

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006-2010) 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

125TH Sitting

Thursday, 10TH June, 2010

The Assembly convened at 2.18 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in Chair]

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

The following Report was laid:

Ninth Report of the Committees on Appointment in relation to the Appointment of Members of the Public Service Commission *[Ms. Gail Teixeira –Chairperson of the Committee on Appointment]*

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Written replies

1. WAGES AND SALARIES OF CONTRACT WORKERS

Mrs. Holder: On behalf of the many who are curious about the tilt in the expenditure of wages and salaries in favour of the contract workers as against fixed establishment workers, what explanation would the Minister give for this?

Minister of the Public Service [Dr. Westford]: The Public Service Commission is responsible for the appointment of pensionable employees. Employment of all other categories fall within the ambit of the Public Service Ministry.

2. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON WAGES AND SALARIES.

Mrs. Holder: Can the Hon. Minister state the Government's Policy on wages and salaries in relation to a healthy diet *vis-a-vis* the cost of living, the percentage of expenditure and real increases?

Dr. Westford: The sum total reflected in the expenditure of wages and salaries as it relates to contracted workers is dependent on:

- (a) the number of workers employed; and
- (b) the categories of workers

3. ACTING POSITIONS IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

Mrs. Holder: Can the Hon. Minister tell us how many acting positions are there across the public service and the strategy to confirm these person?

Dr. Westford: (a) 26 acting positions. (b) Confirmation is based on performance and qualification of the person.

4. TRAVELLING ALLOWANCES FOR THE PUBLIC SERVANTS

Mrs. Holder: Can the Hon. Minister say whether the travelling allowances for public servants, which have remained unchanged since 1995, will be reviewed in 2010?

Dr. Westford: Yes.

5. CONTROL OF GUYANA POWER AND LIGHT BY THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Mrs. Holder: Can the Hon. Minister say if there is any intention to bring the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) under real, rather than nominal, regulatory control of the PUC?

Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communication [Mr. Hinds]: The Guyana Power and Light (GPL) is under real regulatory control of the Public Utilities

Commission (PUC), as would be evident in researching and studying records of all the interactions between the PUC and the GPL.

Oral replies

6. PRINTING OF GRADE SIX EXAMINATION PAPERS IN GUYANA

Mr. Franklin: I beg to ask the Hon. Minister of Education question number 6 on the Order Paper standing in my name:

(i) Will the Hon. Minister state whether or not he is satisfied that the process relating to the printing of grade six examination papers in Guyana is not and has not been compromised?

(ii) Is the Minister satisfied that the Contractor (s) awarded contracts to print the grade six assessment papers are not related in any way to senior teachers of schools which take the exam?

(iii) If such a relationship exists, will the Minister undertake to review/examine the results of schools at which the contractor(s) have relatives teaching from the time the contracts were awarded to present?

(iv) What steps have the Hon. Minister taken to ensure the integrity of the examination as well as the future well-being of the students taking such exams?

Minister of Education [Mr. Baksh]: I am satisfied from all available reports and information at my disposal that the process relating to the printing of grade six examination papers in Guyana is not and has not been compromised. All the standards lay down procedures relating to this process are observed. Over the last ten years there were no security breaches and with expert guidance additional security features have been added and these include the installation of security cameras, security checks of persons employed in the printing section, a special designated area within the printing section for storing employees personal effects, no use of cell phones within the printing area, banning of visitors to the printing area, the rotation of temporary staff during the printing process in order to prevent any one of the workers handling all the examination papers. All risograph stencils and spoil papers are incinerated on premises by the head of that unit in attendance.

Mr. Franklin: Thank you Minister. Question two the Minister has basically answered. That is, all the examination papers are printed in-house. Could the Minister say since when that has been the case?

Mr. Baksh: Yes. As I understand it, this has been for several years now. I do know the exact year, but many years it has been printed in-house, at least since the National Grade Six Assessment has come into effect.

Mr. Franklin: Hon. Minister, I take that, but I would really like to get some specifics - this can be furnished later – when was the printing of these examination papers started on an in-house basis? In other words, when did the Ministry stop contracting the printing of these papers outside of it? Just give us the date and I will accept the answer.

Mr. Baksh: That will be done.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you can proceed with the other question for the Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications.

7. SALE OF ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Mr. Franklin: I beg to ask the Hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications question number 7 on the Order Paper standing in my name:

Will the Hon. Prime Minister state whether an agreement has been made/ signed with a private company and Iwokrama with respect to the sale of ecosystem services in that area?

Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communication [Mr. Hind]: Mr. Speaker, Hon. Member, the straight answer is no.

Mr. Franklin: Is the Prime Minister absolutely sure? I am giving the Prime Minister a chance to reflect carefully on that answer.

Mr. Speaker: I do not know it has a follow up question, Hon. Member.

Mr. Hinds: There has been no sale of ecosystem services.

Mr. Franklin: Mr. Prime Minister, that was not the question.

Mr. Hind: Could you please raise the question?

Mr. Franklin: The question was: If the Government of Guyana and along with Iwokrama have signed any agreement with a foreign company to sell ecosystem services?

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, that is not the question that is here on the Order Paper. I said that the straight answer to the question that is put is “no”. I maintain that the straight answer to the question that is put is “no”.

COMMITTEES BUSINESS

MOTION

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES BILL 2009

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That the Report of the Special Select Committee on Persons with Disabilities Bill 2009 – Bill No. 44 of 2009 be adopted.”

[Minister of Health – Chairman of the Special Select Committee on Persons with Disabilities Bill 2009]

Minister of Health [Dr. Ramsammy]: I would like to move the motion for the adoption of the Report of the Special Committee on Persons with Disabilities Bill 2009. This Bill was first read on the 19th of November, 2009. The second reading of the Bill occurred on the 26th of November, 2009. The Special Select Committee was appointed on the 10th of December, 2009. We subsequently met four times. Thirty-one of the forty-two clauses have been accepted as presented. Eleven of the clauses were amended. At the appropriate time, I will ask that the Bill be read the third time as amended.

I spoke extensively during the second reading on the 26th of November, and I believe that I need not say anything in addition. The Hansard can be consulted in terms of the reasons why this Bill is important. It is, therefore, my pleasure at the appropriate time, after my colleagues have a chance to speak, to ask that the Report be adopted by the House. Thank you.

Dr. Norton: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker, I rise to lend the full support of my party, the People’s National Congress Reform...

Mr. Speaker: Where are they, Dr. Norton?

Dr. Norton: ...the main Opposition party in this Hon. House in the support of this motion, the adoption of a Report of a Special Select Committee on Persons with Disabilities Bill, Bill No. 44 of 2009. This Bill, among other provisions, eliminates the discrimination on the basis of disabilities, provides for the welfare and the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities and establishes the National Commission on Disabilities and for connected purposes.

My party, being the respectful and law abiding party, as it is, will always fully support a Bill of this nature, especially since this Bill, in effect, spells out article 146 of the Constitution of this country in relation to protection from discrimination on the ground, in particular, of disability. The PNCR will always abide by the Constitution of this country and will support this Bill, particularly, because it is in consonance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. What this Bill actually does...

Mr. Speaker: Dr. Norton, I do not normally stop people for relevance, except if there is an objection, because all Members of the House violate that rule all the time. If I have to stop for irrelevance we will have to close down the National Assembly. I am not stopping you, I want to remind you that the second reading of this Bill has taken place already and what we are dealing with is the Report of the Special Select Committee. Now proceed.

Dr. Norton: I repeat that my party fully supports the motion that is brought before the House. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Dr. Norton.

Rev. Gilbert: I too would wish to contribute, as brief as I possibly can, to this discourse on the Report of Persons with Disabilities Bill. I find very encouraging, Sir, the principle of Bills being referred to Select Committees, because, it is my view, it is reflective of the kind of progressive egalitarian culture which is consistent with new and emerging democracies. The atmosphere which often permeates these Committees is enviable the kind that is so sadly lacking and elusive at the national level of discourse/dialogue. While we no doubt would have benefited from the collective wisdom of the esteemed Members of the Opposition, were they being better represented in terms of their attendance, thoroughness and importance of the process that we engaged in at the Committee level were not in any way compromised.

This Bill represents a rather monumental achievement of our country. And when it is viewed in a wider context of its relationship to the number of other legislation which has gained passage through this National Assembly in recent times, it must be recognised as a continued

committed effort of this Government to keep on the front burners of national priorities the needs of all of our people, in particular those who are vulnerable disadvantaged by circumstances beyond their control. This Bill, therefore, sends a clear message that all are equal and deserving of equal opportunities. That all, regardless of their disabilities or impediments, have a right to pursuit of life, liberty and happiness. The message, therefore, to our brothers and sisters who are challenged with restrictions and disabilities which cause them not be able to optimise their true potential, is a clear one which this Government sends through with this Bill, that those needs would not be ignored; those persons will not be left behind by virtue of their disabilities.

In concluding my brief contribution, Sir, permit me to express a concern regarding this Bill. I have no fear that this legislation will complete its passage here this evening. Neither am I apprehensive regarding the commitment of the Hon. Minister of Health in seeing that there is a speedy implementation of the provisions of this Bill. My fear, however, Sir, is that while Government has done its part and the National Assembly has given passage, what remains to be achieved is a change of attitude and culture of our peoples towards those who are among us are disadvantaged by their disabilities. I, therefore, call upon all of us as Guyanese to become familiar with the legislation and give it life in respecting and promoting the rights with persons with disabilities. Thank you Sir. [Applause]

Mrs. Punalall: The Report of the Special Select Committee of Persons with Disabilities Bill 2009 is before us for adoption. The Alliance For Change supports this Report but would like to note a few observations. There are questions which I had asked at the at the Committee level.

- (i) What parameter will be used to measure the security of persons with disabilities?
- (ii) How would we differentiate between a disabled person who should receive welfare and one who can be gainfully employed?
- (iii) How early will programmes for sport be put in place for disabled persons?
- (iv) What are the conditions which will apply for persons with disabilities who apply for a driver's licence?

The answer which was given by the Hon. Minister of Health was that these issues will be dealt with by the National Commission on Disabilities and the relevant authorities as the need arises.

Guyana is eighty three thousand square miles and the AFC hopes that the National Commission on Disabilities and the relevant authorities will have systems in place to reach the disabled in far-flung areas. We do recognise that different disabilities will limit different people, in different ways and we hope that fair judgement and discretion will be exercised by officials who have to deal with the disabled. The Alliance For Change supports this Report to be adopted for the Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2009. Thank you. [Applause]

Dr. Mahadeo: I was honoured to be a part of this Committee, although this Bill really did not spend a long time in Committee as the Hon. Minister mentioned. The Bill had the obvious support of all those who attended the Committee's meetings even though some persons who were named to the Committee did not attend any of the meetings. Only some, what I would term as minor changes were made to the original Bill. Again, I want to note that the atmosphere at the Special Select Committee's level is very different from the atmosphere in the National Assembly, and it is still a learning experience for me. We were able to pick out some – will not necessarily false - of the things that we thought needed to be changed and that was done very quickly. I am sure that there will be subsequent changes to this Bill. But one of the things I would like to point out is that the Bill had the support and the input of all the Ministries which would deal with it. Again the Ministers were there to support the Bill.

I crave your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, to say that there are countries which do not have this sort of Bill. But in countries where this Bill exists, there are other side effects. For example, in America where this Bill was passed in the 1990 and the Center For Accessible Society, after ten years, said that that Act - the Americans with Disabilities Act - profoundly changed how society views and accommodates its citizens with disabilities. The universal design in products, buildings, public spaces and programmes was used by a great number of people, not only those with disabilities. It helped to create a society where curb cut, ramps and other accessing designs is increasingly common, and in the process, discovered an accessible society is good for everyone, not only just for people with disabilities. Curb cut designed for wheelchair users are also used for people with baby carriages and delivery people. With our population ageing, I am sure that it will be useful for our people too.

In closing, I would like to say that this is definitely a positive measure: a positive action that is designed to advance and underpin participation by people with disabilities in everyday life; to establish the statutory basis for placing an obligation on public service providers; to support access services and facilities to people with disabilities as well as other citizens to the greatest practicable extent. I want to congratulate the Government of Guyana, this Hon. House and the Minister of Health on this landmark piece of legislation. This is another achievement that we can all be proud of. Thank you. [Applause]

Dr. Ramsammy (replying): I want to thank all the Members who have spoken in support today of this motion. I also want to thank all the Members who participated in the Special Select Committee's Meetings. Not all of us were able, but under other circumstances I may have some things to say about those who did not participate. This Bill is such an important Bill and we, in this House, have done something so significant and so noble that I would not want to tarnish the proceedings by referring to some of what could have been done better. I am going to leave that unsaid. I think everyone knows what I am talking about. This Bill is one that every citizens of this country should support and every citizen should be seen..., particularly those of us who represent various constituencies.

I want to slightly refer to the Hon. Member, Mrs. Punalall's questions. Mrs. Punalall asked these questions during the second reading and again during the proceedings. The law makes provision to empower people with disabilities and the various relevant authorities such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports will all have to put measures in place.

In terms of the definitions, for those who are disabled, the severity of disabilities and what they can be qualified for, we could have taken two approaches. One is to define those in the Bill itself, or we can leave those to the authority which will be put in place to look after the interests and the welfare of the disabled, which is the National Commission on Disabilities. We believe that the National Commission on Disabilities should lead the way in this and consult with all of us, rather than the Ministry of Health leading that process and completing it now and then tie the hands of the Commission. I believe that the National Commission on Disabilities, people living with disabilities and various stakeholders, when the time comes will determine that. While this Bill empowers people living with disabilities and provides for that empowerment, that empowerment will have to come through various authorities.

The amendments made during our deliberations were mainly spelling, grammar and so on. There were only two out of the eleven clauses which we amended changed from what they were to be made more explicit. I do want to end by referring to one of them, because one of the authorities, or organisations, or bodies in this country is being asked to do something, to give effect of to this empowerment of people living with disabilities, is the media - both public and private media. For example, television newscast must at some point put mechanisms in place so that persons with disabilities, in terms of hearing and so on, would be able to follow the news. This is how we are trying to empower the persons living with disabilities through the law. But now that the law is being enacted, the various stakeholders will have to play their role. I thought I have highlighted that one that we had made clearer and set certain timelines in the amended version of this Bill. So the law can only provide for and then others will have to make it happen.

At the appropriate time today I have asked that the Bill be read the third. But at this time I ask that the House adopts the motion that was presented today. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Question is put, and agreed to.

Report adopted.

Bill read the third time and passed as amended.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE ON CONCLUSION OF THE CONSIDERATION OF THE 2004 REPORT OF THE DISCIPLINED FORCES COMMISSION.

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That the Report of the Special Select Committee on the Conclusion of the Consideration of the 2004 Report of the Disciplined Forces Commission be adopted”

[The Prime Minister - Chairman of the Special Select Committee on the Conclusion of the Consideration of the 2004 Report of the Disciplined Forces Commission]

Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications [Mr. Hinds]: It was with a sense of relief that I tabled last Thursday, the Committee’s Report on the Disciplined

Forces Commission Report 2004. Today I hasten to move the motion standing in my name seeking the adoption of the Report of the Special Select Committee on the Conclusion of the Consideration of the 2004 Report of the Disciplined Forces Commission.

We will recall that the Disciplined Forces Commission was established by the National Assembly, Resolution No. 21 on the 16th of May, 2003. It was provided for by article 197A (5), (6) and (7) of the Constitution of our country and its proceedings were governed by the Commission of Inquiry Act. The Commission was constituted on the 13th of June, 2003, of which two persons were nominated by the Opposition in the National Assembly, Brigadier David Granger (Ret.) and Ms. Maggie Burn; two persons were nominated by the Government, Mr. Charles Ramson S.C and Mr. Anil Nandalall, Attorney-at-law and the President nominated the Chairperson, Mr. Ian Chung, S.C, Justice of Appeal.

2.48 p.m.

Ms. Maggie Burn resigned in December 2003 and the Opposition nominated Professor Harold Lutchman, PhD. to replace her.

We will recall that this Disciplined Forces Commission was established on concerns arising out of a wave of serious gun crimes which followed the jailbreak of Mashramani Day 2001. Many and various questions were raised in the minds of every citizen in our country and the terms of reference, whilst broad and wide ranging, were at the same time pointing to some specific issues. Firstly, the changing context of the operations of the Disciplined Forces taking into consideration national and international developments; secondly, the relationship with and the responsibility to the civilian authorities; thirdly, the methods and processes of achieving greater ethnic balance; fourthly operational efficiency and effectiveness, including inter-service cooperation and collaboration; and fifthly, financial and public accountability.

The Commission was asked to give priority to its inquiry into the Guyana Police Force and to offer some recommendations within three months for the greater satisfaction of the workings of our Police Force.

In speaking with one of the Members of that Commission, he remarked on the thoroughness with which the Commission pursued its mandate and he recalled that by public advertisement they invited anyone who would so wish to go before it and testify and submit written memoranda.

The Commission did not constrain its hearings to Georgetown, but held them in a number of places across our country to facilitate the hearing of views in rural locations.

We will recall also that in the previous Parliament on 6th May 2004, the Disciplined Forces Commission laid its Report and later the National Assembly referred the Report to a Special Select Committee in July 2004. That Committee got going, but was not able to complete its Report before the end of that Eighth Parliament. As such, it was in this Ninth Parliament that we picked up the task again and this Select Committee which was constituted on 29th November 2007 held its first meeting on 15th January 2008 and since then has held forty-four meetings. During this time it had to return to this House for extensions as it did not meet the stipulated times for submission of its Report and for this reason, we are glad that this task is now over.

The Report itself is very short and most of the substance of the Report would be in its dealings with the 164 recommendations put forward by the Disciplined Forces Commission with 71 concerning the Police Force, 41 concerning the Guyana Defence Force, 23 concerning the Guyana Fire Service and 29 concerning Guyana Prison Service.

Whilst taking account of the specifics of the recommendations for each force or group as much as possible under common headings, there are two recurring headings which we could take note of. They are the difficult questions of achieving ethnic balance and representation in each force and secondly, the issue of accountability to civilian authorities.

A lot has happened during this time. The Government has not been standing still. Questions have been addressed and dealt with along the way. However, I think that for the benefit of this House and maybe, for the media who would be reporting on it, I should speak briefly to some of the recommendations here and our responses to them.

One issue is demonstrated in recommendation 21. In there, we state explicitly that financial resources would be required and that the response to this question would depend on the availability of financial resources.

A few of the recommendations, which may be no more than about 10, we did not concur with. The first set of those are at 23, 24, and 25 which recommended that the police should no longer be involved with Supernumerary Constabularies. We did not agree with that and the police thought that they should retain, at a minimum, the right to train, appraise and certify the members of any constabulary in the use of firearm. I think some of the questions in 23, 24

and 25 have been addressed in the recent legislation which deals with supernumeraries with the private security services.

At recommendation 31, it was called for that the police, in particular, raise the minimum educational requirement from a sound primary education to at least, a sound secondary education. We certainly want to get there. We think that we are on the road to there with our aim of providing every child with secondary education of acceptable quality.

At recommendation 36 and some others, there was a stress with which we agreed that the police should be trained in the constitutional safeguards relating to their powers of arrest and granting of bail.

Recommendations 38-45 addressed the issue of ethnic balance in the Police Force. This took quite a bit of our time and we returned to it on a number of occasions, but I would say that, at last, we did not experience any great inspiration as to how to deal with these problems which have been bedeviling our society at large.

Recommendations 62-66 dealt with firearms licensing and the Hon. Members would recall that we recently brought to this House and it had passed regulations on the issuing of firearms. It was the position of the Government side in the Select Committee that these regulations concurred with the recommendations and I would say that the Opposition felt differently in this matter. We on the Government side were persuaded by the very elegant and expert opinion expressed by Commissioner, Mr. Charles Ramson, S.C., who is now our Attorney General. We are of the opinion that the firearms regulations recently passed in this House are in accordance with recommendations 62 – 66.

At recommendation 67, the Commission had recommended that steps be taken to make every Magistrate of each magisterial district a coroner for such district. The Committee, which had a number of learned persons on both sides, felt that this is already the case and I fully accepted this position.

As we get into the recommendations that deal with the GDF - 72 – 75 - essentially call for additional resources. We agreed that all of the recommendations here were highly desirable, but we recognised that to proceed with them would require resources and the Government would proceed as resources would allow. One of the areas that we could point to is the additional purchase of two helicopters in the recent past and there are similar considerations

in recommendations 72 – 75 which speak to the Coast Guard. There are also similar considerations in recommendations 82 – 85 and 89 with respect to the Air Corp.

I would like to point out that for recommendation 78 we concur very much with it that the jobs of Reservists of the GDF should be protected. I would like to mention recommendation 88 which took many considerations and I would say that we moved back and forth on this one. This one has to do with limited powers of arrest for the GDF limited to the occasions such as may be necessary for the express purpose of maintaining order thereby giving effect to the wisdom and foresight underlying the statutory position of the GDF of a public duty to maintain public order. We finally came down and accepted this recommendation.

I heard another Member of that Committee saying something, but my memory is that some of the persons on their side too have reflected on the appropriateness or not of doing this. Here again some of the differences lay in interpretations of the current law that would apply. There were some who felt that nothing needed to be done because the GDF is already protected and it does not need any special conferring of powers to arrest. There was the other view that at times they can rely on the powers of arrest of a citizen. However, I think that eventually we came down on the side that they should be explicitly granted the powers of arrest in such limited occasion as expressed in the recommendations.

The question of ethnic balance reappears in recommendation 94 – 103, this time with respect to the GDF We did not agree with the recommendations at 101 and 103 which we understand sought to reduce the demand on members of the GDF We did not think that it would be appropriate to go in that direction. Recommendation 101 suggested that in assigning duties to members of the GDF that they should, generally, not be assigned duties away from their nuclear families for unnecessarily prolonged periods. We thought that that could get in the way of operations and the equality of assignments to locations and even to having experiences that would favour promotion of individuals. Similarly, we did not concur with the recommendation that the minimum period of contractual service should be reduced to two years.

It may be good to refer to the issue of fire stations at various places around our country. We started out with fire stations in Georgetown and New Amsterdam, but as our country advances and we have the way withal, we have been establishing fire stations in other places.

At 121, it is recommended that local communities should bear part of their maintenance cost of fire stations and services. We did not agree with it, but we accepted voluntary contributions. I can mention here also that the Government looks for voluntary fire persons – both male and female – in many of the areas where fire stations are now being established.

I think I have given this National Assembly a good grasp of what was recommended by the Disciplined Forces Commission and the positions that this Select Committee took on the various recommendations. I look forward to this Report being adopted unanimously by all Members of this National Assembly. I thank you. [Applause]

Mrs. Backer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If I may, very briefly, thank the Members of the Disciplined Forces Commission which is informally referred to as the “Chang Commission” for the sterling work that it did, as the Hon. Prime Minister said it has placed before this National Assembly 164 recommendations.

In giving marks to the Chair of the Committee who is, in fact, no other than the Hon. Prime Minister, I would say that by and large he discharged his mandate impartially. While on some occasion we had differences, he showed a level of impartiality that I think should be complimented. He did refer to a particular Member of the House whose Report he had relied on for the issuing of firearm. I would to ask him to share with that Member the art of chairing Special Select Committees. Being that as it may, I think it would be remiss of me if I did not mention the Subject Minister – the Hon. Minister Clement Rohee. There were forty-five meetings, but there were forty-three working meetings and the attendance is attached as appendix two and it is for anyone to see. I can say that of forty-three meetings, the Hon. Subject Minister attended nineteen which is less than half. In terms of attendance, the best grade he could get is a D. The only person who was south of him was also another Member of the PPP but it is not necessary to call that person’s name. I am not discriminating, but I reason that I said that is because he is the Subject Minister and one would think that he would have particular interest in it. This is his four babies, so to speak, and in the PNCR’s view, the lack of respect that he displayed not only to the Committee, but to the Hon. Prime Minister was not good.

At times it was the PNCR and the Chair and then other Members would come. Minister Robeson Benn was present most of the times and so was Dr. Bheri Ramsaran. I think it should be on record that the Subject Minister avoided, in our opinion, attendance of a credible level. At one time he missed nine meetings in succession. It is there for anyone to

see. That shows the level of interest he has in it, having said that, the Hon. Prime Minister and Chair of the Committee made a few good points in his presentation. The one I want to speak about concerns when he said that time did not stand still because these were recommendations that were sent to this House in 2004 and six years have now elapsed and, of course, time has not stood still. He went on to say that the Government implemented some of these recommendations in the course of things, as we would expect them to do. However, in our view, the most important recommendations, some of which do not require donor funding, but merely require the political and professional will and could have been, if not fully implemented, well on the road to being fully implemented, were not done. I want to touch on a few.

Extra Judicial Killings: Let us start there so that afterwards people could, perhaps, relax a bit. [Mr. Ramotar: That is the main purpose] Exactly! The Leader of the Opposition is completely right. In fact, the Chairman mentioned that. If I could read from page 108 of the Report, under “Right to Life”, it says this:

“The right to life is the most primary of all functional human rights. The Commission received sufficient testimony to raise serious concern about the alleged violation of this most basic right in Guyana in recent years...”

This is the part that I want to emphasise:

“Indeed it is the unusual level of killing by the police that, in part, led very directly to the establishment of this Commission.”

That is on page 108 of the Report, but seven years on, what do we see? We see the death of a sixteen-year-old boy by ranks of the Guyana Police Force. I am now reading from page 119 of the Report and recommendations 50 – 52 dealt with Extra Judicial Killings and it says this at Recommendation 50:

“During training, emphasis must be placed on the fact that the use of minimum force is always to be preferred even in confrontations with armed and dangerous criminals - minimum necessary force.”

Recommendation 51 says:

“Appropriate instructions and training should be given to policemen...”

3.18 p.m.

This is another very interesting one, recommendation 52 which says: “permission to carry firearms should be restricted to Guyana Police Force members who clearly demonstrate a high degree of responsibility” and it goes on to speak about “on occasion where it is considered necessary to equip junior ranks...” because it is a junior rank who was involved in the death of the young boy two days ago on the West Bank - “ on occasion where it is considered necessary to equip junior ranks with fire arms for full time duty and the responsibility element is doubtful in such ranks they should be under the control of a mature, responsible and experienced supervising rank.”

The Prime Minister has regaled us that time has not stood still and the Government has enforced and brought into effect a lot of these recommendations. What about those recommendations? We contend that in deciding which of the recommendations to implement, the subject Minister and by extension the Government was more interested in cosmetic recommendations, not the recommendations that goes to the fundamental, to the belly, to the heart of modern policing in Guyana. Had that been done - they did not have to come here to wait in the same way that the Minister horridly rushed the firearm regulations through, in the same way this could have been implemented six years ago.

I want to quote, before I move off from this area, the editorial of today’s Stabroek News “why was Kelvin Fraser shot?” this is the question being asked at the very end of the editorial in today’s Stabroek.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Kelvin Fraser is the young man who was shot recently.

Mrs. Backer: Yes Sir.

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter which has happened recently and it is being investigated by the police. You made reference to it and I allowed you to but we have to be careful of how we are talking about these matters. It is *sub judice* Hon. Member. It is not allowed in our Standing Orders. It is a matter under police investigation, so I am not going to allow you to make any allegations. You talk about senior officers and all of these issues-how do you know... I do not know who was present at this event. You can speak but please bear these factors in mind.

Mrs. Backer: I appreciate, very greatly, your advice Sir. I was just about to quote four lines from today's editorial of the Stabroek news. This is the opinion: " he was shot because the Guyana Police Force persist in placing guns in the hands of policemen with itchy trigger fingers, who have no clue about how to or when to exercise judgment. That is the point. The exercise...

Mr. Speaker: That is a judgment for the newspaper which is not acceptable for this House. This is a matter which is under investigation.

Mrs. Backer: Thank you very much Sir. I apologise and I will move on. We are of the opinion that the issue 'extra judicial killings' and what could reduce extra judicial killings has been skirted around by the Government and not dealt with in a frontal way.

If I could move to ethnic balance because as the Hon. Prime Minister rightly said, that question came up when each of the four services/forces (Sir there are a lot of treats being bandied about here). I am not sure if the Speaker is cognizant of what is going on. It does not seem to be directed at me at the moment but, if per-chance you see me drop.

Mr. Speaker: I will understand.

Mrs. Backer: You will understand. On the issue of ethnic balance as the Hon. Prime Minister rightly said it straddled the all four of the forces/services. We would like to believe that the study that is recommended under the recommendations of the Guyana Defence Force, in other words it is recommended that a proper in-depth study by professions be done- not by the Guyana defence Force or the Guyana Police Force- by professional person or group as to why this ethnic imbalance persists. What could be done to seek to correct it or to make it a more even playing field? We hope, this kind of intervention will have to come from the Government, the Guyana Defence Board or the Minister, we would like to see that when that happen it is not just confined to the Guyana Defence Force but to all the Discipline Forces. A lot of reasons were given, which as the Hon. Prime Minister said would not be reflected in the report but I think there is a general agreement that we need a proper professional study so that we can move forward to once and for all settle what is for many people, a very vexed imbalance.

The area of recruitment and training is covered by recommendations 26 to 27 of the report. There again the Government of the day, while in the report they have agreed with most of these things, we are of the firm opinion that the Government is not doing enough. You are not

going to recruit the best minds if you cannot find innovative ways to raise their salaries and to raise their conditions of work. We all know that donor agencies do not give-or do not usually give money; I cannot make a carte blanche statement - for increase in salaries. The Government will have to find it. They might say: How could we afford it? How could we afford to pay our Disciplined Forces more? Our answer: to that is how could we not afford? We would say to the Government that the ball is in their court. It stops with them. They have to find ways and means of making recruitment; making the Guyana Police Force and other forces attractive. When we get our young men and women, they have to invest in training. Our belief is that the Government of the day is more interested in modernising, that is not bad but they seem to have a very narrow meaning of modernisation. More equipment, more buildings, painting buildings- I saw the Hon. Minister recently opening an arch in New Amsterdam. I doubt that is an off shoot of his responsibility as Minister of Home Affairs. The PPP/C. seems more interested in the acquisition of equipment. That is good, but we say, that in itself is not the most critical thing. The most critical thing is having a well trained, well motivated Guyana Police Force, Guyana Fire Service, Guyana Prison and Guyana Defence Force. That will come from high remuneration, the absence of political intervention. Letting people do the work that they have been trained for, promotion based on merit, and not on whom you know and who knows you. We feel that if that emphasis- and in fact, I think, when the Security Sector Reform Action Plan was brought to a hasty conclusion, was still born so to speak, the British High Commissioner had words to say to that effect. He said the Government seemed more interested in modernisation that holistic reform. We are of that opinion.

Complaints against the police, that is another vexed issue. That could be found in 57 to 61 of the report. Those are the recommendations. When one looks at those recommendations one will see that by and large and in essence Police Complaints Authority must be more autonomous. They must have their own staff, their own investigative capacity; they must be totally independent so that they can properly investigate. How many people-polls seem to be very popular - if we were to do a poll? How many members of the public have any confidence in the Police Complaints Authority? That is the reality, people feel; why should we go there? It is an arm - I am not saying it is under law but that is how it is perceived - of the Guyana Police Force. How can we go to an arm of the Guyana Police Force to complain about the body of the Guyana Police Force? Making the Police Complaints Authority very independent and letting the public understand that, will perhaps result in the Police

Complaints Authority being able to carry out that very important task that they have been tasked with by legislation.

There is also, the issue of oversight. Recommendations 54 to 56 of the report speak about accountability to civilian authority. The Members of the House will be aware that the Standing Committee on Security Sector Reform, having being provided for in the Constitution by Act 5 of 2009, a motion was passed in this House establishing the Standing Committee oversight of the Security sector. We on this side would hope and expect and, in fact, eventually we will demand that this Committee is established forthwith and it begins the important work of oversight. Oversight of the disciplined forces in any country is an absolute necessity if we are speaking about modernisation and transformation which is what we should be speaking about. One cannot speak about transforming the workings of the disciplined forces if it cannot be accompanied by rigid oversight by civilian authority-in this case we have opted for a Parliamentary Committee. We would want to urge that the establishment of that Committee be dispatched so that it could begin this very important work.

Overall I want to say, on behalf of the PNC Reform, that this report contains 164 recommendations, most of which we are saying to this National Assembly has merit. But at the end of the day most of them has to be implemented by the Government of the day, by the Defence Board, by the Minister and by the Heads of these disciplined forces. The big question will be: having taken us approximately six years from the date this report was transmitted to this National Assembly in May of 2004 - we are now in June of 2010 - how long will it take the Government to carry out its mandate under these recommendations that are finally before the House? I want to give the Hon. Member Ms. Africo Selman in responding to the Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh, who is leaving as I speak although he complains that Mr. Ramjattan does the same things, as I get up to speak about him he is fleeing. The Hansard will show that he sought to upbraid her when she spoke about the fact that implementing law is good, we all appreciate that – when I say implementing I mean passing of law - but will the Government go that extra step, which is the real litmus test, to give the law life. That is what remains to be seen.

I want to refer to two simple bits of legislative amendment that could have been done in the past six years; the Hon. Prime Minister said time did not stand still, the Government was doing things. The Government rushed the firearms regulations which my colleague will deal

with and other things were done, just to give you an idea Sir. I will ask you, being the impartial person that we know you are, to judge whether you think life will be given to these recommendations. There is that very simple recommendation about the fire hydrants. For years the question has been asked: who has legal responsibility? Is it the fire service, the Mayor and City Council, or the Guyana Water Inc.? The recommendation here, since 2004, which the Government had sight of was that pass legislation so that we know. So that when the fire comes - and I see our leading fireman is down to speak after me - when the fire comes we know who is responsible for the functioning. That is a simple non-controversial piece of legislation which I am sure could be attached to some existing legislation. Why has that not been done? It is things like that that gives us the sense of foreboding that despite this, this is going to go into some basket somewhere.

Then, there is another simple one: Community Policing, of course this is one of the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs pet project. In the report they said clearly, the commissioners, and I understand that we have two sitting members here, the Hon. Attorney General who was at the time a committee member and the aspiring Attorney General, the AAG, Mr. Anil Nandalall, who was also a member of that committee. When they spoke about Community Policing, they made the point that “there is need to legitimise the practice of Community Policing within some legislative framework, so as, to ensure that Community Policing functions are institutionalised strictly supervised and monitored. It is simple you are not going to have to invent the wheel but regarding that one do you know what the Hon. Minister told the Committee and that is one of the meeting he actually attended. He said: although they are not in a legislative framework they are strictly supervised and monitored by the Guyana Police Force, the National Executive, the Division Executive bodies as well as the Minister of Home Affairs.

Now what is the Minister of Home Affairs doing supervising, regularising and having oversight of a function that must be the concern and under control of the Commissioner of Police? Those are just two examples; there are others, to show that they are very simple legislative amendments, as the Prime Minister said time did not stand still, what could have been done, which could have given us hope. Although belatedly that the Government of the day was interested in a genuine reform and transformation of our disciplined services. We on this side of the House support in essence the report; there are a few things we did not agree to, my learned colleague Mr. Williams will touch on that, but to us the proof is in the eating. The cake has been baked and it has been presented to this National Assembly and we wait-

not holding our breaths - to see if the Government of the day, six years later yes, will implement thing, particularly those things that do not need large infusion of funds. They are many of them. The Government of the day is on notice that we have begun the clock and it is ticking as we wait for you to perform. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Minister of Transport and Hydraulics [Mr. Benn]: Mr. Speaker, I rise to note and to welcome to the Hon. House the final report of the Disciplined Forces Commission, a work which has been in progress since 2004. In so doing I want to, like the Hon. Member before me, note to the impartiality of the Hon. Prime Minister in chairing this Commission and the review. Particularly his forbearance and sometimes, for some of us, degenerating into pageantry in allowing for repeats of issues ad nauseum. Though this was, in some cases, exasperating for some of us it allowed for the opportunity to fully review, on a number of occasions, all the issues which were raised in the report itself from 2004 and all issues, remarks and criticism which were raised in the Committee.

The issue of Disciplined Forces policing security for newly independent countries, countries like ourselves which has a diverse multi-cultural, multi-ethnic background is an important and fundamental one. We know this given the fact that we come from a colonial background where the divide and rule paradigm was paramount in the way our country was run. Our country was run, in colonial times, on the premise of dividing our people - ruling out of that maxim. This issue has particular resonance today because it has come down to us in terms of our experiences, in terms of our perceived conflicts, in terms of our disagreements; maybe through specialisation at various levels in society in civil life, in the economy of our various groups in our Country. The new paradigm today of young modern countries is that we unite the people to be able to rule and to secure the livelihood and economic success of all groups through uniting all the people, through full participation of all groups in the society to allow for a successful and viable country going forward. We would all be secure and safe, particularly if our women, children and neighbours are safe, if all the other groups in our society, different as they may be from us individually as a group if those persons too, are safe.

Fundamentally, I think, the thrust and the intent of overall of the work of this Disciplined Forces Commission is the question of having a holistic approach to all the issues which would allow us to have a united, viable, secure country. This work documented, represents all

the tasks that we have to do and all the issues that we have to confront with respect to achieving that goal.

Mr. Speaker, we can point to the examples good and bad internationally which would point to our continuing on this course and on the work of recognising the recommendations of the Disciplined Forces Commission. We could point on the issues in developing the new South African Army- the new South African Army is not the army which went into Mozambique and Angola, and tried to destroy the East Madagascar Current (EMC) and their supporters who were fighting to develop a new country. Today we have a new South African Army which is working and which is developing on behalf of all the people of South Africa. We have the example of the Indian Army. I did have through the benefit of the Parliament on our visit to India for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Meeting in India when we went to the Rajputana the seat of the President of India. It was enthralling and exalting to see different groupings, you had Rajputs, Gurpas, and other different groups who participated together to secure the President of India and the sovereignty of India. They all grouped together in securing a new Indian army. We have also had the unfortunate experience, the genocide in Rowanda, which resulted in more than eleven per cent of their population - nearly a million people were killed which arose out of issues aside for the struggle over land the struggle which did not result in the securing of the livelihood and the economic development of different groups in the society.

All that we are working on here is intended towards the direction of assuring that we have a secure and safe country through our Disciplined Forces for all the people in Guyana. We are aware that there are challenges. It has been pointed out by the Prime Minister that some of the work of the Committee has been overtaken in some cases by time and events. Many of these proposals are under active development and implementation. I want to recommend that all members of Parliament, including the Hon. Member before me and all the persons who served on the Committee pay attention, and yes to critic and to participate in the oversight Committees, to ensure that all of these recommendations are kept on track. That we have achieved the result that we all so much desire. Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk specifically about the issue of ethnic balance in the report in respect to the Guyana Police Force. I think they are recommendations 38 to 45.

3.48 p.m.

And these recommendations for the Police Force where they have consonants in the Guyana Defence Force, they are expanded particularly with respect to the Guyana Defence Force. The question relates specifically to recommendation 98 for the Guyana Defence Force, the public information campaign, which should highlight the inclusionary ethnic recruitment and retention policy of the GDF in terms of:

- (a) The need for greater Indo-Guyanese representation in the interest of achieving greater ethnic balance
- (b) The benefits of military training to individuals, communities and the nation at large
- (c) The non-exclusionary measures such as the provision of a Bill which caters to an ethnically diverse military population
- (d) Due respect and regard for diverse religious practices
- (e) To secure from all officers including Senior Ranks an attitude of respect for lower ranks

At recommendation 99, there is the issue of the recruitment of a multi-ethnic panel which should be informed to exemplify an ethnically diverse GDF and to conduct recruitment in all the Regions.

While it is stated somewhere in the Report that the issue of quota may be constitutionally invalid, I think that if we, as a country, have an objective where no racial or ethnic grouping should not dominate any critical institution of the State by more than 60%, ultimately, we would achieve a certain optimal balance with respect to what we may want to achieve here. This is particularly with respect to security, protection of our sovereignty and development of the country. Further, it would be useful for other institutions, but we are speaking here about the Disciplined Forces.

It is my belief that we are hurting ourselves in different ways because on the one hand, it is a natural outcome of our experience as a country. A natural outcome of our experience as a people and given the makeup of our people that we have, maybe, specialisation of one grouping or the other in certain institutions such as the Police Force or the GDF. And that this specialisation in some ways is injurious to the group that specialises as such - that is dominant in the activities - to the exclusion of the other groups. It is either a benign exclusion or a deliberate exclusion in some ways that is injurious to those who are dominant in the activity. It is also injurious to those who are excluded. This is a fundamental issue that we have and it sometimes lead to feelings where persons may feel that they have a particular

right, ethnic reserve or space to an activity which they undertake. On the other hand, the other grouping may feel that they are completely incapable. The experience and the facts in other countries and other jurisdictions, as I mentioned before, would belie those assumptions. Fundamentally, I want to stress that we may want to have as a general goal for critical institutions of the State, particularly military, security and security organisations that no one grouping should dominate by more than 60%.

I am happy that the Hon. Member, Mrs. Backer, who spoke before me and agreed that a study on the question of ethnic balances on why there is not effective participation by various grouping as pointed out in the Report, is necessary and that it is important to have this study done as quickly as possible. [Mrs. Backer: Not I agreed, the People's National Congress Reform 1-Guyana, agreed.] Thank you, that the PNCR-1G is in full agreement with this position.

The Hon. Member did speak about the Government having an undue focus on issues of modernising and spoke to assets, equipment, buildings, vehicles, etc. I want to say that from my fairly cursory and not properly informed examination or appreciation of the issue, that there is a holistic approach to the issues of the development of the Guyana Police Force and Guyana Defence Force and all of the disciplinary forces. A great effort has been made towards providing the equipment and the Hon. Minister Rohee, himself, may have further details on all the complaints with respect to rundown police stations, rundown prisons and why rundown vehicles and equipment and all these things had to be procured. And also that the approach to procuring all the things to improve the Disciplined Forces had to address both equipment, but also for issues with respect to the management of the force and the training of officers and ranks both in the GPF and the GDF I am sure that the Hon. Members on the other side are aware that there is a constant stream of GDF and GPF officers who are doing courses nationally and overseas – whether regionally or internationally. The approach has not always been simply an issue of fixing a building or an asset, but also in terms of the persons who are involved in doing the job which relates to security.

The issue of salaries, of course, is one that pervades the entire public service, civil service and even at the level of those who work in commercial enterprises. We all aspire and want more and hope that we can get more, but it relates to being able, nationally, to producing more in an optimal fashion and in an efficient way. Really and fundamentally, even though marginal and other adjustments might be made on recommendation of the Ministry of

Finance, we can only pay what we earn, what we can afford and out of what we produce. This problem is one which goes right across all activities in a country and we have to work harder to produce more to be able to pay more.

The issues in relation to oversight, and as I said, fundamentally, that the Parliamentary Oversight would be there with respect to the Committee that should be established. The issue in relation to the oversight of the Minister with respect to the Police Force or a Community Policing Group, I am completely unaware as to how the Hon. Member may want to confuse oversight with running or supervising of a Community Policing Group. My belief and understanding is that the issue was raised on the question of oversight. There are various levels and mechanisms of oversight and certainly oversight has to be exercised by a Minister. The Minister has ministerial responsibility and oversight for all the activities under his remit with respect to his agency. The question of any oversight with respect to the Police force and a mere Community Policing Group could not be put into question in the discussion for which the Hon. Member had introduced before.

There are a lot of born-again and revivalist's persons appearing in the press making all kinds of statements out there with respect to their recent appointments or ongoing activities, but I want to say that if you are in the activity; if you are in the activity, you have to be wholly, fully and aggressively dealing with the issues in relation to the activity and not assume or attempt to shoot down an entire enterprise because of expediency for reasons of optics.

In closing, again I would like to thank the Hon. Member Prime Minister for his forbearance in working on this very important enterprise in the case of this Report on this Committee on the Conclusion of the Consideration of the Disciplined Forces Commission. I want to thank the Members of the Opposition who served on the Committee for being particularly incisive, at times, in respect of the recommendations being made in the Committee. The debate was fairly robust, if languorous at times, but I want to thank them for their insights and intuition sometimes. I know that they too have a sense that we are all at risk if we do not all work together to ensure that these recommendations come to reality. With that, I want to commend the Report to the House for its deliberate consideration. I thank you. [Applause]

Assembly suspended at 4.02 p.m.

Assembly resumed at 5.17 p.m.

Mr. Trotman: Mr. Speaker it is customary whenever we are considering Reports from Select or Standing Committees, for Members of the House to indulge in much praising of each other. Compliments flow and I have heard my colleague, Mrs. Backer, complimenting the Hon. Prime Minister for his stewardship. I see him bowing not knowing what I am about to say. Yet, complimenting the Hon. Prime Minister for the stewardship of the Committee and no doubt for the forty or more times, the Committee met or attempted to meet, and I should add that there were many times that meeting had to be aborted for lack of quorum and some afternoons the Prime Minister with Members of the Opposition only, commenced or conducted those meetings. There is no doubt indeed, that there was, generally, a spirit of camaraderie that existed within that Committee. We disagreed on many areas and I would like to think that if had we dealt with many of the issues with more alacrity, we would have had a Report, I believe, long before today's date.

This morning when I considered what it was that I was going to say, I thought to myself that in a manner of speaking, this Report being presented this afternoon signals the end of an era. In May, 2003, His Excellency the President after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition, agreed to establish a Disciplined Forces Commission. Thereafter, this House passed a motion giving effect to Terms of Reference (ToR) and so forth and there was much discussion.

However, the fact that seven years after we are now signing off on the recommendations made, is an indictment in itself and I believe that Mr. Lance Carberry made a reference to this on the last occasion that an extension was sought in this House. Today, it gives me no pleasure at all to speak even though I was a Member of the first and second Select Committees. I recall that other Members of the House including Mr. Anil Nandlall, Mr. Bernard De. Santos- Senior Counsel, S.C. and Mr. Charles Ramson, S.C. were also involved as Commissioners. I believe that Mr. De Santos was the Police Force's Legal Advisor appearing before the Commission. Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan made presentations on behalf of the Guyana Bar Association. I, then wearing another hat, presented on behalf of the PNCR1-G, its presentations. For us, this was a long journey and I see this afternoon's proceedings not as a welcoming event, but more as a requiem. If one were to consider all of the Reports that have gone before, starting from the one which you, Mr. Speaker, had Co-Chaired that I referred to quite often, borders on National Security. There was the Simmons Group Report, more recently we had the death of the Security Sector Reform Action plan- there was the very infamous drug strategy/master plan that came to an end recently – 2005 to 2009 - stillborn.

The record speaks for itself and that is that none of these Reports and none of the recommendations or very few, if any, gets implemented. For me, as I have said, I come to bury and to mourn the death of another Report because I am not at all convinced that this one is going anywhere. If we were to consider the words of Mr. Ian Chang, he was not yet Chief Justice, but Justice of Appeal at the time, in the introduction to the Interim Report which was mandated to be delivered by December 2003, he said:

“We should note, however, that policing cannot and should not be separated in a simplistic way from other elements of the criminal justice system. It was made very clear to the Commission that many of the failings laid by the public at the door of the Police may in fact be problems in the wider criminal justice system. Inordinate delays in holding inquests, delays and failings in the Court system and weaknesses in the communication between the Police, the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and the Courts have led to a crisis of confidence in the whole system. Changes to policing will not have the intended impact if they are not complemented by major changes in the wider criminal justice system.”

The point being made here is that it was only within the last fortnight a sitting Judge of the High Court, Justice Roxanne George, based on the promptings of Mr. Basil Williams and representations made by him about prisoners languishing according to them and I hope that I am not crossing that divide between *sub judice* and acceptable language, but comments were made that the entire criminal justice system appears to have been broken. To me, if seven years after these words still ring true, it means that all of our 43 meetings have come to naught and so, for me, we have come to bury and not raise this Report to the public.

We in the Alliance For Change are all in favour of Police Reform as well as reform of the Disciplined Forces, but we are not convinced and have not evinced an intention on the part of this Administration to do much better. Since this Report was written and presented to this nation and to this National Assembly, we have had scores of suspect killings. I would not want to say that they are extra-judicial or unlawful, though I have my opinion that some are, we have had the very recent incident which Mrs. Backer spoke about and I hope that that matter is dealt with quickly. Kelvin Fraser who was accused, perhaps, of molesting girls at a street corner; that is the Report that the Guyana Police Force has issued that they responded to a call of such a nature. Young men will be young men and they will, at times, be at some

corners, they will tease and tantalise each other and call girls and so forth, some of them may even have some marijuana with them or they may not. Even if they did have a joint of marijuana, that should not lead to death. I believe that the time has come to reform the laws dealing with possession of small quantities of marijuana.

Since this Report was laid in this House, we have had the death of Dweve Ramdass, another matter which is *sub judice* and so I will not go further than that, except to say that the Coast Guards have been charged with his murder and have confessed. Since this Report has been laid, we have had allegations of torture against Twoyn Thomas where his genitalia were badly burnt. We have had the case of missing Ricky Jainarine and countless others. I underscore the point that despite all of our deliberations, not much has changed when one considers the words of Justice Chang about major changes having to be made in the wider criminal justice system in December 2003. We are no nearer to police reform than we were seven years ago. And so, the Alliance For Change, takes comfort in the fact, if at all, that at least this part of the work is over. We shudder to think that if it took seven years to consider the recommendations, how many centuries it will take to implement them? That is our concern. Some, no doubt, have been implemented and we have seen some changes. But if in this day and age, we can still have incidents leading to death in circumstances that, perhaps, ought not to lead to death as in the case recently, we are no better off than we were a decade ago.

A few months ago, the Hon. Member, Mr. Everall Franklin, brought a motion to this House, calling on the House to agree that the Police Force be allowed to adopt less lethal methods and be trained in the use of non lethal weapons. I remember the debate well. Some contributors spoke objectively, others accused the Opposition of encouraging criminality and supporting criminals and running the argument that fire will be met with fire. It was to these situations that we were referring when we said that police officers have to be trained, equipped and have a range of options than a shotgun responding to a young man making cat-calls to a young lady. There has to be or there must be and I have no doubt, better options. Our lack of enthusiasm, I have no doubt and I am making bold to say that is shared because if one were to listen to the other speakers before me, there is a lack of enthusiasm and an apathy surrounding this entire Report. I am sure that Mr. Anil Nandlall, were he allowed to speak and I couple his name in this presentation, would have agreed with me that much of his work and much of the work done seven or eight years ago, is languishing like most other Reports today. It is, perhaps, the reason why he was not given the opportunity to speak this afternoon.

We are all in favour of reform, but we are yet to be convinced, given the track record of other Reports and the continuing high handedness of some members of the Police Force. In one eyewitness account, young men were put to lie face down on the ground and a truck driver was encouraged to roll over them. That is what is happening in Guyana and I can speak from personal experiences about an incident where an officer threatened to shoot me. I spoke about it and I think I raised it also. That is what is happening to ordinary citizens on a daily basis for little things like traffic offences; not having bicycle lights and so the confidence that we need to have in the Guyana Police Force is lost.

Before I end, I would like to refer to the Minority Report, if I can term it that, of Ms. Maggie Burn of Northern Ireland who was the Opposition's nominee on that Commission. While she took issue in the main with extra-judicial killings and police interference in the work of the Police Force, in particular, she made brief and general remarks, but though general, still very pertinent. She said:

“This appendix is restricted to commenting on more serious reservations on issues included in the Report. It does not include my concerns regarding a number of key issues that are not even addressed in the Interim Report. For example, there is need for a new beginning to policing to create public confidence in the institution and the changing of the name from Force to Service as proposed by the police themselves with all that that might imply.”

They are not a force; they are providing a service and even the Police Force recommended that their name be changed eight years ago. Today we are still seeing the display, threat and the use of force by police officers, some of whom are meant and placed there to protect and serve. She goes on to say:

“We are not seeing in this Report the contribution that human rights principles could make to effective policing. Instead I have concentrated my remarks on these other matters.”

In other words the Report itself had certain deficiencies. It was our task as Members of this August Assembly to take it, distill it, refine it and present to the public and to the various Heads of the Disciplined Forces working documents. Since then, as I said, we have been overtaken by different master strategy plans, by a failed Security Sector Action Reform Plan, we have never heard anything of the Simmons Report, we have never heard anything

thereafter of the CARICOM Security Task Force Report and we have heard very little, if anything at all, on the Border National Security Report. This is not a criticism against anyone in particular, but an indictment against a Government that is not taking crime, security and public safety as seriously as it ought to. For us, as I said, we see this as a requiem and we are grateful, at least, that we can say those seven years here on, we have been able to bring an end to this sad saga. A saga which began when there was a proliferation of killings. I believe in one year over 62 people died. Unfortunately, many were police officers themselves. So we had introduced into Guyana, something akin to the killing fields and it would appear that we are slowly, but surely drifting back to those days and no one seems to care.

5.34 p.m.

We will reserve our endorsement of this Report and are prepared to revisit it, if and when we see the Minister of Home Affairs takes an active role and throws off the shackles which are being placed on him to restrain himself, and to introduce genuine reform, a reform that has the hands of the Government off of the functioning of the Guyana Police Force and one in which those who speak out, whether they be slow or fast people, are not condemned, but their criticisms and critiques are taken onboard and are considered carefully. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Rohee]: I rise to support the motion by the Hon. Prime Minister to have this Report on the Discipline Services Commission be adopted in this Hon. House. I do so with a tremendous sense of confidence and optimism in respect to the future of the joint services in this country. I reject outright and unequivocal all the indications of doom and gloom, every one of the misrepresentations based on the lack of information and facts by those who seem to want to give the impression that they are informed rather than uninformed about the state of play within the joint services *vis-a-vis* the Disciplined Forces Commission Report.

It seems as though that it is in vogue these days, it is the flavour of the day, to wallow in negativism and destructive criticism of the forces which are vested with the authority, under the law, to uphold the public safety and security of the citizens of this country. Police bashing is not going to get this country anywhere, and those who prefer to jump on the pedestal or the *high horse* of bashing the Guyana Police Force and all law enforcement agencies of this country, I believe, will, in a not too distant future, regret that they ever took that position. I

reject, out of hand, these rather loose statements and innuendos which were made on the basis of making statements in respect to the Report which is before us.

I support the statement made by the Hon. Prime Minister to the effect that while it may have taken a considerable time for us to reach where we are today, the fact of the matter is that a lot has been done, in so far as to police reform and the modernisation of the Guyana Police Force. I, sometimes, wonder why it is, that notwithstanding the fact that so much publicity is given to the steps, initiatives and measures which are being undertaken by the Guyana Police Force and the Ministry of Home Affairs, that persons prefer to ignore those positive developments and focus only on the negative. Perhaps this is part of the political posturing, playing to the gallery as it were, to engage the sympathies of persons who are disaffected, for one reason or the other, as a result of the actions or inactions of the law enforcement agencies. I would not want to engage in self-flagellation because that is precisely what I have been hearing since we started this debate on this motion. All the Hon. Members who were part of the Select Committee engaged in a litany of criticisms of themselves which amounted to self-flagellation. They were Members of a Committee which they preferred to beat up on, rather than to speak in an objective and a positive fashion. The Committee has achieved its objective and that is the most fundamental point which we need to bear in mind.

A song and dance was created about the attendance of the Minister of Home Affairs at these meetings. What did the Hon. Member say? The Hon. Member said that it amounted to the lack of respect to the Committee and not attending to the work of the Committee. But I want to inform the Hon. Member and this House that while I may have been delinquent in attending one hundred per cent of the meetings, I was not delinquent in attending to the needs of the people. [**Mrs. Backer:** What people?] They are the Guyanese people. I have not been delinquent in attending to the needs of the Guyanese people, and that is important. Sometimes we have to make choices and establish our priorities. I have faith that the Opposition would have represented its case quite effectively in the Committee. And I have full faith that those Members on this side of the House would have represented their views quite effectively as well. Where do we go in making such a point about attendance and non-attendance?

Of the seventy-one recommendations made by the Commission, in respect of the Guyana Police Force, seven of them have been implemented and I could say, without any fear of contradiction, that quite a number of them could be considered as a work in progress.

The Hon. Member, Mrs. Backer, spoke quite extensively, and I would not say lucidly, on the question of training of the Guyana Police Force. But I believe that adequate publicity was given to the launch of a comprehensive training programme under the Citizens Security Programme, funded by the International Development Bank, which was launched a year ago; a programme in which training of trainers within the Guyana Police Force, in twenty-six modules, is currently taking place. It is one of the most extensive, profound and interesting training courses ever undertaken in the history of the Guyana Police Force. These courses are making tremendous impact within the Guyana Police Force, and it is important for us to highlight it. What I find amazing is that this is a training programme for the national Police Force of this country. It is a training programme to benefit the citizens of this country when the Force completes it. For the Opposition benches to ignore this significant training programme is a grave and most upsetting disappointment.

The evolving situation in respect of public safety and security in this country imposes upon the Guyana Police Force and other law enforcement agencies in this country to make progressive adjustments as they proceed with their lawful duties. This is precisely what has been happening. The Report speaks about improving the intelligence work of the Guyana Police Force. When we move to improve this, when we move to establish a central agency, when we move to pass laws to change the architecture of this country so that the law enforcement agencies can be much more effective through the use of technology, there is resistance to this, even opposition to this in this country, from the Opposition benches.

The Citizens Security Programme which we have told this House *ad nauseam*, which we have spoken about publicly on several occasions, has three components: the modernisation of the Guyana Police Force, the modernisation of the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the community action component. All these are programmes which are moving swiftly and several things are happening. The Citizens Security Programme – I want to repeat once again – was completed in 2006. May I add that the Disciplined Forces Commission Report which was adopted and published in 2004, two years afterward the IDB-funded Citizens Security Programme took into consideration that Report, the Simmons' Report and many other studies which were done in this country on the law enforcement agencies, principally the Guyana Police Force. All of those works which were done, including the Discipline Forces Commission Report, found to be reflected in the Citizens Security Programme. Many of the recommendations in the Citizens Security Programme are recommendations which coincided with the recommendations in the Disciplined Forces Commission Report and the Simmons'

Report. So when people stand and glibly ask, “what about this other Report”, they must go on the internet, as they would tend to do, and find the website of the Ministry of Home Affairs or the Guyana Police Force where they will find the Citizens Security Programme which embraces and takes into account all these studies which were done. Do not let us glibly ask, “what about that Report, is it not been implemented?” The Reports are currently being implemented through the Citizens Security Programme which has these three arms. Much has been done from 2004 to 2010. How many Bills have not been brought to this House to change the architecture of the landscape of this country? How many actions have not been undertaken by the law enforcement agencies? This is precisely where I believe our focus must be.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, got up and asked, in the course of his presentation, what about the Caribbean Task Force recommendation which was made? That Task Force and its recommendations have now being subsumed in the Council for National Security and Law Enforcement. It has now been consummated within the CARICOM Committee Council for National Security and Law Enforcement. That has long passed and it just shows that Hon. Members who stand to speak on these matters do not read and inform themselves, but prefer to speak on the basis of criticisms which have no foundation whatsoever.

After the British Security Reform Action Plan was jettisoned, the Government made the point publicly that the recommendations in the Security Reform Action Plan will be implemented by it with its own resources. It said that and it is committed to that. If we are to return and visit the recommendations that are in that Action Plan and examine carefully the steps that the Government is taking in respect of police reform we will see that many of those recommendations are being implemented.

As I speak, under the very Citizen Security Programme, a study is now being conducted by a group of Guyanese, with respect to the Guyana Prison Service, on whether they will make recommendation that it will continue to be called the Guyana Prison Service or the Guyana Correctional Service. Let us await the results. But the fact of the matter is that work is being done. This cannot be done mainly by the Minister of Home Affairs, because if it is done mainly by him, I anticipate that the Minister will be accused of political interference. Let the experts do the work. I understand the Opposition has been invited to some of the consultations on this same matter. When we are talking, let us speak the entire truth and not half of the truth.

All over the world police forces are faced with challenge. All over the world law enforcement agencies are faced with challenges. I challenge one to point to me a country where law enforcement agencies, particularly where a police force, exists, where there are no challenges and where there are no criticisms. One should, therefore, ask oneself whether one is not seeking and looking after Utopia. Is one not seeking after Utopia where it does not exist? The Guyana Police Force is no exception from other police forces around the world which are confronted with these challenges. These recommendations, in this Report, which are reflected, I emphasise, in the Citizens Security Programme, I believe, will go a far way to help the Guyana Police Force to confront these challenges like police forces around the world which are engaging in similar modernisation processes to deal with the challenges which they are confronted with.

There will always be a cry. There will always be a need to improve the effectiveness, the professionalism, and the human rights dimension of law enforcement agencies. That is a cry that one can hear throughout the world. Why do we want to make Guyana an exception? The challenge is really to improve the effectiveness of the Guyana Police Force and other law enforcement agencies such as the prisons as well as to improve the professionalism of these organisations and to ensure that there is that balance between law enforcement and the civil, political and human rights of the citizens of the country. There has to be that balance. It cannot be one way to the detriment of another. One has to ensure that there is always this harmonious balance between law enforcement agencies, law enforcement and respect for the human, civil and political rights of the citizens of any country. Sometimes this is a very difficult balance to maintain because whenever there are infractions or misjudgement on the part of the law enforcement agencies, the emphasis would tend to lean on the question of human rights and civil rights of the citizens. Take for example, the case of Jamaica, where this is a classic case which is playing out in this respect. How to balance these two elements is always a major challenge for any administration.

The other challenge is the question of perception versus reality. There is always a contest between perception and reality, so much so that some people say that the perception is the reality. When the Guyana Police Force released the facts based on the reported serious crimes, some people contested those. They asked, "What about the unreported, or what about non-reported occurrences?" Therefore, when we look at the reality, it must be reflected in the statistics which come out from the law enforcement agencies which our Government is compelled by virtue of it being party to several covenants at the United Nations, it has to

send that information to it because of its reporting obligations. Those are the information which are used and examined by experts around the world to assess where we are in this country. That is why, only recently, the just published Global Peace Index which shows the extent to which political stability exists in each country, which is an NGO incidentally...

[**Mr. Trotman:** It is based in North Korea] If you want the website I can give it to you. You seem to know about it already, but you choose not to speak about it. [**Mr.**

Trotman: But it is a North Korea firm] I do not know about North Korea. Guyana, in terms of ranking, is just six places below the United States of America, out of one hundred and forty-nine countries. Therefore, we must speak about those positive reporting indices of our country. Even the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) countries do not figure in the survey or in the report which was just issued. I believe, as Guyanese, we must be proud of these reports which reflect these positive developments of our country. We must be proud of those things.

I want to submit that in the context of the Report, which is before us this afternoon, transformation and modernisation are already taking place. They are taking place – if I may speak more broadly – in the economy, financial sector, agricultural sector, technological sector and communication sector - the whole country! It is not only the security sector, the entire country is going through modernisation and transformation. We spoke about many of these things during the budget debates and I do not want to repeat some of them. I believe in the debate which is coming up soon we will hear on the question of food security and what is taking place.

The Hon. Member raised the question of firearms, and the haste with which we, I quote and unquote, “rush this through”. On 29th July 2009, I wrote to the Hon. Prime Minister, drawing to his attention the 25th Meeting of the Special Select Committee held on 19th June, 2009 my concern in respect of the recommendations 61 – 65. I drew to the Chairman’s attention that I had some reservations and recommendations to make in respect of those recommendations. In that letter, which I drew the Chairman’s attention, let me just quote quickly what I had said:

“Further, I reminded the Committee that Mr. Ramson, in his independent interpretation of the process governing the grant of firearm licences, argues in favour of the marriage of the two statutes, that is, the Firearm Act and the Police Act, both of which, in his view, touch on matters pertaining to the

security of the state through the maintenance of peace and good order which the Commissioner of Police must ensure is done subject to the general orders and directions of the Minister.”

6.04 p.m.

The Report, at page 138, and I would like to quote from it, says:

"it can readily be seen from Section 18(1) and the 45(1)(b) that the Parliament did not itself prescribe a person to be the authority for the granting of fire licences but empowered the Minister to do so by regulation."

Parliament must have intended that the Minister himself should not have the direct statutory function of granting firearm licences, but rather should be statutorily responsible for appointing a fit and proper person to do so."

In the regulations that were published in the Official Gazette on the 10th of April 2010, and incidentally. The point I want to make is that when I wrote the Prime Minister on the 16th July, referring to a meeting on the 19th June it was only 10 months after; we brought this amendment to the regulations of the Firearms Act. So there was no speed or haste in this, it was done properly and in a timely fashion. In the Official Gazette on the 10th April, 2010 the Commissioner of Police and the Commanders of the Divisions remained the prescribed officers for the receiving of the licences, and the granting of the licences. At the end of the day we all know that the Firearms Act, and this report from the Commission, these individuals, whether the Commissioner of Police or the Divisional Commanders fall under the general orders and direction of the Minister of Home Affairs.

I do not wish to speak more on this issue. I issued an extensive statement on this matter. So there is no question as was indicated in a press conference where I saw Mr. Basil Williams and someone else from the Thursday press conference speaking on the role of the Minister vis-à-vis this new regulation that was passed. If they want to spin this matter to achieve political ends there is nothing I can do about that. The most I can do about that is to give the Government appreciation of this matter so that the people out there are able to judge on the basis of the two views that are out there, not only one view. We believe that people are intelligent enough to judge what makes or does not make sense. This is what I believe must happen.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Rohee: Finally, the question of Community Policing. I think the Hon. Member, with all due respect, gave half, or to be a little more generous to her, three quarters, of the interpretation of this matter. Under the *Laws of Guyana*, Chapter 16:01 of the Police Act, Section 83 Parts XV, which addresses the question of rural constables, it says:

"the rural constabulary shall be maintained under this Act and shall consist of the subordinate officers of the rural constabulary and rural constables as hereinafter provided".

And then it mentions, what are the objectives of the rural constabulary. It goes on further to say at Section 88, and I quote:

"subject to the provisions herein before contained, the rural constabulary shall consist of the number and grades of subordinate officers of the rural constabulary, and rural constables from time to time directed by the Minister."

But we have to go to Part II Section 7 which says:

"the Commissioner shall, subject to the general orders and direction of the Minister, have the command and superintendence of the Force, and he shall be responsible to the Minister for Peace and Good Order throughout Guyana, for the efficient administration and government of the Force and the proper expenditure of all public monies appropriated for the service there off".

We have 4,442 members of Community Policing Groups around this country. Over 4000 members of Community Policing Groups across this country many of them are sworn Rural Constables with precepts. If they are sworn Rural Constables with precepts they fall under the Police Act. As such they fall under the supervision of the Commissioner of Police by extension. Through the Minister, who gives general directions and orders to the Commissioner, with respect to Rural Constables? This is precisely where the Minister of Home Affairs comes in. I am surprise that someone who has been edified in law does not understand such a simple matter.

I wish to give my unconditional and unequivocal support to this Motion because, as I said from the beginning, I have full confidence in the Guyana Police Force and the law enforcement agencies to ensure that law and order of this country, that public safety and security of this country, is kept in safe hands. I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. B. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I think it is seven years later, we are here. And my Hon. Friend to my right is wondering what she is going to do now with the free Mondays because for the last seven years, they were taken away for the work of this select committee.

The work of this Committee in fact had its precursor, in the last Parliament under the chairmanship of the Hon. Member DeSantos, which is where the seven years came in. There are certain considerations that really arise from the work of this Committee. Perhaps, the work of this committee raises certain questions about the conduct of business in a select committee. For example, can a member of the committee preempt the committee and publish the work of the committee in other forum without the consent of the committee? Secondly, could a member of a committee take the work of a committee and pass it into law contrary to the recommendations that are under study? A lot of questions are raised about the viability of having a select committee if members, especially Government Ministers are going to treat the work of that committee with such impunity and disregard. I had wondered whether there wasn't some sanction in place as had been attempted in the case of the Hon. Member Ramjattan in a similar circumstance.

Mr. Speaker, like my colleague, we wish to commend the Hon. Prime Minister for the manner in which he chaired the work of this Select Committee. Indeed, he could not complain about the support he got from all three Members of the People's National Congress-Reform represented in that Committee. In fact it is safe to say that the PNCR saved the day in that Committee because if you look at the attendance register, we do not wish to get into the details, you will find that many afternoons, at many meetings, the quorum was the Prime Minister Chair, Mrs. Riehl, Mrs. Backer and Mr. Williams bringing up the rear. On the other occasions there would be a visit by the Hon. Member Ramsaran; the Hon. Member Robeson Benn was more consistent than he was. It was only after we raised the question of their attendance that we saw in the last couple of months the Members Ramsaran and Robeson Benn attempting to take part in the work of the Committee. The People's National Congress Reform had a vested interest in the work of this Committee. We were really the cause for the work of the Disciplined Forces Commission being occasioned. In fact I recall that we were so

instrumental that the Hon. Member Mr. Corbin brought Ms. Maggie Burn out of Ireland to show you how concerned and interested the People's National Congress-Reform was, has been, and continues to be, with the spate of deaths; the numerous young men that were killed, and were being killed, in this country, around that time. We did not get the type of terms of reference we would have fully wanted but... [Mr. Neendkumar: What was your role in the Agricola massacre?] Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the Hon. Member is saying over there.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let us have some order please.

Mr. Williams: That is something he cannot say in the corridor. The point in fact is that this PPP Government had to be brought kicking and screaming to the work of this Committee and also to the work of the Disciplined Forces Commission.

What is even more instructive is that even though the Hon. Member Minister Rohee has been saying that work has been going on all the time during the seven years, what we find. We find that the international community, the major countries and the developed countries, have been recently calling on this Government to hold an inquiry into these self-same killings of Guyanese people over several years. That is what is true. And the PNC has been calling ad nauseam for inquiries into such killings; on many occasions we have been calling for and agitated for that. Really, it is poetic justice now that the Government has been called on to hold these inquiries. I don't know what spin they are talking about; that inquiries can't be held known now and all of that. But that is a different matter. The point in fact is that the People National Congress-Reform has always been in the forefront fighting for justice for the Guyanese people.

It is in our trust for justice that we have this Committee. We do not have difficulties with most of the recommendations. Even though they've said they were implementing again we have an extra judicial killing in this young man. Another illustration of the fact that they have not been doing any work is the case with the coroner's inquest. All these things continue to surface after seven years despite the plea of the Government that things are happening, and a lot of transformation is already taking place in the entire country.

But, Mr. Speaker, the justice system is broken. My hon. friend mentioned that. When you look at the second recommendation in the Disciplined Forces Report, which speaks to the investigative capacity of the Guyana Police Force, that the investigative capabilities of the

Guyana police force should be strengthened; we see that that has not happened after seven years. It has not. We have poor investigations still being conducted by the Guyana Police Force, or nothing at all. Most cases in the criminal arena rely on confessions or alleged confessions, which basically is a 'lift up and knock down' of the Guyanese in custody, or torture, or other acts of violence perpetrated to get them to sign statements. In fact only recent, the Judge of the High Court, Madam Justice George, in a recent case of two murder accused, lamented the quality of the police investigations in that case. Both men were freed. She lamented the poor investigation; nothing at all was done, yet two young men were charged, and they were in prison for six years awaiting trial. So this system is broken, and therefore we do not see any transformation in the Guyana Police Force in terms of its investigative capacity.

Further, when you look at this question of firearms, for example, the Hon. Member gave some story a short while ago about why he pre-empted the work of the Committee. What was the mischief that Commission was attempting to deal with in respect to firearms? The fact of the matter of the mischief was political interference in the firearms issuance process. In other words, it was felt that the proliferation of guns in our society was due to the Minister, at the time, issuing fire arm licences. I will not say willy-nilly but I should say, in unprecedented numbers.

If I might respectfully refer the Hon. Members to the Report on Page 147 this is exactly what is said in the majority opinion. In fact one should know that the Commission has five Commissioners and so if there was a dissenting opinion it was four in favour and one against. It says here:

“Concerns have been expressed about the manner in which firearm licences are being granted and the involvement of the Minister of Home Affairs in the process.”

So it is here. That is what the Commission was dealing with: how to correct and remedy that situation.

It says on Page 148:

“To purport to exercise regulatory control under the police Act is to needlessly attract allegations of unlawful political interference in the processes relating to the grant or refusal of firearm licence application.”

So the Commission was concerned and was of the opinion that the perception was that the Minister was interfering in the process of issuing firearm licences, and had issued an inordinate amount of firearm licences in the country.

So what were the recommendations? The recommendations included specifically inter alia that The Commissioner of Police should continue to have strict supervision and control over Divisional Commanders with regard to the granting of firearm licences; not the Minister but the Commissioner of Police should supervise Divisional Commanders. This is what they said and also recommended at No. 65:

“No attempt should be made to *correct* (emphasis is on correct) previous indiscriminate grants of firearm licences by a general recall and re-issuing of licences”.

They recognised that there was political interference in the process and said they look, we are not going to go hunting anybody down and ask for recall and all of that, but we are going to make recommendations to prevent this happening again. That is what the Commission was dealing with. So the question is: ‘did our Committee implement the recommendations of the majority on this Commission’? The answer is *No*. In fact we are now discovering that the Hon. Member Minister Rohee and the Chairman of the Committee, the Hon. Prime Minister, were exchanging notes in Robb Street. We never knew that because they never sent any letters to us. But confession is good for the soul.

All we knew is that Minister Rohee paid us a visit at the Committee and said something about his looking at something on firearm licences and was going to present it to the Committee. We then proceeded to wait for another four or five months to get this report. Isn’t that so? It was never forthcoming. Instead, because of the PNCR’s intelligence capability we got word that the Minister had laid his regulations already. In fact this particular Regulation does not need any negative or affirmative. The fact that it was laid ipso facto it becomes law. [Mr. Rohee: You are a very good stand-up comedian.] I know I am edifying you now but it is okay. The point in fact is that that act is a blatant disrespect for the work of the Select Committee reviewing the recommendations of the Disciplined Forces Commission.

What is it? Do we want to make a mockery of this process so when it suits this Government they take part in it and when it does not suit then they just aggregate the work of the Committee with impunity? There is no sanction to the Minister. What is the value of having

these select committees? The only reason the work of this Committee continued was because of the abiding interest of the People's National Congress-Reform in ensuring that justice is done in this country by having these recommendations implemented. That is why!

So what is it that we have here now? The recommendation of the Commission was that the Commissioner should supervise the Divisional Commanders, and the Minister passes surreptitiously Regulations to this effect: (1) an application being made for firearm licence is made to the Divisional Commander who then refers it to the Commissioner of Police who then has to refer it to the Minister and the Minister refers it to his Board – his board, the advisory board that he appoints singlehandedly without any reference whatsoever to consultation. Last week I was saying the Minister of Labour had a lot of powers; that he didn't have to consult, but I did not realise the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs was also in the same position. If the Board that the Minister himself set up to advise him makes a recommendation it sends it back to the same Minister that hand-picked them. And I will tell you, if the Minister does not like the recommendation he sends it back to them for further review. Is this what was intended by the recommendation and decision of the Disciplined Forces Commission, Mr. Speaker? The answer is a resounding *NO*. They said that Parliament never intended the Minister of Home Affairs to get involved in these day-to-day matters in the Guyana Police Force. When the Minister is reading in particular Section 7(1) all he is emphasising is that he has a policy role and the Commissioner of Police has control for the day-to-day operations of the Guyana Police Force. It was never intended for them to get involved in the day to day activities.

Mr. Speaker, this Regulation that was Gazetted on 10th April, 2010 by the Minister himself, the Hon. Member Rohee, flies in the face of the recommendations of the Disciplined Forces Commission. It is diametrically opposed to the intentions; what is more, we never supported this Regulation. We never supported it; it was never discussed by the Committee before it was published surreptitiously. Even after the surreptitious publication, we still do not support it. Because the mischief that was intended to prevent and remedy has been enhanced and compounded. That is what is going to happen. So the Minister has now set himself up to be judge, jury and executioner in the granting of firearm licences. In other words he has converted himself into a firearm *czar*.

Mr. Speaker, as I said we could not support that firearm Regulation that was so unilaterally introduced into our laws, but it is the same old story again. After seven years we still find that

the PNCR's recommendations for the amendment of the Coroner's Act, to bring it in line with proper administration of justice, has been ignored by the Government. I don't know what work has been going on all this time as is being claimed. Why are they hiding all this work from us? Why are they hiding this work from the Guyanese people?

Let us look at the Coroner's Act. Only recently the Hon. Member himself said he wanted a second opinion in a matter. I don't know if the matter is sub juiced or not so I am not going to call names. That request for a second opinion on the part of the Hon. Member came against the backdrop that similar requests were made in respect of over 600 persons who were killed extra-judicially, and the refusal on the part of the Government to grant such request.

[Interruption] You weren't even in the PPP then. A lot of requests were made to have autopsies done independently of the Government's pathologist and were ignored. Now, I was asked what I thought about it and I lamented the fact that they were not granted in the past, but I wouldn't begrudge the Minister if he has a second autopsy. He took a second autopsy and I don't know if he has given a report by now. But, what I know is that because he opened the gates, when I asked for a second autopsy recently in another matter they could not refuse.

6.34 p.m.

What I wish to let the Guyanese people know is that the result of the second autopsy in that case which I am talking about has already been published. I do not know when the Minister is going to publish his own, but that one has been published.

If we did not have the Hon. Member himself asking for a second autopsy, it is clear that that request for a second autopsy would not have been granted. That is why we were saying that they are continuing to ignore these recommendations in respect to Coroners, which were made to enhance the whole question of the holding of Coroner's inquest, and having families who are dubious as in the present killing... The family might need to have their own pathologist, i.e. the young Fraser's family, rather than using the Police Pathologist, when it is the Police who they are claiming shot him. That is what the People's National Congress Reform have always been saying in Guyana, that the Act must be amended to guarantee to the Guyanese people in the circumstances that recommend themselves, the right to have an independent Pathologist. We have always been saying that. The Polices is saying "no, we did not shoot that person", and the community is saying "yes, we saw them". What would help is if you get the warhead out of the body.

What is happening is that by the time you reach anywhere close to them, all the police bullets that hit people passes through body; all without fear. The victim's family never have the opportunity to find out what in fact was the truth. We need to have that. Since they say they are doing work, we will continue to request and ask and beg them to empower the Guyanese people by amending the Coroners Act and making such provisions guaranteeing the people independent Pathologists when they need them.

On that note, not everyone will have US \$6,000. So, it cannot be a question of you getting an entitlement depending on how rich you are. They need to look at that so people can have these things when requested. The other question about Coroners is that in Coroners' inquest, the Coroner has to rely on the Police Investigators. That happens in Guyana up to now. In cases where the Police are accused of killing people, it is the same Police Investigators that the Coroner has to wait on to come and bring the evidence against the fellow Police. This has been a wholly unacceptable situation. As a result, we have had many inquests, which in the first place we have to drag out of the Government, aborted because of that. Why? The Mandela three killings was aborted, Shacka Blaire and Donald Heyward was also aborted, because the Police was not forthcoming. That is why Ian Chang's Commission in recommendation 70 said this:

“Coroners should be provided with the investigative resources to reduce their dependence on Police investigations, to enable them to conduct independent investigations expediently, rather than to continue to rely solely on Police investigations.”

You could not want it any clearer than that. After seven years, what has this Government done to give to these recommendations? That is why you find these problems keep raising their head, even now after seven years. It is because they have been left unattended. The People's National Congress Reform still maintains its position that they must have a properly constituted Coroners' Office, with its own resources and independent investigations which are independent of the Guyana Police Force.

We continue, let us go to recommendation 88 which deals with the GDF Powers of Arrest; bearing in mind that the GDF does not have any Powers of Arrest. This recommendation is conceiving the concept of joint coordination amongst the disciplined forces. What is happening right now in Jamaica is where the Army goes in and forms more or less a bridge

head and seal off the area. The Police go in afterward and does its work. That is what is happening all over the sane world.

In Guyana, we have been doing that up to now. The soldiers go in and do the cordoning off activity, and then the Police go in and arrest who they have to arrest. Now, what happens in the question of an arrest being made by the Police? The Police arrest a citizen. That person has to be taken to the Police Station. That person has to be booked. Due process has to be implemented. If they are charged, then they have to attend Court et cetera. What it means is that that Policeman is locked into that case for the next 5 – 6 years depending on what kind of case it is. If it is a murder case he could be locked in for a decade. If the Court of Appeal amendments kick in, it could 2 – 3 decades where the DPP could appeal ad nauseam.

The Police are trained for that. They are trained to, so call, investigate crime and to come and give evidence to get a conviction. The soldiers are not trained in that regard. What the soldiers are trained to do is completely different from the police.

Could you imagine, when we go to the Criminal Courts, a whole set of men in green uniform sitting around, hanging around the Court. Would they be able to go with their weapons? I do not know, because police men normally go with their weapon to Court. So I do not know if they will be able to go in with their AK-47s as they say, and when they finish Court they will go and do a little running around and so in Timehri at the base.

The point is that it is incongruous. It will be wholly inappropriate and dysfunctional to have a soldier arresting people and then have to go to Court to give evidence against that person.

Mr. Speaker: Your time is up Hon. Member.

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Williams: That is why in this Committee, that is the only blemish I have against the Chairman of that Committee. It had to be today at the presentation time where the Hon. Prime Minister failed to indicate to this Hon. House this: I am reading from recommendation 88; “How decision is to be implemented”

“The Members of the People’s National Congress Reform 1G rejected the decision that members of the GDF should be conferred with Powers of Arrest and detention. “

This is the position in the Committee. I do not know how the Hon. Member could come and give you the impression that this was a unanimous decision. Do you know why? The Chief of Staff himself testified before us and he said “no” in relation to giving his men Powers of Arrest. He said they did not want it. They were very clear about that. The GDF did not want Powers of Arrest. He was speaking for the GDF and he said that.

What was the purpose of having this select committee and inviting people to come and give their opinion, if no less a person than the head of the GDF says we do not need Powers of Arrest? How could we say that they must have it?

What is even more perplexing – it should not really be perplexing – was that for six years and eight months the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs himself shared the same view of the Chief of Staff, that the soldiers should have no Powers of Arrest. It might have been from his own narrow interest that he did not want his Police competing with soldiers to arrest people. But, that was his position. Low and behold, two meetings ago, on one of his flying visits, the Hon. Member was so – I have never seen anything like this – this was a transformed Hon. Member Mr. Clement Rohee. Up to now I cannot fathom it, but I have seen that he ducked his head. I was looking at his impression gleaming from the desk. He said, “Mr. Chairman, I know I have said in the past that they should not have Powers of Arrest, but after mature consideration, after direction from New Garden Street, after a little nudging from Vlissingen Road, I have come to the conclusion that the soldiers should also have Power of Arrest.” What I understand is that it was a power situation in play.

What is clear is that somebody or some force is hell-bent on giving soldiers Powers of Arrest for what purposes, we do not know. It is not necessary. The trained people said that it is not necessary, and I do not know why they are still insisting. In fact, we do not even encourage the soldiers to make Citizens Arrest. **[Interjection]** That is not anything easy to do either, because with citizens’ arrest you faculties have to get going. Are you apprehending that they might commit an offence? Do you have reasonable suspicion? You want these soldiers to work out all of these things in their heads and minds. It cannot work. We maintain our position that the soldiers of this country should not have similar Powers of Arrest as members of the Guyana Police Force.

I want to conclude, but it would be remiss of me if I were to do so without touching on parliamentary oversight. We firmly believe that it is important that you have civilian oversight of the Disciplined Forces. If it comes to the form of parliamentary oversight, it would be consistent with democratic practices throughout the world. There must be civilian oversight. We must stop paying lip service. We spoke about it after there was this committee. What is the name of that meeting when the civil society and the political parties meet with the President? The National Stakeholders Consultation, all of these fancy terms. Recommendations were made to have such a body, and it was ignored for a long time. It took special activity to get them to look at it again. But then, they passed it, Act Number 5 of 2009, Constitutional Amendment Act of 2009 which provided in 119D(1),

“There must be a standing committee of the National Assembly to be named the Parliamentary Oversight Committee on the Security Sector, and it shall have responsibility for examining the policies and administration of the entities in the security sector, namely the Disciplined Forces of Guyana.”

This is very important, because we fought tooth and nail to get that. That is, to examine policy. Remember, they were trying to get us into a narrow crease in dealing with the Disciplined Forces. We could not deal with polices so much. At the end of the day we were able to persuade them, so we had this. After that, a Motion came on the Order Paper of the 18th of March 2010, to make proposals to give teeth to the Committee. The composition, et cetera, all those things were mapped out and passed in the Hon. House.

What is the preset state of play? The committee is yet to be constituted, Mr. Speaker. What is the reason for the Government not constituting this committee and putting it in play so that we can commence oversight of the Disciplined Forces in Guyana? What is the reason? It is long overdue. It is important that the soldiers and other aspects of the Disciplined Forces know that they have to be accountable to the people’s representatives in Parliament. We want that to happen. We need that. We do not want to be told about the SSRP (Security Sector Reform Programme), and the provisions or the recommendations of the SSRP being the same as the Citizens Security Programme. What is that? Nothing is shown to us on where this transformation is. This is one of the most invisible progress you can find in any part of the world; progress in talk only. Where is this progress? Where is the entire transformation of this society? What are the Police men doing? Are they still effective? Are they more effective in policing? Do they stop you on the road and allow you to pass without having some

encounters? Where is this improvement? By passing this legislation are you telling me that that is improvement in the architecture, where the legislation takes away people's rights. They are making a mockery of this whole thing. They have yet to account to the people of this country as to why they would allow all that funding to slip out of their hands, which were being proposed to have been given to them by the British. They have not accounted for that as yet to the Guyanese people, and then are telling us that they are funding it themselves. What is that?

It is important that we have the Parliamentary Oversight Committee constituted almost immediately, because a lot of bad decisions are being made by the actors right now in the security sector. They need some assistance from the people's representatives here in this august Parliament.

You tell this Government that there are a lot of people suffering out there. If you get 600 people killed, all those people have families, multiply it. When we talk about the ales, what was the Minister's response? It was that we are playing to the gallery. When the people hear about their children being slaughtered and they are hearing about the Minister responsible for justice and Policing, what is his response? His response is that we are playing to the gallery. We are playing to the gallery, and people are killed. Is that the response?

I can assure the Hon. Minister Rohee that we on this Side of the House are not interested in any *gallery-ing* at this point in time. The *gallery-ing* comes from him. When he gets up and makes these statements as though he exists in Andalucía and not in Guyana. That is where the gallery is, but we from the PNC are really about serious business. We are about serious business. His predecessor of the Ministry of Home Affairs asked me if I am confused, while a lot of the killing occurred under her watch.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I am calling in your understanding of Standing Order 41, this gentleman is reputing certain motives to me that are absolutely untrue and malicious.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I never said that she killed anyone.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed Hon. Member.

Mr. Williams: Thank you Mr. Speaker, I want to wrap up now. The contention that we are misrepresenting the facts and do not know the facts, and that we are making destructive criticisms about the forces cannot stand. The people of this country are not dunces. By now

they are on to the antics of the representatives on the other side. They must know that they are hurting. You are telling them about this country being transformed and they cannot eat when the day comes. They cannot get jobs. The Minister is saying that there are increases, but his is not showing any figures, that is the Hon. Minister of Labour. It is an integrated approach you know. It was you who said the entire economy is transformed, the entire country. You cannot accuse us when we are bringing the facts of Police bashing. That is not going to get you anywhere. The fact of the matter is that your Police force is staffed with persons who are generally underpaid. They are dissatisfied with the conditions of work and service. They are de-motivated. There is discontent between the Policemen of the Guyana Police Force and their Minister. The Minister is creating a vain-glorious picture about the life of the members of the Disciplined Forces which they cannot recognize that at all.

I must conclude as I am being asked. It is too much pain. I wish to commend and say that we support this Motion and we hope our aspirations, are that the implementation of these recommendations would be very swift and quick. And that, we would see and feel the impact of the transformation that these recommendations will bring about, and not to be told about them by the Hon. Member he who alone sees it. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Hinds (replying): I would like to start by expressing my appreciation for the kind words spoken by a number of Members about my chairmanship of this Select Committee. [Mrs. Backer: 'Is only the Opposition praise you, your people did not praise you.'] I think that this debate has already lasted quite a while. It seems to have followed the pattern of the Committee Meeting itself, some 44 meetings. There is much that I may want to comment on of what we have heard.

Allow me to briefly address a few of them. The Hon. Member who just presented spoke much about the issue of GDF issue of Powers of Arrest. I would like for us to return to the fact that this is a recommendation of the Disciplined Forces Commission. It was not that members of the GDF should have the same Powers of Arrest in all the circumstances and so on as the Police. It called for them having the Powers of Arrest and detention in the particular circumstances when it may be necessary for the express purposes of maintaining order, thereby giving effect to the wisdom and foresight underlying the statutory imposition on the GDF of a public duty to maintain public order.

The Commission did not make this recommendation willy-nilly. The Commission made this recommendation in view of the many situations which occurred and which were reported to

them of GDF persons standing by in situations of unrest and disturbance and apparently doing nothing. Therefore, to remove this apparently unnatural situation where a member of the security forces stand by and observe people being beaten and not doing anything, they said you should resolve that situation by giving the members of the GDF Powers of Arrest and detention in those circumstances.

I would take one thing from what the Hon. Members said; that there may be a case for some special training for the members of the GDF so they can carry themselves creditably in such a situation. That is one good point that I say in that member's comment. I would also like to say that although the Government did not find that we could proceed with the SSRP as was put out to be supported by DFID (Department for International Development), we are continuing with Security Sector Reform in stages that we think are appropriate to the people of Guyana. We are continuing with security sector reform. It is interesting that that Hon. Member raised the question of foregoing grants. I can recall on numerous occasions us being accused of just going after money and doing all sorts of things to get money. Here it is that he is now taking us to task for not going after the money, when we believe that what was being presented was not good for our Country.

I would also like to refer to – I could not readily pick the location up – but, at least two Members from the other side quoted a statement which went like this: “policing cannot be separated from the total judicial system”. I would say, indeed, from the various things that were looked at, it could not be separated from the whole society. The issue of ethnic balance is there. It is a matter of concern in the society at large.

A rather limited view of this statement was taken a number of times, policing cannot be separated from the total judicial system. That to me includes the judiciary, the magistracy and all parts of the judicial system. This statement calls for a total review, change and reform in the whole judicial system. Yet, still a number of members over there seem to interpret it at times as referring only to the police. We do not have the Hon. Member Raphael Trotman any longer present in the House at this time. I made a note when he first made this observation. I made a note that I will call on him. I do not know if he read my note, but I will call on him to help us in the reform of the total judicial system.

7.04 p.m.

I would like to call on him, and maybe his colleague there, the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, can pass this call on for me.

I think that we have spoken much on all of this here. I would like to end by again expressing the sympathy and empathy of the Government of Guyana to recent events in Jamaica. As our Minister has said earlier, we should reflect on the difficulties that our security forces, particularly our Police Force and, on occasions, the Guyana Defence Force face, in seeking to maintain law and order in our society. We could see those events, we could see how things went, step by step; we could see that eventually the security forces went in to take actions; we could see what happened at that time, and we could see the calls which are being made, both internally in Jamaica and externally from Jamaica. We should be guided by those events and encouraged to reflect whether we, the developing countries, with our particular type of backgrounds, do not have particular difficult problems which might call for us taking a much more co-operative attitude in trying to resolve those problems and taking our countries forward. With that, I would like to move that the motion, standing in my name, be adopted. Thank you. [Applause]

Question put, and agreed to.

Report adopted

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE IMPACT OF GLOBAL FOOD PRICE INCREASES

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That the Report of the Special Select Committee on the Impact of Global Food Price Increases be adopted.”

[Minister of Agriculture]

Mr. Corbin: Mr. Speaker, out of courtesy for you, I thought I should politely inform you that the PNCR does not propose to participate in this exercise. We stand by our statement made when the motion was initially brought that it is a waste of time in the context of the role which is being prescribed to the National Assembly.

Mr. Speaker: Do you mean this motion now?

Mr. Corbin: Which one of the motion?

Mr. Speaker: Is it the motion on the Impact of Global Food Price Increases?

Mr. Corbin: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: It is okay. Thank you Mr. Corbin.

PNCR withdrew from Chambers.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Persaud]: I wish to present to the National Assembly, the Report of the Special Select Committee on the Impact of the Global Food Price Increases. Members of the National Assembly would have recalled that in 2008 the world was gripped with what was considered a food crisis which was followed closely by a fuel crisis and then a financial crisis. In Guyana, our Government and the people took a pro-active stance in cushioning the effects of that global food price crisis which afflicted nations across the world. In so doing, the Cabinet, then, had set up an Inter-Ministerial Committee on food prices. That Inter-Ministerial Committee presented recommendations and reports to the Cabinet on interventions that would have been necessary to cushion the impact on the consuming public. Further to that, and those efforts, the Government tabled in the National Assembly a motion which sought to bring to one a full public understanding of the severity or the potential severity of this situation on its consuming public. More so, it sought to engage the National Assembly in a national effort, so that in the short, medium and long-term it can take steps to always make its consuming public one which does not feel the hard effects of food price rise, but to ensure that the wider public enjoys a degree of access, and also having the availability and affordability of food in our country. That was the background to this motion which was passed in the National Assembly. It was resolved at a Special Committee of the National Assembly which was set up to examine this matter.

One would have thought that an issue that would have had so much bearing and concern on the ordinary Guyanese would have been something... Here it is the Government then presented an opportunity for all parties and the wider public to participate in the process. But I think the public and many of us here are still confused, as to why is it, something that is non-political and non-controversial, but is of concern to every single man, woman and child in our country, that is access to affordable food, the main Opposition party would want to abstain from? Then again, it begs the question, as to how committed, sincere and concerned is the PNCR about the welfare of our people? Perhaps we should not dwell too much on the

PNCR's policy and position, as the electorate certainly will be given another occasion to judge and to give it the type of dealing and treatment it does deserve.

I want to say that although the PNCR did not participate, the AFC demonstrated some level of responsibility and concern for the public and participated in that Committee through the membership of Mrs. Shelia Holder. I want to commend all the Members of this Committee from the Government side and also from the Opposition, the sole representative, Mrs. Shelia Holder for the efforts, the discussions and the contributions toward the work of this Committee.

Whilst the work of this Committee started in 2008, and we are deliberating on the Report in 2010, there is lot relevance. There is a lot a relevance that we continue to give this subject a lot of attention. Why do I say so? Across the globe, today, we have close to eight hundred and sixty-two million people who go to bed every night without a proper meal, some days without anything significant. There are close to two billion people in our world today who face, intermittently, some form of food deprivation or inadequate access to food. Further to that, we also see that there is a trend of continuing increase, although not to the levels of 2008, but the latest Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) food price index points to constant increase in basic food items. In fact, looking at the 2009 index, compared to what was 2002/2004, we see an increase by as much as eighty per cent in terms of the movement of food prices. As we know food prices are volatile and the impact can be very devastating on, especially, vulnerable groups in our society and that is why, again, we must pay much attention to that.

As we did in 2008, our Government continues to pursue policies and programmes which are aimed at ensuring that it has, one: continue to enjoy a state of food security, and in fact Guyana is the only country in the CARICOM Region which is food secured. We see, whilst in Guyana our exports are increasing, the food import bill of the Region has in fact just passed four billion dollars last year. Our Government continues to pursue policies to sustain food security, to ensure that our population has access to affordable food, but at the same time, to ensure that our policies also translate into more opportunities for those that are involved in food production in Guyana. That is why immediately after the 2008 food crisis we saw our exports, for instance to the Region, of food jumping by as much as 34.6%. We also saw immediately, rice production reaching one of its highest levels and Guyana exporting for the first time in excess of 260,000 tonnes of rice. Those showed that within that

crisis our Government was able to develop, articulate and implement policies which looked at the opportunities that were provided to Guyana and to our people. Those policies and positions continue.

But also the Government continues to put a lot of emphasis on the role of small farmers, because globally it has been recognised that small farmers are main contributors to food security, and also in ensuring that people have access to affordable food. That is why also, Government's policies and programmes, be it our cultural diversification project or the other initiatives that are there within the Ministry of Agriculture and other departments continue to contribute towards the growth, the development and the competitiveness of the small farmers, because it recognises the role of small farmers in this regard.

In looking at the recommendations of the Report, the proposals, I must say that the Committee in its deliberations recognised the efforts which are being made by the Government then, and continues to make in ensuring that it sustains its food security status, that it ensures that food is available and also that it is affordable, especially in hinterland communities which are much more vulnerable to food insecurity and food scarcity. The Committee recognised that Government's policies certainly were aimed at maintaining and even addressing where ever there were weaknesses. But in so doing and, I would not go back and recap all the measures that we have done, but those were captured in our earlier discussions, looking at the recommendations of the Committee, we need to recognise that they are very forward looking.

Forward looking in the sense that, looking at how it is that we can mobilise much more support for our farming groups or farming communities. Looking at where we can have opportunities especially in our Hinterland Regions, and especially where there is particular type of temperature, where there is a sort of a temperate zone where crops which are currently imported can be grown, take for instance, potatoes, onions and even looking at some of the other temperate crops. I must say that in one of the recommendations which was proposed and I want to advise the National Assembly that already much work is being done. Among these, the Ministry of Public Works, Minister Benn and his team are working assiduously in creating a link from Meritzero to Karasabai which will also allow the North Pakaraimas area which has very fertile and unique soil and temperate to allow certain crops such as onions to be produced. That link is currently being constructed at a cost of one hundred and eighty million dollars. To support that, the National Agriculture and Research

Institute (NARI) is looking to have ready, for those farmers also, the type of planting material and technical advice so that we can see those new types of crops being cultivated and providing new opportunities.

Also a lot of the recommendations looked at eating local and buying local and that is very important. The fact that we have the National Assembly itself endorsing a “Buy Local” is important, because in our country, as I said, we are food sufficient, but we have to ensure that the impact of television and other influences do not take away our traditional choice of food, which is very healthy, very organic and very nutritious. In fact, working very closely with the Minister of Health, we are seeking to ensure that as part of the daily diet our people eat more local and certainly one of the recommendations here is to look at how it is we can galvanise and have much more national support for the buy local and even consuming local, and less dependency on the processed can foods which are coming into our country. Whilst we do not want to go back to the days of banning and we do not want to go back to the days of restricting, but we want to be much more positive in showing the virtues, showing the values, showing the economics, showing the moneys which can be saved if people grow and eat what they produced and, in fact, having the National Assembly doing so, is certainly commendable.

The role of our schools and education system in this regard too was recognised by the Committee and certainly fits into some of the work that the Ministry of Education and other agencies have been doing.

I want to say in commending this Report, certainly the recommendations are being considered and many are being implemented. Also the deliberations of the Committee would have impacted, not only on the work that the Ministry of Agriculture is doing with our farmers, but also with the works that the Consumers Department within the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Industry, because a lot of issues came up in terms of consumer protection.

I want to report to the National Assembly that many of the suggestions and the recommendations, those persons who came from the Consumer Association and made their proposals, will certainly be considered. I am quite sure the contribution of this Report in ensuring and securing Guyana’s growth, development, and the transformation of Agriculture, and especially as I am reminded by my colleague, Minister of Benn, the state of Agriculture which has rebounded since the 2005 flood, we will continue to see upward progress and

certainly at the end of the day our people having access to affordable food in our country. I wish to commend this Report to the National Assembly. [Applause]

Mrs. Holder: As the only Opposition Member who served on this Select Committee, I need to make a point or two that the Alliance for Change, indeed, strives to make an impact wherever it is possible by lending our support to the Government in the interest of improving the welfare of our people. I was in fact subjected to some extent, to some amount of criticism and ridicule for having decided to serve on this Committee. I believe that it is important that I communicate to this Hon. House and to the Government benches that we must not take lightly, the fact that the PNCR Opposition Members have left under pretext that it did not make too much sense for them to stay, because it is not very often that this administration heeds the advice and the warnings of Members on this side of the House. I do not think that such an accusation should be taken very lightly, and that some attempt should be made by those of you who have been given powers by the people to exercise it to maintain some degree of harmony, not only in this House, but in this nation as a whole.

The motion on the Impact of Global Food Price Increases was passed in this National Assembly on the 1st July, 2008. The first meeting of the Select Committee was indeed held seventeen months later, on the 22nd of December, 2009. One is left to believe that either the food crisis had abated significantly or that this administration was indeed tardy in addressing the predicament of the people, because it is now, almost two years, that this Report is being laid in the National Assembly.

The matter in this motion that was before the Select Committee called for urgent actions; it called for heighten collaboration between CARICOM and the various multi-lateral and regional institution, such as the World Bank, the Food and Agricultural Organization, World Food Production (WFP), in view of what was described as a catastrophic increase in food prices which the Hon. Minister of Agriculture pegged at over eighty per cent. I think it is only fair to say that the gravamen articulated in the motion has yet to be corrected, two years later. I refer to the “FURTHER RESOLVED” clause which states among others:

“That the National Assembly undertakes to establish a Special Select Committee to discuss the implementation of these governmental interventions that include

i. increasing the disposable income of ordinary Guyanese;”

Did this indeed happen?

“ii. subsidizing the cost of accessing utility services,”

Has that happened?

“iii. implementing the Ministry of Agriculture “GROW MORE” campaign...”

As you know the Alliance for Change valiantly helped in this exercise and, in fact, distributed fifty thousand seedlings in all ten Regions of the country. Item four stating:

“iv. Zero-rating of all essential food items, including diesel and agricultural inputs...”

I believe all agricultural imports have, in fact, been zero-rated and so has diesel. And finally,

“v... assistance to single-headed households.”

Now, let me say this: The disposable income of the Guyanese people has contracted, not increased. Two years on, the ability of our people to access electricity and water remains problematic, costly and unaffordable at best. Where access to Guyana Water Inc. (GWI)’s water supply is concerned, the leakages and the risks associated with the contaminated state of its potable water supply continue unabated.

There are also issues of unfair treatments of whole villages and individuals being ignored, indeed, by GPL as well as GWI. These are the claims of the people not of the Alliance for Change.

The AFC contributed, as I said before, in no small way to the helping in the “Grow More Food Campaign” and I believe that I should make mention of the Guyana Consumers Association’s recommendations. I believe that they are worthy of note and that the Minister of Agriculture should do more than just simply acknowledge its contribution, but in fact take steps to implement them, because I think that they are indeed worthy of implementation. Particularly those which speak to educating our people on how to utilise the limited disposable income that they have and also the kind of educational programmes which are so necessary to deal with some of the other problems.

I believe I need to make reference also to the Ministry of Agriculture’s own submission at Appendix D. The motion, I recall, required period reporting by the Hon. Minister to this

House to give an indication of the progress that was being made with regards to some of these recommendations. The Minister did not indicate – well we know this has not been done - whether or not the Cabinet Inter-Ministerial Committee has been working constantly and what are the outcomes of the exercise are. When I look at Appendix D, the recommendations are very impressive. Some of them I can refer to here and ask the Hon. Minister to indicate if they have been implemented and what progress is being made. I see at recommendation 5 that NARI and GSA were to collaborate with research on composite flours and utilising other ingredients in the combination with wheaten flour.

There were supposed to be enhancement in the extension services which was to include Regions 10. I understand from this Report that there were to be was some forty three extension staff members hired, but that number was supposed to have been increased significantly to some ninety. Has this occurred?

When I glance down further at recommendation 9, I see there was talk about strengthening the capacity to produce safe wholesome meat through the mobilisation of stakeholders for the establishment of abattoirs of international standards and training of measures, such as the Hazard Analysis and the Critical Control Point. I believe the Hon. Minister would recall the concerns that I had expressed in this House, early last year, about the state of our abattoirs and the fact that this is crucial to any agricultural development programme in the livestock sector. I would like to hear from the Minister whether this has taken place.

I go to recommendation 12 and I see it was recommended that cultivation of other crops to be expanded to include an Orchard Programme. Has this take place? There is talk also of transfer of technology, demonstration, extension activities, acquiring of plant materials and so on.

There was supposed to be in the investigation in the use of aquatic weeds and aquaculture at recommendation 14. At item seventeen, it is supposed to encourage communities to form “buying clubs” nationwide to reduce the cost of living. This is very important. These are very impressive recommendations and I would like to hear from the Hon. Minister to what extent these have taken place.

On the question of assistance to single-headed households, let me say this, without a doubt the Ministry of Human Services and Security has played the appropriate role. However, we have not been fooled by the fact that the source of revenues for this exercise comes from the

windfall collected from the Value Added Taxes which, to date, this administration has failed to reduce its original purpose of being a non-revenue tax. Essentially what this Government has been doing is really robbing the people of disposable income, then selectively giving it back to them in the form of largest, expecting to be appreciated for it. What irks about this arrangement is that it is being done with the understanding and the knowledge of the international financial institutions which are indifferent to the political implications of this practice. I thank you. [Applause]

7.34 p.m.

Minister of Amerindian Affairs [Ms. Sukhai]: As the Special Select Committee of the National Assembly on the Impact of Global Food Price Increases met and considered the Report submitted by the Chairman, I would wish to say that the Hon. Member who has just presented her contribution was one of those Members who stayed with the process and provided the type of support to the Committee. I would also want, at this point, to disagree with her on the issue that we should treat lightly with the absence of the PNCR in National Assembly while this motion is being debated. We must be aware and register in this House that the PNCR did not find it important enough to attend any of the four meetings when the Committee met. While we are in office we should encourage heightened elaboration and partnership for ongoing efforts to stabilise and improve our options to sustain our population food security, I fully disagree that we on this side should have to be responsible for making the PNCR participate. Political parties must be responsible enough to represent their constituencies when they are so elected to this House.

I must also say that at the Committee's level there was no disagreement on the factors that contributed to the global price increases and the position on its effect it was having right here, locally or nationally, in Guyana. While one may want to say that we do not have a very significant or numerous numbers of contributions from the public, it was obviously not for lack of notification since there were adequate encouragement and advertisements, publicly. I would attribute, however, that the low response from the public was as the result of the impact of the outgoing government programmes that were in execution, and similarity, the mechanisms put in place with a strong focus on consolidating the agricultural sector which is the largest food producing sector.

The responsiveness of the Government interventions at the Committee's level also proved to be very significant and even the Hon. Member, Ms. Holder attributed to the fact that the AFC

participated not only at the Committee's level, but directly in ensuring that the people received the type of support during this very critical period.

Guyana may have been one of the very few countries which with certainty forged partnership among its people from all sectors in responding to cushioning the intending hardship from the increasing prices for food at home as a direct result or as a spin-off of the different factors at the global level. Concerns, indeed, at that time were in order for the severity of the impact to the population of the hinterland. But while many unkind businesses tried to take advantage of that situation and, in fact, blaming the Value Added Tax (VAT) for the high prices that they were charging the consumers, the Government was able to manage that very well since it made it very clear at the national level that VAT was not to be used as the reason for the increasing of high prices. Again I notice that the Hon. Member, Mrs. Holder, tried to interject that argument into her contribution here, tonight. However, what saves the day, and which all of us know, is that most, if not all, of the basic food items are zero-rated and we do not have to pay VAT. Indeed, even when we were discussing VAT in this House one Member made a very appalling observation. That Member felt that it was very appalling, and noted that the Government was even making cassava VAT free. That Member spoke about it right here.

While we seek approval to adopt the Report of the Special Select Committee of the National Assembly on the Impact of Global Food Price Increases, the Government continues to work to abate our national food price increases continuously. Even as the factor of climate change brought on additional setbacks to our nation, and I am referring here to the El Niño and the La Niña situations, the Government has been making further interventions directed to support those sectors which obviously were affected. I am very happy that agricultural produce prices remain more or less stable throughout the period, since 2008 to current. Even when the price for rice skyrocketed out of control, the Ministry of Agriculture introduced the Rice Price Buster Programme which assisted many vulnerable groups, single-headed household and those who could least afford the high increase in rice during those period.

Again, for the hinterland, our Government continues to provide much needed support and intervention, and during the mid of last year the National Secure Livelihood Programme was launched in a Region 1. That acted as a complementary support to the Grow More Food Campaign which has been embraced and accepted nationally and is bearing much success today. The National Hinterland Secure Livelihood Programme is aimed to, first and foremost, strengthen food security, add value to local produce, create employment and sustain village

development. The programme prioritised seven main enterprises in fifteen communities in Region 1. I would really like to list those communities. Hobodia, Hotoquai, Tobago, Bumbury, Three Brothers, Imbotero, Wauna, Hososroro, White Water, Kamwatter, Arukamai, Yarikita, Barabina, and Aruka Mouth.

The ongoing unique cluster project under this programme includes value added pineapple, moving it to chunks to service a market in France, value added cassava products, crab fattening, aquaculture, value added ginger, passion fruit and citrus enterprise, value added crab wood oil and honey production. Therefore, since Guyana was successful in its objectives to stabilise food prices at the national level, this can be proven in the market in the city, and I will use that example, since many of the food products outside of those imported are actually the products of the rural and hinterland residents. Those who do marketing will realise that the prices are still affordable, even while the prices in the hinterland for other goods, other than those produced within the communities, are still high. One would only wish to attribute that to the high cost of transportation due to the instability of oil or fuel prices which still obtained.

Obviously, tonight as we share our opinion for the formulation of the recommendations as is contained in the Committee's Report, it is also important for us to observe that most of the recommendations as set out by the Committee, in the Report, are mostly occurring and are in progress already at both international, national, and at the community or village level. The specific recommendation to introduce buy local in the schools' curriculum should be supported and introduced into the school at the earliest. I, therefore, take this opportunity to register support to the recommendations and commend the Committee's Report to this National Assembly. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Persaud (replying): I just want to commend the contribution made by the previous Speaker and also to thank Minister Sukhai for highlighting, especially, the emphasis that is being placed on hinterland food security.

In concluding the discussion, the Hon. Member, Mrs. Holder asked for updates on several matters, and with your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, I will briefly provide those updates. In terms of looking at the "FURTHER RESOLVED" clause – looking at the issue in terms of accessing utilities services – I think the Hon. Member would know about the investment that Government has been making constantly, especially in the area of providing water and electricity, and the efforts that are being made to ensure that these services are constantly

improve and I think that is much public information. In fact, if one is to do a comparison in terms of the cost of utilities services in Guyana, with many other countries one will see that our country is well below those countries.

In terms of the Grow More Food Campaign, the Ministry continues to focus on that and, in fact, that a programme is being driven by the Agricultural Diversification Project which has support from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) as well as the International Fund for Agricultural Development. The Ministry continues to pursue that so much, so that there was the growth in production as well as the result in growth in export.

In terms of the budgetary intervention the Government has... If one is to look at the budget, since 2008, there have been increases in critical areas that contributed directly to food production. Mention was made about in 2008 and subsequently efforts were taken to ensure that all food items were zero-rated, also inputs for agriculture machinery, chemicals and so forth, and there have been adjustment in terms of the excise which deals with fuel.

Monitoring and export for essential agricultural commodities continue, and our Government does not want to export everything and then to create shortages on the markets. That happens because of the system which it has in place, as well as monitoring prices which the Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC) as well as the Bureau of Statistics would do. The GMC publishes on a weekly basis the listing of all prices as well as the movements. That too is available on the GMC website.

In recent days, we have heard much of about the efforts made by Government to empower and improve the income and to look at new opportunities, especially opportunities in the area of agriculture for single-headed household, especially our women. I am certain if one looks at the “FURTHER RESOLVED” clause those issues have been given the deserved attention.

Regarding the recommendations found in Appendix D, if one is to do an audit of these recommendations one will find a full implementation or substantial progress. I will illustrate those which Mrs. Holder pointed to. Recommendation 5: Work has been done between the National Agricultural Research Institute and discussion are engaged between the National Flour Mill in how that they can look at other ingredients to combine, looking at cassava and so forth, and in fact, NARI would have done the research, what mix they can come up with, not only in terms of flour, but they have also move that research to in the area of animal feed

to reduce the dependencies of imports of certain inputs. If one is to go to Bounty Farm the results are there for all to observe.

Regarding extension services is very critical, and I must say that the Ministry of Agriculture has just started a process of further restructuring the extension services and merging it with the research into NARI. It has, in fact, passed ninety fulltime as well as what are called extension agents, because giving a budgetary limitation the Ministry would not be able to put everyone on full employment but it has worked out an arrangement where there are farmers and young people trained as extension agents from time to time and placed them across the country. But much work needs to be done in the area of extension services and I must admit that it is a weak area.

In terms of looking at the concerns about the abattoirs, it is a concern that the Government has too. I have no qualm in saying this that the city abattoir is not the ideal situation. The mini abattoirs which are across the country are not the desired plan. What the Government is doing under the Agricultural Diversification Project, and at this times using a firm out of Italy in partner with Housty Law Firm, which is the local agent, there is a current review of all health practices including it has come up with new standards for the abattoir, is to build an abattoir just about one million U.S. dollars. It will be a totally new abattoir which will allow our country to export. In fact, very soon there will be tender out for the design and even for the supervision of that abattoir. The Italian experts are here and they are working on that, because all of us recognise much more needs to be done.

In terms of other crops, looking at the new crops, I can point to the spices programmes which the Ministry of Agriculture had and just benefited from a two-year stint by Indian expert, especially looking into the hinterland region. Also with the transfer of technology, there is active training, ongoing training, which the Ministry has. The Ministry of Agriculture is even building in different farming communities, for instance, the drip irrigation systems. It is also looking at what new technology can go to Region 9 under the rice and beans project which is there, the type of technologies that the Ministry is taking to the farmers. Just recently, the Government has processed close to eighteen tractors which will allow some level of mechanisation to those remote communities as well as it is doing along the coast. But again it is work in progress if we are to look at that particular area.

In terms of aquatic weed, the Ministry of Agriculture has looked at that in terms of looking at duckweed and its use with fish feed. Much research and activities were done in collaboration

with Institute of Private Enterprise Development (IPED) which had an IDB project which was supported by the Ministry of Agriculture. Those research activities are continuing, but one will have to recognise too that before those are rolled out in scale there is much technical work which has to be done in this regard.

In terms of the “buying clubs”, the new GMC has embarked on a programme and has continued in the outreach where the Ministry has programmes in communities to encourage them to do that. That is what the recommendation states and it will continue in this regard.

Again, in concluding, making my final point, is that this Report will be a useful guide and I wish to reiterate our appreciation to the Members who participated and once again to belabour the point that we have seen once more the action of the main Opposition party failing in its obligation and its duty and, in fact, it is sending a statement, a clear statement to the farmers of this country who produce food and, also to the consumers of how little it cares about their interest; how little it cares about their concerns and certainly its inattention and callous attitude towards the development generally, perhaps, of these vulnerable groups. In this regard, I wish commend the Report to the National Assembly. [Applause]

Question put, and agreed to.

Report adopted.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: This brings us to the end of our business for today.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, I move that the House be adjourned to a date to be fixed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the House is adjourned to a date to be fixed.

Adjourned accordingly at 7.55 p.m.