



PRESS RELEASE

CIVIC CALL FOR AUTONOMOUS AND INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT OF EXTRACTIVE SECTOR

The bewildering pace and range of official decision-making is rendering the Government accountable to no one, generating a widely felt dilemma of who to trust and what to believe. There is no longer any official institution or agency to which anyone – including those sympathetic to the administration - can turn for an objective assessment of major issues affecting the future of Guyana. Parliamentary Sectoral Committees do not meet; Regional governments and Neighbourhood Democratic Councils have never been allowed to function independently.

Three recent examples of government extricating itself from accountability are: the stripping of the Public Oversight & Accountability Committee (POAC) from the Natural Resources Fund (NRF) Act; reducing the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to a rubber-stamp and the pending appointment of a high-profile party person to Head the Guyana Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (GYEITI).

In the case of the Parliamentary opposition, the government's reasoning for not engaging in even the pretense of consultation appears to be that the APNU+AFC forfeited any right to accountability as punishment for the five months electoral impasse in 2020. With respect to civil society, long-standing ideological suspicion by the ruling party of groups not under party political control has translated into 'no one voted for them' and therefore they have no right to accountability.

The essence of accountability is provision of trustworthy information, i.e. facts that enable free, prior and informed consent. Currently citizens rely on sources pieced together by the media, anecdotes from an Energy Conference, remarks to visiting dignitaries, or the latest foreign investor unveiling his plans.

This control of information in an ethnically and politically polarized society - in which one side is inclined always to give the rulers who look like them benefit of the doubt and the other side to always suspect mischief - is particularly toxic. Such an approach would be unacceptable even were such opaque decision-making limited to routine political matters. However, when dealing with future-of-society issues such as a gas pipeline, a controversial hydroelectric scheme, expanded oil exploration and deposit of 30 tons-and-counting of toxic wastes daily on the coastland, the current decision-making process is nothing less than frightening and intolerable.

It is difficult to identify a more relevant Agency to our current situation in Guyana than GYEITI. It has a clear and limited mandate to contract leading international accountants to produce vital extractive sector information in an annual Report in which anyone can have The two Reports produced to date have been generally well-received. However, its primary characteristic of trustworthiness is now under threat.

The person recently identified as the next Director of the GYEITI is not known to have competencies in business, economics, finance or the extractive sector. Moreover, the absence of required qualifications is aggravated by the fact that his employment record in Guyana has been associated with positions usually reserved for persons trusted by the ruling party. In small politically and ethnically divided States such as Guyana, governed by a very

slim one seat “majority”, it is imperative to ensure that the Head of the GYEITI Secretariat is both competent in the specifics of the job as well as capable of objectively managing diverse stakeholder’s interests.

Similarly, the credibility of Natural Resources Fund is fatally compromised by party-dominated decision-making. Also troubling is the replacement of the Minister of Finance with the Presidency in the NRF Act 2021, an Office immune to prosecution. In such circumstances the transparent and trustworthy information all Guyanese have a right to expect about the Fund will be sacrificed.

We believe our concerns are similar to those reflected in the recent US Government Report ***Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Assessment Guyana*** released a few days ago which states on page 8:

“It is incumbent on the government, parliament and the citizens to reach across the racial and ethnic divide to come to a common vision of a new national development plan....political favoritism towards one ethnic group is especially worrisome as Guyana is on the cusp of unprecedented economic transformation.”

The endorsing organizations of this statement are, therefore, calling on the Government specifically to modify the legislation governing the NRF and to ensure selection processes in both the NRF and GYEITI are credible, transparent, trustworthy and in the national - rather than partisan interest.

ENDORISING ORGANIZATIONS

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Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR)
East Coast Development Committees (ECD7)
Guyana Human Rights Association (GHRA)
Guyana Organization of indigenous Peoples (GOIP)
Guyana Society for the Blind (GSB)
Guyana Workers Union (GWU)
National Toshias’ Council (NTC)
Policy Forum Guyana Inc (PFG)
Red Thread
Transparency Institute Guyana Inc. (TIGI)
Ursuline Sisters in Guyana

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