

# FORUM ON EFFECTIVENESS & SOLIDARITY

## REPORT

### TO

## UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

### ON

### WORKSHOP #3

### “Promoting Racial Harmony”

Methodist Outreach Centre

Georgetown

June 15 2004

#### Introduction

Workshop # 3 aimed to convert the proposals generated at Workshop #2 on ‘*Improving Race Relations*’ into practical proposals for action. The focus on race emerged from Workshop #1 as the topic most organizations felt needed to be addressed by civil society.

Workshop #2 ended with the identification of four priority issues that culminated from discussions. The Continuation Committee was charged with converting these priorities into proposals for an action programme. The four priorities were :

- *Reinforce national awareness of challenges diversity presents in Guyana*
- *Address widespread sense of Powerlessness in the society*
- *Actions to Promote Social Cohesion at the Community Level*
- *Independent Youth Actions.*

#### Preparation For Workshop #2

In preparation for the #3 Workshop the Committee’s efforts focused on integrating the four priorities into two forms of action. This process took longer than anticipated, largely due to difficulties encountered in operationalising constitutionalism as a strategy. Several meetings were

held on this issue without successfully resolving the problem. The Committee decided to take the matter back to the larger group rather than delay the Workshop.

Proposals were circulated to participants in advance of the meeting on how the two forms of action could be developed. The first action was a *Campaign on Diversity* and the second "*Constitutionalism: Pathway to Empowerment*". It was agreed to begin the workshop with two panel discussions the first on constitutionalism and the second on campaigning on race.

## **Workshop**

The workshop was held on Tuesday June 15<sup>th</sup> at the Methodist Outreach Centre. Unfortunately two major workshops were scheduled for the same week on 'trafficking in people' and 'corporal punishment', to which many NGOs participating in the FES series were also invited. In all some 34 people representing 24 organisations (*Appendix 1*) participated in the Workshop, which commenced at 9.00am and ended at 3.30pm

Difficulties with the constitutional issues were compounded by the fact that neither of the two key persons for the constitutional panel were able to attend the meeting: one being out of the country and the other out of circulation with 'flu. In light of this it was agreed prior to the meeting to postpone the constitutional aspects of the programme and devote the workshop to action on improving racial harmony. In keeping with this decision the panel discussion format was replaced by a presentation by Rights Of Children (ROC) on their campaigning techniques on promoting racial harmony.

## **Agenda Items**

Rights of Children (ROC) has been the most active organisation in Guyana in campaigning on issues of race. It is the only organisation whose sole focus is to promote racial harmony. Four members of ROC made brief presentations of the organization's past campaigning activities and circulated examples of materials produced in support of their campaigns. This presentation culminated in the explanation of a ROC Handbook for community-based campaigning on race, produced as part of a *Community Challenges* campaign four years ago. ROC also circulated a list of all the activities they had developed and the materials produced.

Participants then divided into four groups, two comprising community-based organizations and two made up of national organizations. The community-based groups focused on identifying actual ideas for campaigning their organizations wanted to initiate using both the preparatory papers circulated prior to the meeting and the ROC Handbook as aids to this process. The national organizations focused on the kind of support their organizations needed from FES in order to respond more effectively both to requests from members as well as to participate in national discussions.

### *Reports from the Groups*

Reports from the groups of community-based organizations revealed a list of issues on which they intended to campaign. The different groups with networking support from FES will carry out these activities individually. The ROC offered to assist any groups with technical aspects, particularly on campaigns that they themselves have undertaken previously.

The following groups identified themselves as interested to campaign:

Love Outreach International - Art Competition on race

Vilvoorden Womens' Group - Poem and song competition

CBR Essequibo - Hands on Harmony Challenge

Uitvlugt Hindu Temple - signature campaign

#78 Womens' Group - art competition

YMCA – Linden : hands on harmony, street drama and signature campaign.

Buxton AOG - addressed need for action which de-stigmatized the community after the period of violence and the coming together of all existing groups to plan a way forward. In particular the community has an unemployment problem linked to the violence.

The national level groups expressed a number of concerns they felt could be addressed through the FES:

- meet other organizations concerned about relations between races
- explore issues of national interest such as the Keane Gibson book in a less formal way than the Ethnic Relations Commission
- Need opportunity to raise questions arising from local level work at a broader forum
- Need periodic forum discussions on topics related to race such as PRSP, constitution.
- Provide opportunity to get a sense nationally of what is going on in matters related to race.

After lunch the broad division between national and local level organizations, which was considered v. effective was maintained for the next session which consisted of :

- i. For local level groups: how they will go about planning the campaigning activities identified in the pre-lunch sessions, and
  - ii. For national organizations: A programme of national level discussions for Forum members.
- i. Local level campaigning began with an introduction to '7 Steps in Campaigning' by Merle Mendonca, Campaigns programme Coordinator of the Guyana Human Right Association. This was followed by a session of applying the 'steps' to one of the activities chosen by the group members at the previous session.

In a subsequent report to the plenary, representatives from Buxton identified an imaginative campaign to be initiated in the August holiday period. Some elements of the campaign include:

- inviting back East Indians who used to live in Buxton
- recognize East Indians who never left
- develop the theme "as it was in Buxton in the early days"
- relate with other communities that suffered
- invite distinguished Buxtonians
- physically improve village: lights, clean trenches, pavilion
- expand overseas involvement
- banners highlighting racial harmony

Other FES members offered their support and willingness to involve themselves in appropriate activities of this campaign.

- ii. National level organizations identified a series of themes on which they wanted one day workshops held. Topics identified were:

- Race and religion
- HIV/AIDS and race
- Race and the education System
- Role of women in Racial/Ethnic Violence
- The issue of Race & Constitution – (previously agreed on).

The group spent some time addressing the issue of involvement of FES members in planning and organizing these functions. It was pointed out that the Coordinating Committee had no mandate beyond organizing the activities needed to bring the “improving Racial Harmony” issue to the point of action. Members of the Coordinating Committee, for the most part, are older established organizations. They felt this arrangements is not healthy. New people need the experience of being on planning committees. Newer organisations showed a marked reluctance to involve themselves in the Coordinating Committee. An interim solution agreed upon will see the original members of the Coordinating Committee remaining for the next six months, during which time the aim is to complete the 5 one-day workshops on the themes identified above. For each of the themes, organizations that either requested them, or have a special interest in them will be integrated into the planning and organizing. According to this principle, the Hindu Society from UG will play a role in the Race and Religion workshop; A.I.D.S. will play a similar role in the ‘HIV/AIDS and Race’ workshop and so on.

#### **Follow-UP Activities**

The FES Coordinating Committee will meet in the near future to formalize its activities for the next six months. Five events during that period is ambitious and needs to be reviewed in light of other commitments and demands being made on NGOs,

In the meantime networking among members with respect to campaigning activities is being encouraged.

#### **Finances**

A Report on the Budget and financing for the workshop is attached. (Total expenses: \$150,538.)

**Mike McCormack**  
**Convener**  
**Coordinating Committee**

## Appendix 1 List Of Participants

Name	Organisation
Lateef Lisimba	Guyana Cooperative Credit union
Fred Fredericks	Guyana Organisation of Indigenous People (GOIP)
Carol Macy	Printing & Allied Workers Union (PIAWU)
Vanessa Phillips	“ “ “ “
Gem Issacs	G+
Pancham Singh	Guyana Trades Union Congress (TUC)
Mercylene Moses	Grace Assemblies of GOD, Buxton
Phillip Adams	A.I.D.S.
Kaye-Ann Hall	Rights Of Children (ROC)
Megan Vieira	“ “ “
Malissa Somwar	“ “ “
Shondell Payne	“ “ “
Lance Smith	“ “ “
Gitanjali Sarjoo	Guyana Human Rights Association
Mike McCormack	“ “ “ “
Merle Mendonca	“ “ “ “
Tessa Crandon	Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC)
Rosina Butters	Guyana Council of Churches (GCC)
Shurcina Hope-Hinds	Christian Brethren, Buxton
Andaiye	Red Thread
Lisa Haniff	UG Hindu Society
Norma Paton	Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) – Essequibo
Linda Duncan	“ “ “ “
Dharamdai Ramjit	Vilvoorden Women’s Group – Essequibo
John Palmer	Love Outreach international - WCD
Shawn Persaud	Uitvlugt Hindu Temple
Nelson Bakker	Linden YMCA
Ulric Harmon	FREED – Linden/Kwakwani
Rona Dowden	FREED “
Wilhelmina Henry	#78 Women’s Group - Berbice
Seonaid Welch	Adult Education Association - Berbice
Randy Pellew	Guybernet
Stanhope Williams	“ “
Patricia Thomas	CBR - Guyana