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PRESS RELEASE

The Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) participated in the United Nations Permanent Forum of People of African Descent (PFPAD4) at the UN Headquarters in New York, April 14-17, 2025.

Representing the Commission is Shaikh Moeenul Hack, Chairman of the ERC. Commissioner Norris Witter was unanimously approved by the Commission to attend the forum; however, he opted out a few days before the opening. Also present at the forum, is ERC Commissioner Ras Khafra (Deon Dick) in his capacity as representative of the Guyana Rastafarian Council.

The Chairman in his address to the United Nations PFPAD4 stated “With a population comprising more than 30% of people of African descent, Guyana continues to call for justice through reparations, justice as accountability for centuries of slavery, exploitation, and the negative legacy of colonialism.”

He added to overcome the injustices, we must acknowledge that “Reparations is also about recognition of the pain, the displacement and the generational trauma inflicted by slavery. It is also about healing and reconciliation which form the foundation for lasting peace.”

Surrounding the Chairman’s participation at the Forum, the Commission has noted with great concern negative sentiments about his representation of ERC and takes this opportunity to clarify the distinction between the Commission being represented and the Commissioners being represented.

It must be noted that in 2023 and 2024 Commissioner Khafra was unanimously selected to represent ERC. In 2024, at the very last moment, Commissioner Khafra withdrew from representing ERC and opted to represent the Guyana Rastafarian Council.

In 2025, the opportunity to attend the forum was provided to Commissioner Norris Witter, to which there were no objections from any Commissioner. On Thursday 10th April, after 10pm Commissioner Witter withdrew his intention to attend, and requested Commissioner Ras Khafra as his replacement. It should be noted that travel to the forum was on April 13.

Based on his current attendance, it appears that, at the time when Commissioner Witter redrew, Commissioner Khafra was already sponsored to attend the forum as a representative of the Guyana Rastafarian Council. In addition, it would have necessitated a decision from the wider Commission on the issue of replacement.

The Commission wishes to state that it will not be distracted by the theatrics of persons seeking to cloud our vision and work. The ERC has consistently addressed complaints of all races and ethnicities in a fair and transparent manner, inclusive of African Guyanese.

The Commission has consistently prioritized African culture and issues by its participation in Emancipation observances, by providing trainings on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, by developing a Glossary of Terms to rid the use of derogatory Terms that are used to describe African Guyanese and all other ethnic groups, among other initiatives.

The ERC strongly believes that to holistically address injustices such as reparations, the African community needs the support of ALL, regardless of ethnicity, to advocate for justice, for the crimes of slavery imposed on our ancestors of African descent.

The Ethnic Relations Commission reiterates the call for reparations, as highlighted in the Chairman's remarks to the forum, "Let us use this moment to expand the support for reparations, underscoring that this is not about charity, it is about justice."

15 April 2025

Ethnic Relations Commission