



ERC STATEMENT ON THE LAUNCH OF COUNTERING HATE SPEECH CAMPAIGN

In Guyana, our enviable peaceful coexistence and tolerance exemplify what is generally desired of a plural society. With our hospitable diverse people, our rich tapestry of cultures and religions have contributed to the mosaic of identities that define us.

The fusion of cultures in Guyana is evident in every aspect of daily life, from our foods, music, and art to our languages and religious practices. Our country's cultural landscape reflects the myriad influences that have shaped it over centuries, hallmarked by the sharing in each other's religious and traditional observances with great pride.

While we can truly be proud of Guyana's rich diversity and its corresponding positive attributes, we must also recognize that like all plural societies, we are not defined by perfection.

Historical legacies of colonialism, slavery, and indentureship have left deep scars, resulting in ethnic tensions and political divides. Through unanimity in Parliament, the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) was established to address some of these challenges and, along with stakeholders, work towards building a more harmonious society.

In many ways, our historical and current challenges, helped to forge a profound sense of resoluteness among all our people for the good of society. This needs to be built upon holistically to help derive the harmonious society we are desirous of.

This brings us to the importance of Countering Hate Speech in Guyana's context. As our UN partner has noted, global trends indicate that xenophobia, racism, intolerance, discrimination, and anti-religious hatred are driving hate speech.

In Guyana, hate speech primarily targets individuals based on ethnicity, race, and political association, and to a lesser extent, disability and the LGBTQ community.

The Ethnic Relations Commission, tasked with promoting harmony and good relations, finds it crucial to counter hate speech in our society. Moreover, this campaign is also geared towards the 2025 General Elections period, to counteract the anticipated spike in hate speech that is usually prevalent during elections season.

Addressing hate speech has been an ongoing effort at the ERC. Over the years, the Commission has established a Media Monitoring Unit that tracks violations on the basis of ethnicity across television, radio, newspapers, and social media.

The ERC concurs with the UN findings, as social media notably emerges as the main platform for spreading hate speech, where racially-inciting, divisive, hateful, stereotypical, xenophobic, and inflammatory remarks are flagged. In the past year, the ERC has manually monitored and recorded over 134 instances of hate speech, with 103 violations based on race, 7 on religion, and 24 xenophobic violations.

The Commission has taken significant steps to address these violations through cautionary warnings, mediation, reconciliation, and, for severe cases, referral to the Guyana Police Force.

Crucially, the ERC has prioritized public education and awareness as a proactive measure to discourage hate speech and foster respect, tolerance, and kindness. The Countering Hate Speech Campaign aims to expand these efforts by partnering with UN Guyana to execute this important initiative.

Notably, the campaign aligns closely with the ERC's functions as outlined in Article 212D of the constitution and several other Guyanese laws, including:

1. **Article 160 A (1) of the Cybercrime Act** which states “that all persons, institutions and political parties are prohibited from taking any action or advancing, disseminating or communicating any idea which may result in racial or ethnic division among people”
2. **The 2002 amended Racial Hostility Act 1964, Cap 23:01**, which makes it a criminal offense to excite hostility or ill-will against persons by reason of their race and prohibits incitement to racial hatred. This can include words spoken, written, or published.
3. **The Broadcast Act 2011** prohibits the use of racial, ethnic or religious vilification of any individual or group by the broadcasting operators.
4. **The Representation of the Peoples (Amendment) Act No. 1 of 2001** also states that it is a criminal offense for any person to make or publish, or cause to be made or published, any statement, or take any action that results in or can result in racial or ethnic violence or hatred among people.

These laws demonstrate Guyana’s significant efforts to deter hate speech. The campaign will sensitize the public on these legal frameworks and the dangers of hate speech.

The Countering Hate Speech Campaign will include:

- 1) **A widespread social media campaign**

The social media campaign is aimed at creating social media content designed to counter Hate Speech and will sensitize the public on harm associated with such speech while sharing positive messages.

The Commission has already engaged public and private stakeholders, youth organizations, among others and takes this opportunity to once again encourage all stakeholders to do their part in supporting this campaign by generating messages that will “COUNTER HATE SPEECH” in all its forms.

2) Workshops with youth, social media influencers, and DJs

The workshops will aim to inform and educate stakeholders on the various forms that hate speech can take and how they can play a role in addressing the issue, using their wide networks.

3) Enhanced monitoring mechanisms

The ERC has identified two suitable software, which are currently being procured, that will aid in the tracking of key words and terms, that will assist the Media Monitoring Unit in better capturing a wider scope of monitoring, than their manual efforts are able to reach. The UN Guyana team is also working towards supporting this through their international partners.

4) Public engagements and awareness sessions

The messages of this campaign will be taken to high traffic areas, such as marketplaces, schools, malls, seawalls, workplaces to ensure maximum reach of the public. The team has already begun to engage the public and the response has been very receptive.

The Countering Hate Speech campaign will ensure that persons are conscious that freedom of expression comes with an important responsibility to be respectful, tolerant and mindful in what we communicate. The ERC team will be available to conduct awareness sessions upon request, in addition to those already scheduled.

Let's all do our part to “SAY NO TO HATE SPEECH” and advance our efforts to promote harmony and good relations among all.

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