



***Public Consultation
on the Perceived Needs of the
Chinese Community***

17th July, 2008

In the ERC Boardroom

At Lot 66, Peter Rose & Anira Streets

Queenstown, Georgetown

CONSULTATIONS WITH CHINESE RESIDENTS

On Tuesday 17th June, 2008 the Ethnic Relations Commission held a meeting with the Chinese Residents in Guyana, in the Board Room at 77 Peter Rose & Anira Streets, Queenstown. This meeting commenced at 10:45 hours and was chaired by Bishop Juan Edghill, Chairman, Ethnic Relations Commission.

ATTENDEES -ERC

Bishop Juan Edghill	-	Chairman
Mr. John Willems	-	Commissioner
Ms. Cheryl Sampson	-	Commissioner
Ms. Christine King	-	CEO/Secretary
Ms. Cameal Mentore	-	Senior Investigative Officer

PRESENTERS

Zhou Xing	-	Chinese Embassy Georgetown
David Lui Hing	-	Chinese Association
Godfrey Li Oy Yong	-	Chinese Association

The Chairman welcomed the presenters to the ERC, and in his remarks, spoke of the Chinese population which is seen as a minority group, but plays an important role in the Guyanese society. He said that the ERC was for the first time preparing a document on Chinese who were born in Guyana and well as those that are naturalized. The Chairman added that as a minority group, Chinese should voice their opinions on the issues that were/are affecting them and that the consultation was Part 1 of a process to hear their views on equal opportunity and if there were any barriers with respect to economic, social and cultural issues.

Mr. David Lui Hing - Chinese Association

There are about three thousand (3,000) Chinese registered with the Chinese Association..

1. The language barrier relative to Chinese Immigrants.
2. That Local Chinese did not know the Chinese language.
3. That Chinese do paper art and this is an undiscovered part of Chinese work that Guyanese are unaware of.

Mr. Godfrey Li Oy Yong

1. Security - Chinese Immigrants are unable to receive the type of security they desire, because of the lack of finance.
2. Chinese Immigrants are being targeted because of the language barrier.
3. Chinese nationals are not integrated with the rest of the society.
4. Chinese do not "mix" easily with other race groups in the society. They prefer to be quiet and isolated.
5. That there are other Chinese organisations in Guyana. One such is the Chinese / Guyana Friendship Society.

The ERC Chairman enquired about

1. Reports of robberies committed on Chinese
2. The Presenters position on education and health care
3. The co-operation of Chinese and Caribbean people who are settling in Guyana especially the Brazilians.

Mr. Zhou Xing representing the Embassy responded by speaking on

1. Reports of two (2) murders. He said that because of the type of business Chinese are involved in (restaurants), and the fact that they hold cash in their business places, as well as the openness of the restaurants, also cause them to become easy targets for criminals.
2. There are problems with the Immigration Department. New Immigrants coming to the country come on a tourist visa which is stamped for a three months stay. Some will overstay their time and when a request is made for an extension, there is where the problem begins. The process takes more than a year. In the meanwhile, they are deemed as illegal Immigrants. He claimed that Chinese Immigrants are treated badly by Immigration Officers. He further disclosed that they are sometimes unable to pay for visa stamps which some instances turn out to be fake.
3. The majority of Chinese Immigrants are coming from Guandong and do not know the English Language. As a consequence there is a language barrier between themselves and the locals.

Mr. Zhou Xing said that these Immigrants do not receive dual citizenship. If they become naturalized Guyanese, then their Chinese citizenship is revoked. The Chinese Government does not endorse dual citizenship. With regard to the education of their children, Chinese send their children back to China for education and the Embassy gives assistance to residents whose Chinese citizenship are maintained. He also said that their problems are engaging the Minister of Home Affairs and that changes will be made for regularization shortly.

The ERC Chairman observed that there was need to have one standard Immigration Policy.

Commissioner Sampson enquired if there was any place the Chinese could have stayed for someone to examine their documents before, and also to speak on their behalf, because of the language barrier. She also mentioned that there was a perception that Chinese Immigrants do not always stay in Guyana, but they migrate to North America and other shores.

Mr. Lui Hing in responding said that it was just like the mining industry, where some people stay and others leave. Mr. Zhou Xing added that Chinese will leave if they are not satisfied.

In terms of education, Mr. Lui Hing reported that because of the language barrier, Chinese Immigrants who were educated up to Secondary school level could not access tertiary Education in Guyana. He pointed out that one person had to leave for London to continue his education.

There was no report on health care. It was said that Chinese take care of themselves like any other Guyanese. They have their own network and they use private hospitals.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The Commission was told that once the Immigrants are naturalized, they are allowed to vote as the locals in Guyana.

Commissioner Willems advised that the Chinese Association should bring their issues to the ERC if they so desire.

The Chairman informed the meeting that Part 2 would be an ongoing discussion with the Chinese residents. He said that the ERC would like to meet with the Executive and members of the Association at one of its statutory meetings. He mentioned also that a special rapporteur will be visiting Guyana in July, 2008 to examine minority groups who feel helpless and powerless and that they should make every effort to participate in the activities that are arranged for groups such as theirs.

The Chairman said that while the ERC was not receiving complaints from the Chinese population, it was ERC's duty to ensure that all groups have access to equal opportunities. He asked those present what they would like the ERC to address.

Their main concerns were:-

- a. Security - Protection Services
- b. Immigration - Citizenship/Naturalization
- c. Language - Chinese Immigrants to learn English Language and
 Locals to learn the Chinese Language.

The consultation concluded at 11:30 hours.