

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006-2011) 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

158TH Sitting

Thursday, 14TH July, 2011

The Assembly convened at 2.14 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have been advised that the second motion on the Order Paper, Guyana's Ratification of the Protocol amending the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas to incorporate the Council for the National Security and Law Enforcement (CONSLE) as an organ of the Community and the Caricom Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) as an Institution of the Community, standing in the name of the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett, will not be proceeded with at this Sitting.

PRESENTATIONS OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Report was laid:

- (1) Annual Report for the year 2010 of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Guyana Rice Development Board. *[Minister of Agriculture]*

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

The following Reports were laid:

- (1) A record of the outcome of the Round Robin of Members of the Committee of Selection on Thursday, 7th July, 2011
[The Speaker of the National Assembly - Chairman of the Committee of Selection]

- (2) Report of the Special Select Committee on the Report of the Draft Standing Orders

[Minister of Health – Chairman of the Committee on the Draft Standing Orders]

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS, POLICY STATEMENTS

Minister of Foreign Affairs [Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett]: Mr. Speaker, colleague Members of the National Assembly, as Members of this Hon. House are aware, on 9th July last, a new State was born—the Republic of Southern Sudan. This is the result of the January, 2011 referendum, held under the terms of the 2005 comprehensive peace agreement signed between the government of the Republic of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement where the people of Southern Sudan freely and overwhelmingly exercised their right to self-determination, choosing the option of independence and a State of their own. We must commend the leadership of both the North and South Sudan since it is to their credit that their citizens were able to vote peacefully in this historic referendum.

The advent of independence and Statehood marks a decisive new chapter in the history of any people. However, for the people of Southern Sudan it follows a tragic period of prolonged conflict and bloodshed in which millions of people lost their lives. As this fledgling State takes its first step among the community of free and unique nations, the Government of Guyana invites this Hon. House to join in extending congratulations, solidarity and support, on behalf of the entire Guyanese Nation, to the Government and people of the Republic of Southern Sudan and our full and unequivocal recognition of the new Republic.

Mere hours ago, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution which was co-sponsored by Guyana officially recognising the Republic of South Sudan, Africa's 54th State, as an independent Nation and the 193rd member of the UN family. As we welcome the new State of Southern Sudan in the family of nations, the Government and people of Guyana extend to the Southern Sudanese Government and people our best wishes for peace, progress and prosperity as they embark on a new journey of nation building and development.

Mr. Speaker, we recognised that a number of issues remain unsolved that bear important implications for the future of Southern Sudan and that of its northern neighbour, the Republic of Sudan. We support the authorities of these two brotherly countries as they pursue the path of dialogue with a view to peacefully resolving all outstanding issues under the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the key post-referendum arrangements that will sustain a long-term North-South relationship. In this context, Guyana wishes to recognise the valuable efforts made by the United Nations and the African Union in the development and fruition of the peace process, and calls for the continued support of the international community for the efforts of the parties in the realisation of these objectives for the betterment of all Sudanese.

I am sure that Members will join me in expressing the hope of the Guyanese people that the independence of this new Nation, ushering in a new and hopeful chapter for the people of Southern Sudan will contribute to the consolidation of durable peace and sustainable

development not only for the peoples of Sudan and Southern Sudan but also for the people of the African continent and, indeed, the world at large.

Finally, on behalf of the Government and people of Guyana, I express heartfelt congratulations to the Republic of South Sudan's first president, the distinguished, Salva Kiir Mayardit, his Government and to the citizens of South Sudan. I thank you. [Applause]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

BILLS-SECOND AND THIRD READINGS

1. CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (Free Entry of Skilled Nationals) (AMENDMENT) BILL 2011 -Bill No. 12/2011.

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to amend the Caribbean Community (Free Entry of Skilled Nationals) Act”.
[Minister of Foreign Affairs]

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amendment of the Caribbean Community (Free Entry of Skilled Nationals) Act which is before us today represents one additional but important step being taken by the Government of Guyana to meet its obligations under the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, more particularly the Caricom Single Market in relation to free movement of people.

The topic free movement of people within Caricom is one that evokes all kinds of emotions within Caricom and, perhaps, more so in Guyana. The special and differential treatment, albeit of a type most unwelcome, meted out to some of our law abiding citizens from time to time at airports and in other parts of some of our Caricom territories raises the question of what free movement really means and what we are expected to achieve. One might be even tempted to conclude that this issue of free movement is the Achilles heel of the Integration Movement. Of course, there are times when hassle free travel and the free movement regime under the Caribbean Single Market are seen as one and the same. While there is a direct link between the two, they are not one and the same. Let me state very clearly that hassle free travel within and throughout the Community is fundamental if we are to encourage greater interaction amongst our people which is central to any integration movement. It is, therefore, understandable, if persons judge the success of the integration by the experiences, good or bad, they encounter when the travel within the Caribbean Community. More importantly, let me reiterate, if only for the sake of those that are still unaware, free movement, as of now, within, Caricom, is not absolute. There are a limited number of categories of skilled persons who are allowed to work in the participating States of the Caribbean Single Market without the need for a work permit. This means, if persons do not qualify under these categories they must seek a work permit from the respective Government.

Mr. Speaker, it is recognised that free movement of people with the community will be a gradual process. Not least because of the size of our territories and populations. Indeed, I am not unaware of other considerations in certain territories however notwithstanding the

intermittent criticisms, which in many instances are justified, there has been considerable progress. I agree fully that Caricom can only be as strong and committed as the sum of all its Member States. In this regard, Guyana is consistently doing its part. In the last appraisal of the state of implementation of the Caribbean Single Market in 2009, Guyana received a favourable report in terms of meeting our commitments to the CSME. Indeed, while the report offers some recommendations, which we are addressing, it indicated that: “Guyana is substantially compliant.” For example, there is no hindrance for the movement of capital as Guyana has abolished its exchange control regime; the right of establishment is in operation- Caricom Nationals may establish a company in Guyana without any difficulty; the legislation on transference of security benefits, avoidance of double taxation and the Caricom Regional Organisation for Standards and Quality (CROSQ) are all enforced.

On the issue of contingent rights, we provide emergency and primary health care and hospitalisation to Caricom Nationals on the same basis as we do for Guyanese Nationals even though at this time we are not required to do so by treaty but we are doing this. In terms of facilitation of travel, the six months definite entry for all Caricom nationals is in place. These are just some of what we have done so far. Recently, we passed the Consumer Protection Bill. I think it is already an Act. **[Minister Prashad: Yes.]** Minister Prashad has advised. This is also a requirement under the CSME.

Mr. Speaker now for the specifics of the amendment before us: As you are aware, in 1996 the House passed the Caribbean Community free Entry of Skilled Nationals Act. Section 8 of that Act stipulates the necessary qualifications required to obtain a schedule 2 certificate- people commonly refer to this as a CSME certificate. This certificate allows persons from participating Member-states of the Caribbean Single Market regime to work without the need to obtain a work permit. According to the 1996 Act these are the qualifications:

- A degree from the University of Guyana or the University or the West Indies, designated as Bachelors, Masters or Doctors degree;
- A degree from the University of Suriname;
- A university degree which is by common repute, at least comparable in academic standing with any qualification mentioned in paragraph (a) or (b)- I just spoke about those.
- Any qualification certified by the Secretary General of the Caribbean Community under Section 9 as satisfying the qualification requirements of this Act and any qualification which the Minister may by Order prescribe as satisfying the qualification requirements of this Act.

Mr. Speaker since we passed that Act in 1996, the Heads of Government of Caricom have expanded the category of persons eligible to work in participating Member States of the CSME to include nine additional categories. The Nine additional categories are:

- Media workers;
- Musicians;
- Artistes;

- Sports persons;
- Teachers;
- Registered nurses;
- Persons holding Associate Degrees
- Artisans possessing a Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) or an approved National Vocational Qualification; and
- Domestic workers who have obtained a CVQ.

What we are doing, today, is amending Section 8 of the Principal Act to add these additional categories. In addition, we are all aware that apart from the Universities of the West Indies, Guyana and Suriname, there are other duly accredited universities in the Region. Even though it can be argued that Section 8(1) (c) in the Principal Act caters for qualifications from additional universities in and out of the Region. Rather than list all of the universities in the Region it was better to just state ‘universities’ hence that specific amendment.

I should note that, while this amendment is now being brought to the House, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has administratively begun to facilitate the movement of persons under the additional categories in keeping with the decisions of the Heads of Government, with the exception of Artisans and domestic workers- we are in the process of working out those requirements. I should inform this Assembly that since we commenced issuing the Skilled National Certificate in 1997, we have issued a total of 3301 certificates. Of this amount, 2404 are graduates with university degrees-I want us to note the period 1997-2011. One hundred and twenty four (124) trained teachers, 35 registered nurses, 65 musicians, 142 artistes, 43 media workers, 88 sports persons, 400 Associate degrees and equivalent-this would be Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) and those from the Aeronautical school, and 25 to non-nationals-other nationals from the Caribbean community.

Notwithstanding, the Administrative arrangements that have been in place to facilitate the issuance of these certificates to these additional categories, it is necessary for us to amend the laws of Guyana to reflect the full list of categories. This is one of the outstanding actions on Guyana’s part but not only Guyana all of the other countries to become compliant under the CSME regime.

I would also like to inform this Assembly that His Excellency President Bharat Jagdeo has signed an Order under the Immigration Act to update the schedule of qualifying nationals so that the Immigration Act and this amendment today will be in sync. The amendment for which I am now seeking the approval of this House can be taken for a simple one. However it reflects the P.P.P/C’s commitment to fulfilling our legislative obligations under the Free Movement regime. Let me say that while various Member States of Caricom have made some adjustments to their administrative and or legal arrangements, in terms of free movement following the passage of this amendment, Guyana will be the first Member State to do so comprehensively. For this, we, on this side of the House, are justifiably proud. I thank you Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly [Mrs. Riehl]: Mr. Speaker, I rise to offer some views on this amendment to the Caribbean Community Free Entry of Skilled Nationals Act 1996, I am in support of this Bill which amends the original 1996 Act. This Bill seeks to enlarge, essentially, the category of skilled persons who may be allowed free entry into Guyana from sister Caricom countries without the necessity of a work permit. Support for this legislation is premised on the understanding that freedom of movement of persons is vital to the fostering of any integration movement. I think the Hon. Minister expressed a similar view earlier.

The European Union with its policy of seamless borders is, perhaps, the best example of the vision for a truly integrated community. The European Commission, as of now, is supporting E-government services which facilitates entrepreneurs setting up businesses and allows citizens to study, work, reside and retire anywhere in the European Union through the delivery of seamless interoperable and sustainable cross border services- so says its website. We, in the Caribbean, are trailing far behind such developments. The components of the Caricom Single Market Economy supposedly rests on five planks: -the free movement of goods, the free movement of services, free movement of persons and the free movement of capital and finally the Caribbean Court of Justice.

The free movement of persons contemplate, ultimately, the elimination of the need for passports for Caricom Nationals travelling within the Caricom Region. During the world-cup cricket 2006, the Caricom Region was declared one zone for the purpose of persons coming into the Caribbean to look at the cricket. Many citizens remarked, why could Caricom not move with such alacrity to facilitate free travel for its own nationals within its own borders. Suffice it to say, we are still some distance away from that and all we can hope for is, as the Minister said, hassle free travel within the Region.

This Bill speaks to Caricom nationals who want to come to Guyana to live and work here. According to section 3 of the Principal Act, that is the 1996 Act: An Immigration Officer should permit such a person having a valid Caricom passport and equipped with a Schedule II certificate to enter and remain in Guyana for a period of indefinite duration. This Bill also permits him to bring his family and what is extended to the actual person coming to work is also extended to the family-that is also within the ambit of the 1996 Act. There are reciprocal legislative provisions in most of the Caricom States and those particularly listed in Schedule I, which are: Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Christopher/Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. There are now 14, initially there were 13 under the old Act but the Bahamas has now joined the grouping. There are the reciprocal arrangements and, as the Hon. Minister said, Guyana appears to be the first to have passed this amendment, comprehensively changing and expanding the rules.

These 14 territories are referred to in the Act as qualifying States but all of this is well and good in the law- and the Hon. Minister did say that Guyana is compliant, the most compliant perhaps, in terms of its legislations- and demonstrates that Guyana *is* playing its part in promoting the CSME, at least by enacting the relevant laws. But the practicalities on the

ground say otherwise. How many Caricom nationals come here seeking employment? The figure must be miniscule, indeed. The traffic flows in the opposite direction, with Guyanese going to other Caricom countries. Not so long ago, we had the terrible experience of a sizable number of Guyanese being rounded up for deportation from a sister Caricom country- Barbados. What is driving this outward flow of Guyanese and this militating against Caricom nationals coming here? First and foremost, is the pay structure. As of yesterday's date, here are the official Bank of Guyana equivalencies of Caricom currencies to the US dollar: Trinidad and Tobago-\$6.7 to US\$1; Barbados- US\$2 to US\$1; Bahamas-\$2 to US\$1; Eastern Caribbean- \$2.7 to US\$1; Jamaica-\$85 to US\$1; and Guyana- I did not quote but it is over \$200 to US\$1.

That is the reality. People are not coming here because we do not have the necessary jobs to offer them that will pay them and be worth their while to come here. Secondly, there is the horrendous crime rate here in Guyana which is a major deterrent to foreigners wanting to live here. And thirdly, there are simply no jobs, as I said earlier, available here. This is the scenario. The free movement of skills does not necessarily mean just one way out of Guyana. Our dilemma is that the flow of free movement is always out of Guyana. Householders complain in the city and even beyond that it is difficult to find a good carpenter or plumber these days because many of them are working in the Caribbean. As the Minister said, she has been granting these schedule 2 certificates which allow our citizens to go in the Caribbean and work since 1997. It is hard to find our skilled workers because they are always flying out of Guyana. Are we doomed to be constantly replenishing these skills?

2.44 p.m.

Putting our teachers and nurses on bonds? Bonding our teachers and nurses after training them is not the answer. Both those categories are now on this expanded list, and the list which the Hon. Minister went through, and which I would not go through again, both nurses and teachers are there, and she said also that she had given some of her nurses and teachers papers to go.

What is the answer? We must strive to put value in our dollar and to cut our cost of living; it is simply that. We have to cut our cost of living, which will encourage not only one way traffic but traffic to Guyana as well as from. Already there are large conclaves of Guyanese living and working in Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Antigua and several other Caribbean territories, looking after themselves and remitting moneys just as their brothers and sisters are doing in the North America Diaspora to assist with the high cost of living in Guyana. If our citizens can leave here and go and find employment, look after themselves in the sister CARICOM countries and still be able to send money home to look after their relatives here then we need to stand up and take note and find out what is really wrong with us here.

The question has been asked, how one puts value in their dollar? I am no economist, but I would hazard a guess that it depends on two bad words which used to be used in the past. I say bad words because we do not hear those words anymore and we do not act on them. Those words are "production" and "productivity". I think that if we should borrow from the

past – I know that in the recent past this administration was always ready to run down what the PNC did in their 28 years and those sort of things – but if we should borrow some of those concepts and act them out like we had attempted to do earlier, perhaps we would have been in a far better position.

As I said earlier I would not be long. CARICOM and the CSME (Caricom Single Market Economy) must get its act together. With Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica still holding out against the use of the appellate jurisdiction of the Caribbean Court of Appeal which is one of the five planks, as I said, of which the whole CSME rests. With not enough work in its original jurisdiction, the Caribbean Court of Justice is fast becoming a white elephant because two major territories, Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica. Jamaica has a lot of crimes and so does Trinidad and Tobago compared with Barbados and some of the lesser Eastern Caribbean States. Trinidad, Jamaica and Guyana are the three territories which you would expect that would supply cases to the court and keep it working in its appellate jurisdiction. Alas, only Guyana goes to the appellate jurisdiction, far and in between as we would say in Guyanese parlance. With the CCJ not really working and getting off to that grand start that we had anticipated, I see that the CSME is still somewhat behind in catching up.

On December 31st, almost seven months ago, the past Secretary General of CARICOM retired. Although we had said that we are now into seven months, there has still been no replacement. His retirement is a situation which was known and should have been catered for even before it occurred. The wheel simply takes too long to turn in matters of CARICOM and the CSME, and through integration it continues to elude us as a result of this. I thank you Sir. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: We now welcome the Hon. Member Mr. Manzoor Nadir for what I am sure will be a very substantial contribution.

Minister of Labour [Mr. Nadir]: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. It is not that the Hon. Member who just spoke before me did not make a substantial contribution, perhaps it was not in the right context. I thought we were going back to the budget debates when I listened to the last speaker. I felt a bit disappointed in the comments of the last speaker, because lead by three B's; Burnham, Barrow and Bird, and lead by the Leader of the People's National Congress then, Guyana provided leadership for CARICOM which was then CARIFTA. On to today, even with this Bill, we are providing leadership to the Caribbean integration movement. This whole issue which we went down on exchange rates and cost of living; the Hon. Member was a bit out of her dept. I will tell you why. Do not go there if you cannot backup your arguments, you are just making the whole party look bad.

In January I went to a Labour Ministers meeting of the Caribbean in Barbados. At that meeting Guyana was upheld as a country not only with the most impressive growth rate of GDP, but it was also the country with the lowest unemployment rate in the entire Caribbean. One of the issues it this, while we may two hundred and two Guyana dollars to one US dollar, it has been so for over a decade. I have mentioned this over and over in the budget debates; the biggest decrease in our depreciation is when we had the substantial hamstrung award

which the economy at that time could not absorb. So the depreciation rate went to almost twenty percent. That is gone. Do you know what the problem is with exchange rates? Barbados stubbornly refuses to deal with a floating exchange rate, and it is pegged at two to one, and that is why they have so many imbalances in their Balance of Payments.

Last week I was in West Strathaven and I met a young couple who had just returned several months ago from Barbados. You can go and check this out; the young man is the pump operator of the newly refurbished pump in Cane Grove. Do you know why he returned from Barbados? He said, "Sir, things have gotten really hard in Barbados". He was there for seven years. I agree that one swallow does not make a summer, but we have to take a very long term view of this whole integration process.

I would like to come back to exchange rates. The OECS (Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States) have pegged their exchange rates at EC \$2.7149 to the US dollar. They are not removing it, and what happens? Dominica was tinkering on the verge of bankruptcy. We have been providing leadership to the integration movement. There is not a party in this National Assembly who is going to contest or who is going to talk about reversing the gains of integration. We know that together integrated, we are going to face the vagrancies of global economy and the global society better than if we do it individually. So, while the Prime Minister of Barbados has somehow made a statement that seems to be retracting a bit from CARICOM, and while it may take seven months for us to appoint a new Secretary General, that is not signalling the slowdown and the lack of commitment to CARICOM and to the integration of our economies. It is not a commitment to the CSME, it is a commitment to the Treaty of Chaguaramas which has three basic principles, not only the issue of a common market, but foreign policies coordination and functional cooperation. Those are other aspects of this Treaty that we are speaking to and how this is going to deal with the Bill.

This issue of exchange rates and cost of living, I dare her to say that the cost of living in Guyana is more expensive than many of the Caribbean countries. I dare her to go and to justify that; it just is not so. This whole issue of exchange rate which I want to come back to is the stability of it, so that the investment dollar can have some amount of predictability and certainty. It was not under this Government that saw the largest depreciation of the exchange rate. In 1986, immediately after the rigged 1985 elections the exchange rate moved from eleven to one to forty five to one when we had the parallel window. That is by four hundred percent, and by the time the term had changed it was one hundred and twenty five to one. I will tell you about cost of living, because I mentioned it over and over again; per capita income was once at US \$250 in 1992 and has now moved to over US \$3,000 per capita income today with purchasing power parity. Go and look at the CIA fact book. There is purchasing power parity of almost US \$6,000.

I say to Hon. Member Basil Williams over and over again that we are not living in paradise. We know that we have seventy five very poor people in this country. I said earlier that we have been providing vision and leadership to the integration process. I do not know how many of them grew up alongside the waterfronts here, but I remember in 1960 a young man stepping off the boat, he had jumped ships and was from St. Lucia, and we put him up in the

rice mill which we had at C' Hog Street Albouystown for one week. We little children gave him seventy five cents and he made his way up the interior. Three hundred St. Lucians live in Mahdia, who had migrated here fifty or sixty years ago. There is a St. Lucian community in Mahdia; you go up the St. Lucia Hill and you see them there. They are still there with their children. I am talking about this very myopic view that we heard from the Hon. Member who just spoke.

Mr. Trotman: A point of order Mr. Speaker, you had previously ruled on the word 'myopic' in reverence to a person that is out of order in the National Assembly.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot remember ruling on the word 'myopic'.

Mr. Nadir: Mr. Speaker, I am no lawyer, but lawyers are very good with words. I thought 'myopic', 'parochial' and 'short sighted' are all the same thing. I do not know words. I want to come back to the movement of people within these countries have been happening for three hundred years. After the Treaty of Chaguaramas was signed and we started moving towards this we just had some formality. I was mentioning the late Sir. John Compton. In the late 80s when under this Administration our people used to have to pack up little suitcases with leather crafts and handcrafts and carry it to a place in St. Lucia called the Boulevard, the main shopping area, and they would be under a store called JQ Charles. They would be there and they would take out their items and they start selling them. There was a little backlash. There was a particular party that was in opposition that said the first things they would do is pick up all the Guyanese hagglers. They use a St. Lucian word for suitcase trader which is haggler. They said we will pick them up as soon as we win, as soon as Mr. Compton is out, and put them on the next plane. Mr. Compton stood up in the Boulevard and said "our people are forgetting when Guyana had things better and they used to take our people, and I will stand up here and defend the rights of Guyanese to be able to come here and sell their wares and be able to buy some bread and flour and carry back", because that is what they used to do.

This was in 1987 and the particular campaign was in April of 1987. I do not have to lie on the dead. That gentleman Sir John Compton was such an integrationist that when I moved here he had cut his personal Law office in half and shared the other half with me. We have to have this vision. I do not know that the CCJ is a white elephant. In fact I have had the opportunity to listen to several of the presentations, especially when our councils appeared before them and I have learnt a lot. I am confident that it will be an institution to reckon with. You know Sir of how long these institutions take to establish themselves. This particular piece of legislation in here has two important categories for our workers; domestic is one of them. A lot of our people leave here and go and hide out as domestics in other countries for many reasons. They do that as great sacrifice for their families. Here there is going to be some formality for a very vulnerable group. Thanks to the cooperation of the Minister of Tourism Industry and Commerce and the Minister of Education we now have an institution no longer as the Carnegie School, but an institution for hospitality training where those domestics will get the vocational certification that is spoken about in this particular Bill.

When you look at how this PPP/C Administration has developed the architecture in almost every single sphere of activity, including our external relationships, you can see a plan, a focus, a determination, a vision, one that would redound more and more to the benefit, not only in this case of Guyanese, but every single one of the 6.5 million people who live in these fourteen member states of the community. I thought this was going to be an extremely short debate. We should not, where it comes to CARICOM, within the halls of the Heads of Government and the different Councils of Ministers, the Cosard and the Foreign Council and so, let us fight there, but let us demonstrate to every single citizen of the Caribbean Community that their political administration has the political will to push forward with integration at all levels and more importantly at the levels of people which these extended categories as mentioned in the Bill will accommodate. I would really like to commend, in these twilight hours of this National Assembly the Minister of Foreign Affairs for bringing this particular Bill at this time. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett (replying): Mr. Speaker, when I made my presentation I thought it was a great opportunity for us, everybody together in this House, to speak about our commitment wholly and solely to the commitment of the integration movement. I could not understand fully what Mrs. Reihl the Hon. Member meant when she said that the issue of free movement is one where we can only hope for hassle free travel. She was basically saying that we need to move faster on this. On the other hand she complained about Guyanese leaving Guyana. We cannot speak out of both sides of our mouth. Let me say this, I am extremely proud that since CARICOM was born that Guyana's successive Governments have been committed to this whole process. Let us not get into the comparison with numbers Mrs. Reihl, because then I am going to ask you who moved the exchange rate from two to one in 1964 to one hundred and twenty six in 1985. I am going to ask you that.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please let us have some order in the House.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett: Mr. Speaker, they ate soap before they came and so their mouths are slipping all the time. Let me say that when the Belizean Foreign Minister says to me that his children studied at the University of Guyana, not in your time, I am very proud. When the St. Vincent Foreign Minister says to me I studied and practiced in my earlier years under Roger Luncheon in Guyana I am extremely proud. When the Foreign Minister of Bahamas, Brent Symonette, say to me that we should work out something because he needs more of our surveyors because they are the best we have, I am extremely proud. I agree that we have to think out of the box in terms of what we are good at, what we can export and how we can benefit from the skills of our people. Let us not fool ourselves. People are moving throughout the world. People are moving from the Bahamas, from Dominica and all over. People are moving from India to the US and to all over the world. People are going to move, this is why this amendment that we are bringing here today is to make sure that this movement is done in a much formalised way and in a way that our people would not be exploited one way or the other. You asked about who is coming to Guyana. Let me tell you. We have companies that are being established in Guyana; there is Digicel, ANSA McAL Trading and there are many Caribbean companies that have been established in Guyana. Some of the certificates that we have issued are for some of our people that are working with some of these Caribbean

companies. They are in Guyana. They work here, but they leave to go to some other countries for a week or two to do some work there and come back here, so as to lend their skills to some of those countries that so badly need it. Let us not see this whole movement of people in a very negative way. I think it is something very positive, and we have to see it in that way.

Mrs. Reihl the Hon. Member spoke about the European Union. I think when we are doing comparisons it is a good thing to look at the European Union and what they have done. They are much older than CARICOM of course, but the European Union went to several countries with far more people, billions of people. Our community is a community where if you just minus the numbers from Haiti's eight million we are just about six million people. A lot of our nations a very small. When we look at the progress we have made we must also be realistic as to how far we can go. I would also say that we need to move faster, but we also have to take into consideration what are some of the realities in some of these countries as well. One of the countries in CARICOM is the fifth most populated country in the world. They are looking at their numbers. Our discussions with them is that you must not treat our citizens in humane, you have a right to your own rules, but you cannot treat anybody in an inhumane manner. We are having those kinds of discussions.

I would like to say to the Hon. Member Mrs. Reihl, that Minister Nadir dealt with her very well, but I want to say that we are extremely proud that we were one of the first countries to accede to the CCJ. We are extremely proud of our judges there. And yes, we would like to see Trinidad and we would like to see Jamaica and all the others come on board. We have been speaking about this with them, but those are decisions which they will have to make in their own time. Let us not take what we have done in a way that we are saying "look we have done this, but others have not done it". I think we have to be trendsetters also, and I think we are. I think what we are doing today is setting a trend with what we have done in the Caribbean and with climate change, and this is how we are going to continue. With that I ask that this Bill before us be read a second time. I thank you for your support.

Question put and agreed to

Bill read a second time

Assembly in Committee

Clauses 1, 2 and 3 together with Schedule 1

Clauses 1, 2, 3 together with Schedule 1 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill

Assembly Resumed

Bill read a third time and, passed as printed.

GUYANA'S RATIFICATION OF THE AGREEMENT REPLACING THE CARIBBEAN DISASTER EMERGENCY RESPONSE AGENCY (CDERA) WITH THE CARIBBEAN DISASTER EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (CDEMA)

WHEREAS the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) is tasked with mobilising and coordinating disaster relief, mitigating or eliminating the immediate consequences of disasters and providing immediate and coordinated response by means of emergency disaster relief to any affected Participating State;

AND WHEREAS Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) agreed to have the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) replace the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) to provide an integrated and proactive approach to disaster management;

AND WHEREAS the Agreement Establishing the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) was signed by Guyana on July 2, 2008 at the Twenty-Ninth Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in Antigua and Barbuda:

BE It RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the ratification of the Agreement replacing the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA).

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett: Mr. Speaker, the Motion before us today seeks to have the Assembly approve the ratification of the replacement of the Caribbean Disaster Response Agency (CDERA) with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA). Indeed CDERA officially transitioned to CDEMA on September 1st 2009.

This agreement to establish CDEMA was signed by seven CARICOM Member States including Guyana at the 29th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government in July 2008 and was applied provisionally from the 4th of July 2008.

3.14 p.m.

To date fifteen participating States have signed the agreement to establish CDEMA and four States have so far ratified this Agreement. Those four States are the Bahamas, Jamaica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago. I should note the reason why the participating States and not CARICOM member states, because the British Virgin Islands, Anguilla and Turks and Caicos are also expected to be part of CDEMA.

Article 38 of the Agreement stipulates, and I quote:

“This Agreement shall enter into force when instruments of ratification have been deposited by at least seven of the States listed in the annex.”

So, with our ratification, would make it the fifth Member State.

The Motion is not just a simple name change from ‘Response Agency’ to ‘Management Agency’. It removes the response or reactive mandate to one that will fully embrace the

principles of comprehensive disaster management, through an integrative and proactive approach.

CDEMA basically has an expanded mandate, a broader stakeholder base, and an improved governance structure. In terms of this expanded mandate CDEMA's role as facilitator, driver, coordinator, and also as a motivating force, will see the promotion and engineering of disaster management in all participating States. Some of the main or expanded functions are: mobilising and coordinating disaster relief; mitigating or eliminating, as far as practicable, the immediate consequences of disasters in participating States; securing, coordinating and providing, to interested inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations, reliable and comprehensive information on disasters affecting any of the participating states.

CDEMA as I said, engages a wider base of stakeholders such as the private and public sectors, as well as all segments of civil society, and the general population. This is intended to facilitate a more structured and effective collaboration among organisations with overlapping interest, and ensures the provision of high quality technical assistance.

We know that CDEMA has a vital role in the Caribbean region in view of our region's susceptibility to natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes and flooding. The CDEMA was created, I believe, on the solid foundation of the previous Agency, CDERA, which has a reputation of building partnerships in the region with international development partners, including the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the UNDP and the Inter-American Development Bank. The Agency currently has several projects covering areas such as community disaster management, flood preparedness, hazard mitigation, and search and rescue.

In view of Guyana's susceptibility to flooding, and the ongoing need to prepare and respond to the effects of climate change, the Government of Guyana is hereby requesting this National Assembly to approve of the ratification of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency to Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency. [Applause]

Mrs. Riehl: Mr. Speaker, this motion brought to this Hon. House seeks to ratify the agreement signed on 2nd July, 2008 to replace, as the Hon. Minister said, CDERA, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency, with CDEMA, in which there is the one word change from "Response" to "Management" agency.

The CDERA has been in existence since 1991. And, at the risk of being contentious, I know that this Government in its earlier days had sought to pull away from this body saying they were not interested. I would not say further. Suffice it to say they have come aboard and have fully undertaken what the response mechanisms dictate for CDERA.

The CDERA's main function was to make an immediate and coordinated response to any disaster affecting a participating State, once that State requests such assistance. According to its website, which the Hon. Minister read extensively from, CDEMA is more than a name change in that it fully embraces the principles and practices of Comprehensive Disaster Management – a CDM it is called – which is an interactive approach to disaster management.

The CDM seeks to reduce the risk and loss associated with natural and technological hazards, the effects of climate change, to enhance regional sustainable development. States participate in CDEMA through their local disaster relief body. In Guyana that body is the Civil Defence Commission.

Whilst in this region we do not have technological hazards - no oil spills, no nuclear or industrial waste problems— we certainly have our fair share of natural disasters like: hurricanes on an annual basis, volcanoes such as in Montserrat, earthquakes and floods. The 2005 floods exposed our vulnerability, and was certainly the big wake up call for us here in Guyana.

Part of the mandate of CDEMA is to encourage the adoption of disaster loss reduction, and mitigation policies and practices at the national and regional level. Mr. Speaker, I want to posit that disaster relief should be structured here to include disaster prevention, disaster preparedness, then mitigation and relief. This body is essentially catering for a disaster after it would have taken place.

I want to spend a few more minutes talking about the prevention of disasters in Guyana. The type of disaster we are prone to, which is flooding. We have always maintained the seawall because we are cognisant of the fact that this country is below sea level. Also being aware of the effects of global warming, and the concomitant rise in the sea levels, the Government is focusing on mangrove planting and trying to educate Guyana on the value of the mangrove tree in staving off the sea. This is laudable. But I must remind this Hon. House that the 2005 flooding did not come from the sea. It was a combination of heavy rainfall meeting bad environmental practices. Many of these bad environmental practices are still being perpetrated today.

Let us remind ourselves also that climate change does not only mean the warming of the ocean, but, it may signal heavy rainfall, droughts and different changes in the pattern we have been accustomed to. It is incumbent on us, therefore, to educate this Nation. I call upon this Administration to embark on an aggressive education and awareness campaign to alert our citizenry about the dangers of some of these practices.

The East Coast residents in the 2005 flood suffered, I think, a little more than us here in Georgetown, because of a deviation from the building codes. Our building codes in this country, because of being below sea level, dictate that we have one story; we build away from the ground. A lot of homes are now being constructed with an apartment below. I think despite the flood that still happens. We also suffer from clogged drains with plastics and styrofoam. If the Government will not do it then it is high time that some form of incentive be given to the private sector to invest in a recycling plant for plastics in this country. If the Government refuses to ban styrofoam articles, because they collect sizable taxes from these imports, then those taxes or at least a portion of those taxes should be given to the city council and the neighbourhood democratic councils to assist with cleaning this major hazard to the environment. There is no doubt that styrofoam boxes are found all over this city and in the suburbs all along the roadside; they stick out amidst the green of the parapets. The

Government of itself must contribute heavily to solid waste disposal and not niggle about this item. All across the streets and even in the rural areas there are bags of garbage lining the roadways; where there are back roads or old roads especially, people make them fulltime garbage disposal areas. It is very sad that this is the way our country is progressing. These are the issues, whether the Government would like to educate our people through the schools or through the CDC (Civil Defence Commission), or whatever form, I think education is the way to go. It is all well and good to have organisations and regional bodies such as CDEMA looking after disaster relief after the disaster has occurred, but the prevention of the disaster is what we can take hold of in our own hands, and seek to do something about. So, the Government must contribute to solid waste disposal and not fight with the entities and wait an inordinately long time to find areas to put waste.

Citizens should also be educated that clogged drains are breathing grounds for mosquitoes. So, a connection must be made to diseases that may occur when the environment is not protected. Citizens should be educated not to pollute our rivers and our seawalls as was happening in Linden. I understand the Demerara River is being polluted by bags of garbage being hurled into it. The need for solid waste disposal is there, and people are taking these matters in their own hands, but at the same time doing untold damage to our environment which we may live later on to regret should we have another disaster such as the flood.

Sir, I support this motion, the ratification of CDERA; the change from CDERA to CDEMA because CDEMA takes a more comprehensive approach. They bring into the body now not only the persons appointed but people from the private sector – engineers and people of that nature who would help the body. But as I said all of this is post-disaster.

With these few words I would like to support the Bill but emphasise that the Government should also look at pre-disaster, and prevention of disasters in this country. Thank you, Sir.
[Applause]

Minister of Transport and Hydraulics [Mr. Benn]: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to support the Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett, Minister of Foreign Affairs on the issue of ratification of the movement from CDERA to CDEMA.

This ratification is appropriate and apt at this time. I do note that the Agency's watchword, as it were, is 'managing disaster with preparedness.' This is fundamentally the issue in the name change. Instead of being a reactive agency responding to disasters as they happen, by happenstance, and with whatever resources that may be immediately at hand, there is a planned pre-emptive, prepared, mechanism and organisation in place which will respond properly with the appropriate links, synergies, and resources, identified well before hand, in relation to disaster management in our Caribbean region.

This region, of course, is one of the most disaster prone regions in the world. We have had floods, which we too have experienced. We have had issues relating to volcanoes. Montserrat is an example; completely depopulated, as it were. We have had hurricanes and Guyana did respond to the issues of the hurricane damage in Grenada. In fact, our personnel remained in

Grenada for a very long time. We remained the longest there, helping and assisting the people of Grenada in response to the damage they had with respect to the hurricane.

The overall issue that now pertains with respect to managing disaster in the new global environment of climate change is of course apt, and this is why our signing on is very important at this moment. This is also a situation for which one has to be very well prepared for to take all measures necessary, to respond to those issues.

I would say that the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, Robert Persaud and his Ministry have recently completed a disaster mapping exercise of large portions of the coast and of Georgetown particularly. They have done flood mapping in respect of the amount of rainfall and the resulting flood levels throughout those areas, so that we are indeed in a state of preparedness and can provide this type of information to CDEMA and other agencies including non-governmental agencies which would have an interest in this type information, and who would also want to respond as they have done in the past to help us when we have our issues at various times.

I would like to clarify, from my perspective, a few of the issues the Hon. Member Mrs. Riehl alluded to, in supporting this effort. I would not agree there is not a situation in the Caribbean where we do not have technological hazards. If there is a petroleum refinery or any large industrial plant in an area which has a severe risk, that is a technological hazard. The Japanese have learnt that to their great distress. In fact, the Japanese Prime Minister, Mr. Naoto Kan, has said that in going forward, his country is no longer going down the road of nuclear power, because the technological hazard imposed by a nuclear plant, which failed and is still a risk there after the earthquake and tsunami, has had incredibly damaging consequences for his country.

Sir, I would say indeed that we do have technological hazards, on the coast particularly, in respect of issues relating to disaster management.

The Hon. Member said what to me was a surprising statement when one sees the facts on the ground. She did say we have always maintained the seawall. I have difficulty with this statement particularly as last Saturday I stood and looked off the seawall at the retreat lines of the sea defence in the area of West Coast Berbice at Brahn. We also know that in the area from Mon Repos there was also a retreat of the seawall. We lost national territory and agriculture lands because there was neglect of our seawalls; not only our seawalls but our other entire infrastructure over a particular period in this country. The Hon. Members on that side of the House know exactly which period I am alluding to.

Fundamentally the issue of public education awareness on issues relating to clogged drains, garbage in drains and so on is one which I think the Government is paying great attention to. In the media, even in the schools, our schoolchildren are being made aware. There is constant discussion and debate as to the clogging of drains, the throwing of garbage and so on. I hear there is an implied criticism on the issue of styrofoam boxes.

The issue in relation to the poor environmental state, with respect to garbage, particularly in the city of Georgetown and other places, has fundamentally to do with lack of proper management of the systems in place, of the resources. The resources are there; the people are there. The assets are there. Fundamentally in the city of Georgetown the reasons we have clogged drains and styrofoam boxes in all those places is not because we buy styrofoam boxes or use plastic. I know the Members on the other side are politically aligned with the City Hall. I am saying fundamentally it is the same attitude which has transcended over the years, and which persists in terms of poor management of public resources. Even when there is an asset base, even when there is a revenue base, with recourse to properly expend the sums, there is a poor environment. That is indeed the problem.

Mr. Speaker, it has perhaps completely escaped the Hon. Member's attention that indeed the Government has closed the La Repentir Dumpsite and has opened a new Garbage Management Sanitary Waste Landfill Facility, with modern equipment, at Haags Bosch. It seems to have completely escaped the Hon. Member's memory or attention. I think since she went on so much about that it is indeed unfortunate that is the case. **[Mrs. Backer: Who is she?]** The Hon. Member, Mrs. Clarissa Riehl.

The answer is not simply in banning styrofoam as was suggested by the Hon. Member. I know they have a reflective attitude towards banning things, so, now they want to simply ban styrofoam boxes and not deal with the issue as it stands in relation to the management of the city with which they have a very close and intimate relationship.

Fundamentally, all over the world and I do note that on last Sunday there was a large flooding in the capital city of Nigeria. The Governor of the State, Mr. Babatunde Fashola, was decrying that Lagos was not following a planned, prepared, disaster management system, even though they said it was flash flooding and they were still recovering bodies up to last night. The basic problem was that they were not following the plan as it were, and developing proper resources and interventions.

Problems exist all over the world. We have to anticipate, and we are in a position of anticipating and relating to these issues, as the Hon. Minister did present, when we signed onto this arrangement. I want to say that since we are faced in going forward with issues of climate change, and since we are faced with enormous risks, including the technological risks, we need to be disciplined, be fully aware and not obfuscate the issues which relate to the problem of disaster management when it occurs. We need not be in a position where we lose our heads when we are faced with the difficulties and challenges related to disaster management.

With that, I would like to say I fully support and endorse this move to CDEMA, and I hope, as indeed the Hon. Member Riehl did indicate, that it would benefit from the full support of the Hon. House. Thank you. [Applause]

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkette (replying): I want to thank my colleague Mr. Benn, and also thank Mrs. Riehl for the support of the Motion. I agree that national institutions also have to be very

strong. I think that our own Civil defence Commission stepped up to the plate during the last flooding in the Rupununi. We are also improving here in Guyana.

With that Mr. Speaker, I say thanks for the support and ask that the motion be adopted.

Question put, and agreed to

Motion is carried.

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

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Hinds: Mr Speaker, I move that the House be adjourned to next Thursday, 21st July, 2011.

Adjourned accordingly at 3.43 p.m.