

Domestic violence, police profiling among focal points for state of African-Guyanese forum

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The second annual "State of the Black and African Guyanese" forum, to be held on August 10th, will address the levels of violence against women, the depressed socio-economic status of Afro-Guyanese, and confront the negative correlation between young African males in Guyana and the country's law enforcement system.

The forum is being held under the theme "Guyana Approaching 50 years of Independence: Reviewing the Past and envisioning the future" and will feature speakers including David Granger, Vincent Alexander, Carl Greenidge, Aubrey Norton, Onassis Granville, David Hinds, Norman Ng-A-Qui and Sharma Solomon.

As was the case last year, the forum is organized and will be hosted, in part, by the Cuffy 250 Committee as it seeks to "to raise consciousness among African Guyanese about their history, heritage and the factors that combine to stifle their quest for equality and empowerment; and to encourage and mobilize communities to begin to address their problems on their own."

During a press briefing yesterday, Hinds told reporters that violence against women has been identified as a major problem in the Afro Guyanese community and he said the time has come to confront the "negative development." He said that domestic violence, if left unabated, will continue to have negative implications for the community and as such cannot be ignored. He added that men need to come to realize the importance of respecting women; that it is part and parcel of the African way of life.

Hinds also noted that young Afro-Guyanese men have been the target of executions and harassment by the police. A segment of Sunday, he said, will be dedicated to sensitizing young black men about their rights and the factors that contribute to their unfortunate relationship with law enforcement forces.

Hinds also says that the "rapid decline in the socio-economic and political

fortunes of African Guyanese," which he says has been happening for the last twenty years, in particular, is also reason for concern and must be addressed. Hinds says that visits made to various communities have confirmed statistics which state that unemployment among Afro-Guyanese is substantial. As opposed to being gainfully employed, he noted, many men are seen "liming" on street corners.

Even young people who graduated from secondary school and/or tertiary institutions and are therefore skilled or semi-skilled, he said, are part of the unemployed ranks.

Hinds says he has also found that small businesses owned by members of the Afro-Guyanese community are suffering as they are unable to access the capital needed to facilitate expansions or acquire other necessary resources.

The spending strength across the Afro-Guyanese community, he also pointed out, is noticeably weak as business owners and persons otherwise employed are together finding it difficult to purchase commodities as they seek to better their condition. These issues are compounded, Hinds says, by the fact that Afro-Guyanese find it more difficult to access the relief necessary to better their economic situations.

The committee says the realization of these realities made it clear that efforts were needed to correct the prevailing situation.

"During the course of the year we held over 30 forums, workshops and community meetings on the Essequibo Coast, West Berbice, Linden, West Demerara and Georgetown that addressed a wide range of issues that affect African Guyanese," a release from the committee stated.

Ng-a-Qui and Hinds believe these efforts have already produced encouraging results. Ng-a-Qui says the workshops have led to the revitalization of village groups, which have gone on to find solutions to community problems as opposed to depending on the state to fix their problems.

In addition to fixing their issues, he said, communities have begun to engage in development programs and policies. Hinds added that camps have been organized to sensitize young Afro-Guyanese on current and past realities. He said that such a camp is currently in session in Stanleytown,

West Bank Demerara (WBD). Fifty young people, he explained, have enrolled and are learning about their history as well as the current economic, education and other such situations they must live in. He said that such instructions are necessary for the youth to make informed advances.

"After almost fifty years of Independence, the jury is still out on the extent to which Guyana has lived up to its independence motto of "One People, One Nation, One Destiny." From an African Guyanese standpoint, Cuffy250 believes that the last 50 years of independence, despite some sincere attempts at social engineering, has not brought enough relief to this group from the institutionalized domination that has characterized its post-emancipation experience," the press release also says.

While the forum will pay a lot of attention to determining "the condition of African Guyanese within (Guyana's) larger Independence project (towards making) the linkage between the fortunes of the group and the macro-policies undertaken over the last 50 years," it will also focus on "teasing out the advances, challenges and setbacks of the national (Independence) project, as well as beginning a conversation on what realistic goals we can set for the next 50 years."

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