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ERC HONOURS PRIZE WINNERS IN NATIONAL ESSAY COMPETITION ON COUNTERING HATE SPEECH

The Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) on Saturday, June 28, 2025, hosted a simple award ceremony for its National Essay Competition, held in observance of the International Day for Countering Hate Speech 2025.

Coincidentally, youth hailing from schools in Essequibo, Demerara, and Berbice were announced as the main prize winners after a rigorous judging process by literary critic Al Creighton. Seventeen-year-old Kareem Baksh, a student at Anna Regina Multilateral School, was adjudged the First Place winner. Christina Campbell, 16, of Manchester Secondary, East Berbice, Corentyne, was awarded Second Place. Joint Third Place was shared by Afiyah Jabbar, 15, of the School of the Nations, and Emanuel Hinds, 17, of New Campbellville Secondary, Georgetown.

The announcement was made during the presentation ceremony at the National Library, Georgetown, to honour the winners. The competition, which ran for about a month, was organized by the ERC in collaboration with the United Nations (UN) Systems in Guyana.

The competition was open to students aged 12 to 17, who were invited to submit essays under the timely and important theme: *"Countering Hate Speech: How can we fortify bonds among the ethnic groups?"*

The remarks from ERC Chairman Shaikh Moeenul Hack highlighted the essence of the initiative, noting that it formed part of a series of activities executed under the Commission's Countering Hate Speech Campaign launched in June 2024. He stated, "Initiatives such as this Essay Competition ensure that our youth, as future leaders, have a platform to amplify their voices and put forward solutions that we and society at large can adopt to foster a Guyana free of hate speech." He further added that The solutions outlined in the essays were centered around the importance of education and align excellently with the work of the ERC, as we too believe in the power of education to counter hate speech. Over the past two years, the ERC has engaged over 160 schools, reaching more than 17,700 students across all ten regions of Guyana. This, among several nationwide initiatives has target several stakeholder groups in a multifaceted approach to address hate speech, particularly race- and ethnicity-based.

The Chairman also emphasised the importance of putting the proposed solutions into action, explaining, "As we approach the 2025 General and Regional Elections, the significance of this work becomes even more urgent. In such politically charged periods, the risk of hate speech, particularly on the basis of race and ethnicity, intensifies. Let us take guidance from the voices of our youth and recommit ourselves to preserving peace, promoting mutual respect, and protecting national unity during this critical time."

UN Resident Coordinator Jean Kamau commended the winners but was vocal about the damaging implications of divisive remarks, especially on social media. "Your voices are powerful, and your words can inspire change. Standing up to hate does not require grand gestures. It begins with everyday actions, how we speak, how we treat others, and how we stand up for what is right. What may seem harmless can sometimes contribute to the

spread of harmful narratives. Have the courage to speak up when friends cross the line, don't laugh it off. And do not hesitate to call out disrespectful behaviour, even from adults," she asserted.

The three main prize winners received cash prizes and certificates amounting to over one hundred thousand dollars. A total of twenty-nine remarkable entries were received, and the young Guyanese shared their insightful perspectives on the theme. Competition judge Al Creighton emphasised that the scores were not far apart, citing the overall high quality of the submissions.

The Ethnic Relations Commission reiterates its commitment to its constitutional mandate of promoting harmony, understanding, and good relations among all Guyanese. The National Essay Competition is a key component of the ERC's public education and awareness programme aimed at eradicating discrimination and encouraging respect for persons of various cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

In closing, the Commission challenged all to live the values articulated in these writings, to think before typing or speaking, to act with respect, and to have the courage to challenge prejudice wherever it is encountered.

The winning essays will be made available to the general public on the ERC Facebook page and website.

Ethnic Relations Commission

June 28, 2025