even be on a cricket team. I would be the water girl. But I want to touch very briefly on the Domestic Violence Act, 1996. And I would have to put some questions to the Honourable Minister of Home Affairs at a subsequent date; but I am a little baffled, Sir, by the figures presented by the Honourable Minister, *vis-à-vis*, violence against women and domestic violence, and I wonder if it is because a lot of people do not realize that the Domestic Violence Act does not make the act of violence an offence.

If Mr. and Mrs. Jones have a problem, and Mr. Jones cuffs Mrs. Jones up, and she goes to the court, she goes to the police station, and he is subsequently charged; he would be charged under our general Criminal Act, for assault or for wounding, assault causing actual bodily harm, wounding, felonious wounding, and it would go up, depending on the magnitude of her injuries. So nobody ... I do not know. Perhaps, what happened to the Minister, we know that sometimes he gets things wrong, and perhaps, he has gone into the Occurrence Book looking for people who would have been charged under the Domestic Violence Act; but that does not usually happen, since they are charged under the Criminal Law Offences

Act, and that is why he most probably is not finding people. Where someone is charged under the Domestic Violence Act, is if a Protection Order has been made against that person, or Occupation Order, or a Tenancy Order, and that person breaches that Order; then I think it is under Section 32 or 33 of the Act, that they can be charged. So there is no offense of domestic violence. A man cuffs a woman; he is going under the regular Criminal Act.

And of the recommendations, we think is worthy to look at, is having the offence ... if the perpetrator has that relationship as defined by the Domestic Violence Act, that there should be specific offences within the very Domestic Violence Act. We need to look at that, to see if it makes sense. Because if you do that, you can also say that if someone is charged, and found guilty under that Act; then perhaps, there should be mandatory counseling. But it is difficult to talk about mandatory counseling within the Domestic Violence Act, when the offence is occurring outside of the Domestic Violence Act. It can be a bit untidy. So Minister Manickchand, as you go about the country continuing your consultations, you perhaps could look at that.

Sir, the hypocrisy ... This is a unique person, Sir, and I really recommend that an audio-visual link be used with Mr. ... what is his name? Sorry ... Honourable Member,

Neendkumar ... a bit later. Sir, I am getting forgetful. I do not want to have any nightmares.

Sir, the hypocrisy of the government, I do not think this is time for bashing the government too much, in that they are looking already beaten-up, anyhow; but Sir, the hypocrisy of them calling on the Opposition to support a Motion, which shows that we are upholding International Conventions ratified by us is good. But two weeks ago, under conventions we have ratified also, the government turned the Nelson eye. I do not want to be mistaken, when I say *the Nelson eye*, people may want to know: who is Nelson? I am talking about *turning a blind eye*, because I do not want people to say *I am speaking about Nelson, and nobody knows who Nelson is*. Because, Sir, this very Constitution lists towards the end of it, and it refers to Article 151 ...154 (A), the Conventions in the Fourth Schedule, and I accept that the ... Sorry, I am having a little problem finding it ... *[Interruption]* ... You are my main problem; but I got insecticide. No, it is right here.

Yes, Sir, 154 speaks, Sir, of the Convention that we have ratified, not the PNC, or the PPP, or so; but the Government of Guyana on behalf of all us, all of us have ratified. Yes, we have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which the Honourable Minister mentions in her Motion; but we have also

ratified the Convention against Torture, and Other Inhuman or Degrading Treatments or Punishment. Yet when the Opposition brought the Motion; when the AFC brought the Motion on Freedom of Expression, and asked that it be interpreted not by the letter of the Law, but by the spirit of the Constitution – both of them were denied.

And it smacks of double standards, that you, the government can feel comfortable ... and I really hope that they do not feel comfortable; but they appear to be comfortable ... to brush aside legitimate Motions by the Opposition, and come with this pious look and say, *you know, we are committed*. But what they forgot to say, Sir, is that *we are committed selectively*. And it must be placed on record that these double standards are being noted, by the public at large.

Sir, I have already touched on the Domestic Violence Act. The Sexual Offences Act, STAMP IT OUT, and one of the WHEREAS Clauses, there are several of them, one of the WHEREAS Clauses speaks about *strengthening a new legislation on sexual offenses*, and the Minister, quite rightly, has received a lot of credit for the STAMP IT OUT, which will lead to the Sexual Offences Legislation. We do not know when, we are told *soon*. It is about a year now, but *soon* will come; but Sir, when we do that, we would not be doing anything revolutionary. We will be coming in line with countries like Trinidad and Barbados, who have passes this legislation years ago. So we are not

doing ... all we are doing is to play catch-up, that is what we are doing. That is commendable; but we are not inventing the wheel here. Sir, in 2000 ... I can see I have struck a raw chord here. I am perpetual disappointed in you, so you can join me.

The Sexual Offences Bill, Sir, there is a CARICOM Draft Model that has been around, since the '90s. And this Sexual Offences Draft Legislation of CARICOM, of which we are a member, a founding member, has been around for about ten years. And when you look at the STAMP IT OUT, the STAMP IT OUT and of the recommendations coming out of the STAMP IT OUT reflects this, almost to the letter.

So the point I am making is that we cannot see: one, why this is taking so long, and two, rather than since 2005, we drew attention to this, has the government ever given any other party any recognition? It is like if this thing is a brainchild of the PPP/C Government; nobody else ever thought about it. We are behind CARICOM, and all we are doing is playing catch-up. So, yes, it is an important legislation. Since 2005, we are record as saying *we are ready and willing to support it*, and three years have gone by. But will we be given any credit that we brought it out? I have it in my presentation. I have it here, No. 8, when I made a presentation in 2005. But one would get the impression that the PPP/C has, out of the blue, pulled

this thing when there was nothing – the same thing with the domestic violence.

If we are saying, you heard about the WPA being in the vanguard, the WPO being in the vanguard of women's rights from the grassroots. The NCW, or the WRSM as it was then called, was never involved – was never involved. I do not have to be there to know. I do not have to be there, I know that, I am younger than you are ... *[Interruption]* ... That is not the point. The point is what you try to take sole credit for something that should be the collective credit of the whole country; that is the point. This is not something ... I agree, for a change, with Mr. Rohee *this is not a political point*; this is about accepting that we have all played a part in getting us where we are now. *[Applause]* It started long before the PNC or the PPP was in government ... *[Interruption]* ... It is not debatable. We all played a part. What does that have to do? You should have brought the Motion.

Sir, the relationship of poverty to domestic violence has been mentioned; but I would have thought, we would have hoped, to have seen more detail, a little more concrete idea from the government of how we would alleviate poverty generally. Because people have gone around the world quoting figures, but world figures show that *70 percent of people who live in poverty are women*, and I am quoting here now from the Integrated Poverty

and Gender Inter-Health Programme, which is a WHO Handbook and it says here now:

Although women from all socioeconomic groups experience gender violence, an increasing number of studies from different parts of the world show that low income women experience a greater incidence of violence, especially intimate partner violence.

And Dr. Ramsammy, I think, in his presentation, hours ago, supported this. So what are we doing as a country about poverty? I raise this to say to the government that: domestic violence, violence against women, is multidimensional, both in its causes, and we would also have to be multidimensional as we seek to alleviate it, if not eradicate it completely from Guyana.

Sir, the legislation is, by and large, as I said, in place. There can always be improvements, no one will quarrel with that; but it is, by and large, in place. What is the economic cost of violence against women? I think Dr Ramsammy and Dr Norton mentioned the broken bones, the health issues; but what is the economic cost as a result of those health issues? In that women have to stay away from work, because they are in hospital or they cannot go out. They are emotionally challenged, so even when they go to work, they cannot produce as they ought to; their production level is not as high. These are the kind of

studies ... I know that there are some studies going on, and I know that studies are expensive things; but of course you can have general studies, like health studies as a designated sub-section of that; you can have things dealing ... surveys dealing with women and the socioeconomic cost and the economic cost, the health cost, and I think we need to do some more of that so we can be more informed.

Sir, the greatest challenge, I think we all accept it from all sides of the House, is the social challenge. How do we get people to accept that violence against women is unacceptable and it cannot continue? And Sir, I have a slightly different outlook. I think that ... I see it happening now, and I am glad. We must involve, both men and women. I have always been against the view or the kind of projects, where we target women only; because men and women are the two sides in the equation. If you only look after one side of the equation, you are going to continue to have the problem. Violence debases not only the victim, it debases the perpetrator. We have to accept that. And it cannot be ... I refuse to accept that *men, by their nature, want to beat-up people*. I reject that out of hand. And I think that it is the socialization that all of us, how many of us, as women, sit, if we have sons, we have cousins, we have brothers, and say to them *you can not do that; it is wrong*. Are we doing that? Are we, as women? We have asked the men to do things; but are we, as women? How many of us can

stand up proudly and say ... you would not know; but far as I know, my son, my brother, has never been involved in a n act of violence against women. We women have to continue to shoulder that responsibility. The hand that rocks the cradle can, by being a smart woman, if not rule the world; help to rule the world ... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, Guyana, if we imagine Guyana as a bird, and I know that Minister Manniram will be happy about that; if we could liken Guyana to a bird and see, imagine women as the left wing and men as the right wing of that bird; that bird will only fly at its optimum, if the wings are working in tandem, if there is an acceptance that the wings will be of equal strength. That is what we have to work towards.

I close by saying that we have to make this campaign center page, in the same way HIV has been made center page. We have to make violence against women, and in fact I want to go further, beyond this Motion; we have to make violence generally center page. We as a nation have become barbaric. We laugh at violence, all of us. We like to laugh out. We are beginning to have that culture of being uncaring; but I think we can reverse it. That is what we have to do. We have to start at the homes, in all the religious organizations, in the schools, from nursery, from in the schools. We have, Sir, to regain in people, as the young people say *we have to big up people*. We have to

say to our young people *we know you can do better*, both men and women, and we have to play our part.

So, Sir, if the PNC/R-1G supports any action or any forms of violence, that stand against domestic violence and stand against violence against women. We support it, because like the PPP/C, like the AFC, and I presume like most people; we stand firmly against any form of violence, whether it is against children, women, and indeed any fellow citizen.

I thank you, Sir.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member Ms. Manickchand ...

Hon Priya D Manickchand: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we really have to move to a point in this Honourable House, and I think of that as something that all of us in here should support, where we can review what was said almost immediately, so we do not have to wait on HANSARD. I think it would mean some equipment and some short-hand people.

I started off by saying at the very beginning of this Motion, and Mrs. Backer was here, that *I wanted to commend and recognize the work of very many*

organizations, where I named the WRSM particularly, and the National Congress of Women, and other organizations that have been in the forefront of this struggle. If Mrs. Backer, whatever part of her party she belongs to, is feeling guilty that they have not done enough, than deal with that somewhere else; but do not stand there, and attribute to us not saying, or not recognizing the efforts of the women of your party, as well as the women of this House and the women of the NGOs who did a lot of work on this issue and have brought us to a point, today, where you and I can stand up here and deal with this. Okay?

Mr. Speaker, we would have been able to clear that up, if we had that sort of equipment, because I said that from the beginning, and I was very clear that we on this side, nor they on that side, or the people at the back who are interested, none of us alone can work individually on this issue. Government action will not be enough, and we need all the hands on board, which is why we are here before this Parliament. I have also been on record, Mr Speaker, publicly, and your friends in the press and my friends in the press, might be able to give you that backup, and I have said that the STAMP IT OUT Proposals ... the proposal in STAMP IT OUT, are not innovative. The proposals in STAMP IT OUT will see, if we enact them in this Honourable House, Guyana catching-up with the rest of the world. We have called it *old*, we have called it *archaic*. What have you done,

outside of speaking about it every now and then, to bring it up to scratch?

These are questions that we have to ask ourselves long and hard. It was also very inaccurate, and there are certain words that are banned from this House; but it is inaccurate to say that it took a year for us to get to the stage of drafting or laying legislation. In November of last year, we published the document. If you Google, you will be able to find it; it was published in November of last year. And this is how the PNC sometimes ... when people like Mrs. Backer can really be hypocritical; because one time they call for consultations and they call to be involved, and they call for the involvement of ordinary people, and when we publish this paper, we go across this country consulting ordinary people, consulting even you, you say it is too long. November last year, we started consultations, and published a document, a white paper. We started consultations and we finished those consultations this year.

Legislation has been drafted this year; we have been on record as saying that. The legislation is with the Chief Parliamentary Counsel right now being reviewed, and we have shared that legislation, the draft legislation with persons who were interested. This is not anything new. We are on record as having said that. So to say that we took a year to draft legislation is inaccurate. We have been consulting as to what should be in the legislation.

That is what we have been doing. And is that not what the Joint Opposition calls for all the time? Do you want to consult or do you not want us to consult? You have to make up your mind about that at some point. I will continue to do what the people of Guyana expect us to do, and that is to check with them before we do something major like this.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear, the Police Commissioner presently and the police force, as well as persons who drafted the Domestic Violence Act that we could now speak proudly about, the persons who drafted that Act, many of whom ... *[Interruption]* ... Anyway, even if it is just a little bit that was done by a Member of this Honourable House, it is a lot ... But the persons who drafted that Act recognized, and will tell you now, and have told me, that they believe part of the problem with the Domestic Violence Act was that they drafted it in abstract, in the sense of a group of persons sat down and drafted it; then they just brought it to Parliament and passed it. And some of the problem with that was when the Parliament, the National Assembly passed it; nobody knew what to do. It has taken us 12 years, and 12 years is too long, for us to learn what to do with it.

But all of us in here ... we have come to a point tonight which is sad, where we are standing here to determine who did what, and who did what better, on an issue that is so important to all the people that we come in contact

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 11 DECEMBER 2008

with, an issue that is important to our children, our brothers and sisters and the future of Guyana. Whether we meant it or not, we have all taken an oath to do all we can for Guyana. So we can stand here tonight, we want to go into who did what and who did not do what, and when the PNC did something and the PNC did not do something. Mrs. Backer, I would be willing right now to allow you to sign this Motion and take whatever credit you believe needs to be taken, if at the end of it, what we can do is make sure it is passed, and we do what we are asking to be done. This is not one of those issues. It is not one of those issues, Mr. Speaker, that need to be politicized. We come here, and we are speaking about violence against women, and various Members have taken the opportunity to talk about roads, and when Minister Benn did not visit, and who wants a house lot, and what water they were not getting; and then to make it relevant, drop in at the end of that sentence, **STAMP IT OUT**.

And I know **STAMP IT OUT** has become a familiar term; but the fact that somebody does not have a road, or the fact that you do not have a house lot, or the fact that you do not have a job, we have to be very careful with the message we send here. Mr. Speaker, we have to be extremely careful if the message we send here is going to be that it is acceptable to beat-up your wife, beat-up somebody's daughter, or beat-up a child, because you do

not have road, because you do not have a house lot, that is a dangerous message we are sending.

Mr. Speaker, we have to be very careful with saying, without thinking, while there may be a link, and while researchers have said there is a link, and poorer women will suffer violence more than richer women, and poorer women will suffer all ills more than richer women; while there is a link, we have to be careful with the kinds of messages we ... That is why I am, or we are calling, for a collective voice to resonate across this country, that says *we are not going to tolerate violence against women in any way or form.*

To say, Mr. Speaker ... and I do not wish to spend a lot longer. I am deeply grateful to all the speakers who spoke here tonight, because while I recognize that the temptation is too strong sometimes, to divert into politics, while I recognize that that temptation is way too great sometimes, I believe, for the large part, we have heard, while I do not believe that it was an unadulterated condemnation of violence against women, we have heard for the most part violence against women being condemned by almost every speaker in this Honourable House; about that, I believe if nothing at all, a success. At some point, Mr. Speaker, perhaps we can get an unadulterated condemnation.

Mr. Speaker, there are issues that came up. And that is why I am saying *we have to be careful.* I agree that there

is a clogged court system. I agree that there may not be enough court personnel, but to call today's Motion a waste of time is going too far. A clogged court system does not ... *[Interruption]* ... That is why it would be useful for us to have that piece of equipment I was speaking of. Mr. Speaker, a clogged court system does not stop us from hearing matters *in camera*. This is already provided for in the Act. This is not happening; it is causing much hardship, it is for us as lawyers and Members of this Honourable House to ensure that happens. That can happen with or without a clogged court system. A clogged court system does not allow, disallow a magistrate from hearing a matter. They hear the matter, and adjourn it. So they have paid attention to it and it is adjourned, and adjourned, and adjourned. That is something we can deal with from this Honourable House. A police not addressing complaints before him, it is something we can do. Every single complaint we know is not addressed, pick up the phone and call the Commander of the Division and demand action. That is our right, that is our duty, not only as citizens but as Members of this House who, it appears, will vote in favour of the WHEREAS Clauses in this Motion.

Before you, Mr. Speaker, and before every Member of this Honourable House, Mr. Speaker, because I recognize that that is a problem; there is a pamphlet, which provides all the places that give service, and I know, life gets in the way sometimes, so it tells you where you can call. Call at

any of these places and say look, this person is not getting through. It is a start, somewhere we are going. To say that nothing has been done, or if I should say, enough maybe has not been done, and I would certainly say much more can be done; but much has been done. We hear wild calls for more shelters. Help and Shelter has a shelter that is never filled to capacity at an undisclosed location. It is never filled to capacity. I have checked with them repeatedly, which means that there is space if anyone wants to go there. The problem we have is getting people to go there. The Government of Guyana, since 2007, funded completely Help and Shelter. That funding continues in 2008; Help and Shelter is being funded completely by government. Legal Aid is funded completely by the government.

Mr. Speaker, in 1997 we had 28 matters filed, the year after the Domestic Violence Act was passed, and this is given from Mr. Kaladin at the High Court, I cannot remember his portfolio – 28 matches in 1997 were filed. Of course, 1996, the Act had not been passed, and nothing was filed under that Act. And in 2007, I do not know if those figures are accurate. He had 116 been filed in the Georgetown Magistrates' District alone. People are using it; they are obviously not using it enough, because we are still seeing much that can be done. But like I said, part of the reason people are not using it enough, I believe, is because of a lack of confidence in the entire system.

If the police do not function, the courts do not function, and the social workers do not function; then not only will I, the abused, not go back; then my neighbour, who is watching me not get through will probably not use those services too. And that is what we have to ensure happens. But we cannot say, we have joined, like I said, 175 out of 195 countries in the whole world to observe this day; and the 175 countries that we joined, they have roads and they have lights, and they have water, and they are still battling with this issue. Because it is an issue that we have to confront, we have to change and, Ramjattan, Honourable Member, said it most succinctly ... I think this is perhaps one of the best presentations I have ever heard from him; it is, and I say that with congratulations, not condescendingly at all. It is a whole mindset that we have to change. And I saw person giggling when Dr Norton spoke of *the disabled man, who had to climb on a chair to slap his wife*, and I saw that Honourable Member in fact, giggling, and say: *did she wait for the slap?* You know, it is like when you are a child, and your mother sends you for the whip or the drop cord, and you go and you get it and come back for your licks; it is the same kind of psychology. It is not something we can understand, and it is not something we can explore, certainly not at 9:40 in the night; but I am saying that these are issues that have to be addressed, and addressed in a holistic way. We cannot deal with these matters without understanding the psychology behind them.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to say genuinely and heartily, thank you to all the Members of this Honourable House, not on my own behalf; but on behalf of the persons who will be served by us collaborating here tonight, on behalf of all those women and girls, boys and men, who are going to benefit from our joint initiative here tonight, to ensure that we send a loud and clear message.

I wish to say *thank you* on behalf of those persons, to all the Honourable Members of this House and to you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you very much, Honourable Member.

Honourable Members, the Motion has already been proposed. I now put the Motion as set out in the Order Paper.

Motion proposed, put and carried.

The Motion is carried unanimously.

Honourable Members, there is one other matter on the Order Paper. I understand it is going to be put down for another occasion.

PRIVATE MEMBERS BUSINESS

MOTION:

**LIVE AND UNEDITED BROADCAST OF THE
SITTING OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

Mr. Aubrey Norton: Mr. Speaker, I rise to suggest to the House that the Motion, in my name, be deferred to the next Sitting of the National Assembly.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

[Motion is deferred]

Honourable Prime Minister ...

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I wish to propose that the House stand adjourned until a date to be fixed.

The Speaker: Honourable Members, the House stands adjourned to a date to be fixed.

Adjourned Accordingly At 21:42H