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GECOM Commissions Independent Media Monitoring Unit

Dr. Steve Surujbally, Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) today declared GECOM's Independent Media Monitoring Unit (IMMU) officially open. The IMMUs, which is located at Lot 110, Duke Street/Barrack Street, Kingston, Georgetown comprise a team of 15 monitors who have already been recruited and trained. Their monitoring skills have been boosted with the able guidance of Mr. Tim Neale, Commonwealth Media Advisor to GECOM.

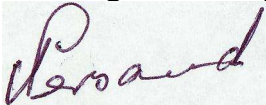
The IMMUs was established by GECOM following the establishment and signing of the self-regulatory Media Code of Conduct by all the country's main newspapers, radio and TV stations with the purpose of encouraging the media to make a full democratic contribution to the upcoming Elections. This initiative by GECOM is being supported, particularly by the European Union, under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the donor Community and the Elections Commission.

The Media Code of Conduct, which meets international standards of professionalism, will form a benchmark against which the monitoring team will assess the performance of the Media. The monitoring will be both quantitative and qualitative, in the first case actually counting and recording the share of time or space given by each media house to each political party and, in the second, making a qualitative assessment of the balance, accuracy and fairness of all news and political programmes.

Close attention will be paid to the often unavoidable coverage of sensitive issues. Any examples that seem likely (deliberately or by careless handling) to incite racial hatred or be the cause of inter-community violence will be noted for urgent discussion with the media house involved.

As the monitoring continues, discussions will take place with any media house that published any information with potential to generate problem. Later the Monitoring Unit will make public regular summaries of its data in the interests of transparency.

As a third stage, an International Independent Media Refereeing Panel (IIMRP) consisting of two respected media practitioners from elsewhere in the Caribbean is in the process of being established. The panelists, who are included in a list approved by the signatories to the Media Code of Conduct, will visit Guyana on a number of occasions in the next few months, and then come for a continuous period covering the last two months up to the Elections themselves. They will make their own assessment with full access to the recordings and library of material that will have been collected by GECOM's IMMUs.



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