

TOWARDS GREATER INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE IN GUYANA

“BUILDING TRUST TO ACHIEVE
GENUINE POLITICAL CO-OPERATION”

Presented by thr PPP/C Government



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Pioneering Constitutional Reform and Good Governance

The People’s Progressive Party (PPP) was established in 1950 as a multi-ethnic organization with the aim of winning independence and achieving social justice for all the people of British Guiana. The founders of the PPP were convinced of the need for such a Party to involve the broad masses for a successful challenge to colonialism and to improve the quality of life of the people.

The PPP demanded constitution reform with the objective of expanding rights and improving Governance in all its aspects. The PPP was, therefore, a pioneer in the political campaign for good governance.

The first important victory of the PPP was constitutional reform allowing for universal adult suffrage for the people of British Guiana and a Ministerial system of Government. After the first general elections held in 1953, which the PPP won by a landslide, the improved constitution was suspended and the colonial authorities prosecuted the PPP leaders.

National unity forged by the PPP was shattered by an engineered division of the Party, which resulted in the formation of the People’s National Congress (PNC).

Despite the division, in all the subsequent free and fair elections, the PPP/C won a percentage of votes far larger than the size of any single ethnic group.

The reason for this consistent success is that the PPP has unwaveringly promoted national unity even in the most difficult days of subversion. The late Leader of the PPP and President of Guyana, Dr. Cheddi Jagan reflects this position in the following statements:

“Regardless of race or ethnic origin, let us consolidate our forces, win new support and march forward to victory... Racism is the greatest curse of our land... anyone who spreads racial propaganda must be severely dealt with. Such a person is an enemy to himself and his country.”
(Dr. Cheddi Jagan, 1965)

“Unity of the working class regardless of race is vital. If we are to go forward, the party must have the backing not of one race, but of all races. We must take the offensive. We must combat racism mercilessly and build a disciplined party...”
(Dr. Cheddi Jagan, 1967).

The PPP won the 1957 elections after the colonial authorities reinstated constitutional rule. It again succeeded in securing constitutional reform in 1961 when it won elections for the second consecutive time after the suspension of the constitution. It assumed office under an advanced constitution which introduced “self-government”. The British Government gave the undertaking that independence would be negotiated before the next general elections due in 1965. However, the PPP Government was severely destabilised between 1962 and 1964. The Government was not allowed to serve out its term because of the imposition of early elections with a change in the electoral system from first-past-the-post to proportional representation in order to facilitate removal of the PPP.

It was as a result of the rejection of efforts towards political unity, increasingly authoritarian rule and elections rigging from 1968 to 1990 that broad unity was sought by the PPP with other opposition forces. The unity which was generated aided the restoration of democracy in 1992 in which the Carter Centre led by Nobel Laureate and former US President Jimmy Carter and other international organizations, including the Commonwealth, played a major role. As a result, the PPP/Civic won the elections and assumed office.

The historical record is unchallengeable: Since the division in 1955, the PPP made continuous efforts to arrive at arrangements with the PNC to maintain and ensure the unity of the Guyanese people. These efforts were particularly intense during the periods 1961 to 1964, 1976 to 1978 and 1984 to 1985. The PNC rejected these efforts categorically describing them at one time as only “superficially attractive.”

The Struggle for Good Governance

During the years of authoritarian rule the PPP on its own or in unity with other opposition groups, parties and members of civil society, resisted all efforts to destroy democratic and constitutional rule in Guyana.

Among the issues which the PPP campaigned against were:

- Elections rigging between 1968 and 1990;
- Abolition of appeals to the Privy Council on constitutional matters;
- Politicisation of the Judiciary and Security Forces
- Political and ethnic discrimination
- Abolition of Press Freedom
- Subversion of independent institutions
- Corrupt and poor accountability
- Party paramouncy over the institutions and organs of the State
- The 1978 rigged referendum and the 1980 imposed Constitution.

During this period the PPP continually sought unity and explored proposals to generate ethnic security and a restoration of democracy.

The Commitment to Democracy, Constitutional Reform and Inclusive Governance

As a result of the PPP's commitment to democracy it embraced constitutional reform and inclusive and participatory governance as part of its platform for the 1992 general and regional elections. *This resulted in the formation of the PPP/Civic alliance to contest those elections.*

Upon its accession to office in October 1992, the PPP/Civic Government inherited one of the poorest and most heavily indebted countries in the hemisphere with, inter alia:

- Over 90 percent of revenue being used to service external debt;
- Over 60 percent of the population living below the poverty line;
- Several macro-economic imbalances including a fiscal deficit of 25 percent of GDP and a balance of payments deficit of 47 percent of GDP;
- High interest rates;
- Runaway inflation;
- Dilapidated physical and social infrastructure;
- Lack of public accountability; and
- Mass migration leading to a severe "brain drain"

Today, the debt servicing is less than 40 percent of revenue, the population below the poverty line has been reduced by half, the balance of payments and fiscal deficits are below 10 percent of GDP, interest rates have been cut in half and for the last eight years inflation is in single digits. The physical and social infrastructure has been significantly rehabilitated. In addition, the Government has made significant progress in advancing good governance and financial accountability through the introduction of the following measures:

- Return of and respect for democratic organs;
- Independent functioning of State institutions;
- Expansion of press freedom;
- Participation of the Opposition on state boards;
- Amendment of the Standing Orders of the National Assembly to allow for Standing Committees;

- Reintroduction of financial accountability especially through the submission of annual reports of the public accounts by the Auditor General;
- Reform of the tendering process;
- Appointment of the Integrity Commission;
- Introduction of legislation to prevent discrimination and marginalisation at the work place;
- Fair and transparent financial and resource allocation to regions, sectors and communities.

The PPP/C Government's attempts to establish a Race Relations Commission failed due to the lack of opposition support.

The achievements set out above are not exhaustive but a mere indication of the substantial work done by the PPP/C Government to restore good governance and participatory democracy to Guyana.

Constitutional reform commenced during the Cheddi Jagan Government by the appointment of a Select Committee on which the Opposition was represented. The Select Committee travelled to many parts of the country and compiled several volumes of evidence. However, it was unable to conclude its report and make its recommendations because Parliament was dissolved and elections called for December, 1997.

Constitutional Reform and Inclusive Governance

In 1997, the PPP/C won the elections, which were certified as free and fair by international observers. Once again sustained destabilisation activities created instability, threatened social peace and obstructed the functioning of government offices. In order to ensure that the situation did not spin out of control, the PPP/C agreed to major compromises in the Herdmanston Accord. The Government's term of office was reduced by two years, it agreed to an audit of the elections and undertook to continue the process of constitutional reform.

The Audit concluded that the elections were free and fair.

A constitutional Reform Commission was established and the PPP/C agreed to substantial reforms that advance the process of inclusive governance.

The Constitution was amended to provide for:

- (a) Reducing the powers of the President;
- (b) An Opposition veto on the appointment of the Chancellor and Chief Justice;
- (c) Expanding the functions of the Judicial Service Commission;
- (d) Strengthening the financial independence of the Judiciary and Auditor General;
- (e) Institutionalising participation by social groups in the decision making process;
- (f) Expanding human rights;
- (g) Involving the National Assembly in the appointment of Service Commissions (Public, Police, Judicial and Teaching);
- (h) Modifying the electoral system for national and local government elections;
- (i) Establishing of five Standing Committees to examine and review government policy in the social, economic, foreign policy and natural resources sectors;
- (j) A Parliamentary Management Committee;
- (k) A Human Rights Commission;
- (l) A Procurement Commission;
- (m) A Standing Committee on Constitutional Reform;
- (n) A Commission to review the functioning and composition of the security forces; and
- (o) Commission on the Rights of the Child, Gender Rights and Indigenous Peoples.

These and other reforms make the Guyana Constitution the most advanced in terms of inclusiveness and Opposition involvement in governance in the Caribbean Region and certainly one of the most advanced in the world.

The Human Rights, Ethnic Relations and Procurement Commissions established in a bi-partisan way together can address allegations of police excesses, ethnic discrimination and corruption, which are some of the main unsubstantiated accusations which the Opposition has levelled against the Government. However, these and the other reforms now provided for by the Constitution to deal with these issues have not been

given effect to because of the current boycott of Parliament by the Opposition.

In addition to the above, the constitutional standing committees of Parliament and the Parliamentary Management Committee have not been established nor have the commission on social groups, which include commissions on Rights of the Child, Gender Rights and Indigenous People.

The PPP/C once again won the 2001 general elections under a modified electoral system. These elections were certified as free and fair by international observers, including the Carter Centre, the Commonwealth, the OAS, the European Union and CARICOM. Immediately after the conclusion of the elections, the PNCR opposition organized extensive protest demonstrations.

Consistent with the PPP and the Government's position on dialogue, as stated by President Bharrat Jagdeo below, an invitation was issued to the late Mr. Desmond Hoyte, the Leader of the PNCR to dialogue.

“I extend a hand of friendship to those who are in opposition and invite them to sit with us and iron out differences so that we can have a common cause to serve – a cause in service to our people and nation”.
(President Jagdeo, August 11, 1999).

“It is critical that we engage one another in dialogue. We should always reach out and talk to each other. In this way, we would be fulfilling the mandate of all Guyanese we share out differing views in the search for national consensus on the common objective of making this country a better place for all”.
(President Jagdeo, March 31, 2001).

Arising from the agreements, the following bi-partisan committees were established:

- Local government reform;
- Border and national security;
- Distribution of land and house lots;
- Resuscitation of the bauxite industry;
- Depressed communities' needs; and
- Radio monopoly and non-partisan boards

The achievements of the dialogue included:

- (a) Depressed Communities Needs Committee:** Four areas were identified by the Committee: Non Pariel/Enterprise, Buxton, De Kinderen and Meten-meer-Zorg. The Government has set aside \$60M to do work in these areas. The agreed development work has been carried out in all of the four communities.
- (b) The Report of Border and National Security Committee:** The committee met on a number of occasions and produced a report. President Jagdeo and Mr. Hoyte met with members of the committee and agreed that the report will be tabled in the National Assembly for the consideration of the Sectoral Committee on Foreign Affairs when it is formed.
- (c) National Policy in Distribution of Land and House lots:** Both President Jagdeo and Mr. Hoyte rejected the report of the Committee on the distribution of land and house lots. It was agreed that the Government would table a white paper on land distribution and the criteria for selection by the end of February 2002. However Parliament did not meet until March 15th, 2002. The White Paper was tabled.
- (d) The Bauxite Industry Resuscitation Committee:** On February 19, 2002, President Jagdeo and Mr. Hoyte met with the members of the Bauxite Resuscitation Committee. It was agreed that it would focus on the LINMINE privatisation issue. A negotiating team comprising representatives from the Government and the Opposition would be set up to engage OMAI/Cambior for the privatisation of LINMINE. On February 19th, 2002, Mr. Hoyte was asked to submit his

- representative, which he subsequently did. This has resulted in a MoU between the Government of Guyana and Omai/Cambior.
- (e) **The Report of the Radio Monopoly and Non-partisan Media Boards:** The report was presented to President Jagdeo and Mr. Hoyte. It was noted that no agreement was reached on the issue of the National Frequency Management Unit (NFMU) at the committee level. On February 18th, 2002, Mr. Hoyte suggested to President Jagdeo that the Government of Guyana proceed with the drafting of the necessary legislation pending agreement on the issue of the NFMU. By February 19th, 2002, President Jagdeo had informed Mr. Hoyte that the report was sent to the Attorney General Chambers so that the drafting process could start. It would be useful to note that on November 7th, 2001, President Jagdeo and Mr. Hoyte signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which cleared the way for the passage of the amendment to the Wireless Telegraphy Regulations (which was agreed to by the joint committee) and the establishment of an interim Advisory Committee on Broadcasting with respect to compliance by television stations licensees.
 - (f) **Local Government Reform Committee:** The Joint Task Force on Local Government Reform has made tremendous progress up to the time its mandate expired on May 18th, 2002. The Committee has made a request for an extension of the mandate by three months, so that it could wind up its work.

Other progress made by the dialogue included:

- (1) **PNC/R Membership on State Boards, Commission and Committees:** Mr. Hoyte had raised the issue of PNC/R participation on boards. As a result, PNC/R nominees were named to serve on over 50 state boards, commissions and committees.
- (2) **Creation of post of Head of the Public Service:** President Jagdeo and Mr. Hoyte agreed “to create a position of a formal Head of the Public Service separate and distinct from the political post of Head of the Presidential Secretariat.”

(3) Parliamentary Management Committee and Sectoral Committees: At the February 18 and 19th, 2002 dialogue meetings, the President, once again, suggested to Mr. Hoyte that since their representatives (Messers Persaud and Carberry) were unable to reach agreement on the issue, they should discuss this outstanding matter at their level. Mr. Hoyte, in response, suggested that the matter should be dealt with at a subsequent meeting.

On March 14, 2002, the PNCR surprisingly, put the dialogue on pause despite the above achievements alleging that agreements were not fulfilled.

Building Trust

Post-independence politics in Guyana has been characterized by a lack of trust between the two main political parties despite the determined efforts of the PPP and the PNC/R.

Recently, executive power sharing has been proposed as a solution to Guyana's problems. Quite apart from the negative consequences associated with executive power sharing such as the institutionalisation of ethnic rivalry and the absence of political opposition, no contrived system of governance will succeed in a situation where trust and good faith do not exist between the political parties.

The PPP/C believes that a conscious effort is required by the major political parties to build trust and establish confidence. Without such trust, suspicion will continue, motives will be questioned, policies will be judged on distorted criteria, resource allocation will always be followed by allegations of partisanship and agreements will be difficult to be arrived at. It is not even possible at this time to sign a crime communiqué as proposed by the Social Partners.

The PPP/C proposes the implementation of all the constitutional reforms as an immediate measure to building trust and to further enhance inclusive governance. In this regard, the parties will be required to collaborate on:

- the appointment of the Rights Commission;
- the appointment of the Parliamentary Management Committee;
- the appointment of the Service Commissions; and
- the appointment of the Standing Committees.

The establishment of these and other bodies provided for in the Constitution and their optional functioning will generate confidence and increasing cooperation and good-will.

The PPP/C will expand on these efforts by encouraging broader co-operation by all forces in the society involved in public affairs but particularly the political parties.

These collaborative efforts would include:

- (a) Establishing means and facilities to enhance the work of Members of Parliament and strengthening their ability to present their views in legislative matters and to represent their constituents.
- (b) Improving the discourse between Government and Opposition through the appointment of Shadow Cabinet Ministers who can represent their views on policy to the Government and be apprised of policy developments by the Government.
- (c) Improving ties between the political parties through discussions and debates which will also contribute to building confidence.
- (d) Devising additional ways and means of working closer together in a non-partisan way at the local government level where national political controversies generate less divisions and where development and implementation issues give rise to the possibility of greater co-operation in the short term.

These measures which are vital for our political development and the emergence of a new political culture characterized by greater trust, civility and commitment to the national interest.

The PPP/C is encouraged by recent pronouncements by the main opposition party which indicate a commitment for constructive engagement. We hope that these engagements will result in the acceptance of these and other proposals to solve national issues, to build trust and to improve relations between our political parties.

In an environment created by deepening trust and confidence, further arrangements for inclusive governance can result after consultation with our constituents and the electorate.

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