

STATEMENT BY DR. STEVE SURUJBALLY AT THE GECOM MEDIA
CONFERENCE HELD ON FRIDAY, JULY 7, 2006.

Some time ago, the GUYANA Elections Commission (GECOM) made a unanimous decision not to issue any release, the content of which would in any way insult, embarrass or be antagonistic to any political party, Commissioner or other stakeholder. It is for this reason that GECOM has not, cannot and will not accuse any political party, Commissioner or other stakeholder of misrepresentation and mendacity. The Commission's releases will adhere only to the facts.

Here are the untarnished facts as they relate to the various current issues.

1. RE: THE EAB's FINDINGS

The Electoral Assistance Bureau (EAB), in its news release on the analysis of the 2006 PLE dated 22.06.2006, noted that it had issued a previous news release dated 09.06.2006 with "provisional results" on its analysis of the 2006 Preliminary List of electors (PLE). The very "provisional" nature of that release dictates that it was subject to corrections and further analysis. The EAB's final news release of 22.06.2006 concluded from its analysis of the 2006 PLE, which included computer, in-house and field tests, the following:

- 93.99% (+/-2.93%) of the electors on the 2006 PLE can be accounted for.
- Less than 1046 possible duplicates exist on the PLE, representing less than 0.22% of the total number of electors.
- No person under the age of 18 years at the qualifying date (15 the July 2006) is on the 2006 PLE.
- No person who has not been assigned a National ID number is on the 2006 PLE.
- 98.41% (+/- 2.89%) of the electors in the 2006 PLE are placed in their correct divisions based on a check of records of the random sample of 1199.

It is obvious from the above extract from the EAB's news release of 09.06.2006, that the advertisement was influenced by the Bureau's "provisional results" and takes no account of the final figures which were released by the Bureau via its media release of 22.06.2006.

Concerns by certain stakeholders have been raised about four categories of persons that are associated with the "voters list" list being "flawed". These are (i) "Persons reported to have migrated"; (ii) "Persons reported to have died"; (iii) No such addresses found; and (iv) "Persons not known to live at address".

At the outset, it must be pointed out that the term "voters list" is often being referred to (for example in a newspaper advertisement) as if it is the Final Voters List or Official List of Electors (OLE) when in fact it is the 2006 Preliminary List of Electors (PLE). This PLE should in no way be regarded as the "voters list", since it is subject to a sequence of legal changes before it emerges as the 2006 Official List of Electors. This point is made in order to counter the implication that it is the 2006 PLE that would be used to conduct the 2006 National and Regional Elections.

In addressing the four areas of concern listed as i-iv above GECOM notes the following:-

- i. Even if the EAB's field exercise were accurate and 97 persons have migrated, there is no legal basis for GECOM to delete their names.
 - ii. GECOM deleted the names of deceased persons from the 2001 OLE before merging it with the list of eligible electors registered during the first Cycle of Continuous Registration to form the 2006 PLE. This was done on the basis of monthly reports from the General Register Office on persons who had been registered as having died. Up to the time of the deletion of the names of dead persons, GECOM had received such reports up to May 31, 2006. The Objections aspect of the Claims and Objections exercise, which commenced on Tuesday, May 2, 2006, and concluded on June 10, 2006, provided the facility for the removal of the names of persons who might have died between May 31 and June 10, 2006. However, to do so would have meant the objector providing evidence in support of his/her objection.
 - iii. Preliminary research at GECOM has revealed that the EAB had relied on addresses rather than Electoral Division Numbers thereby ending up with the category of "No such address found" Anyone conscious of the commonality of names with villages in Guyana would immediately understand the anomaly which the EAB faced in this regard. According to the 2001 edition of the Gazetteer of Guyana for example, there are eight villages named Friendship, seven named Good Hope and seven Endeavours and so on..
 - iv. The 2006 PLE contains the names of electors brought forward from the 2001OLE and those from the first Cycle of Continuous Registration. Since the latter group would have been verified as living at the registered addresses, the concern of "Persons not known to live at address" has to be associated with the former group. It must be pointed out that any number of persons could have changed their addresses since the 2001 OLE was compiled. There is a facility for such persons to seek to record changes of their addresses by applying to GECOM for transfers. However, this is not a legal requirement which, if not met, could result in the deletion of the names of such persons.
2. RE: THE FINGERPRINT SCANNING AND CROS-MATCHING EXERCISE (FS & CME) CARRIED OUT BY THE ELECTORAL OFFICE OF JAMAICA AND MANAGEMENT SERVICES AND SUPPORT INC (EOJ & MSSI)

Firstly, let it be clear that it has never been documented that, in the past, there has been any great number of persons willfully wanting to defraud the electoral system by multiply registering.

Secondly, the EOJ did say that 25% of the fingerprints scanned were of good quality. The EOJ also said that 27% were of average quality. Of the remaining 48% of the prints which were of poor quality all (except 423) were usable. Of the 509853 scans of the prints on the Master Registration Cards (MRCs), 00.01% were found to be

“duplicates”. Of these, the EOJ was absolutely certain of only 947 (or 0.002%). The Scanner picks up fingerprints that are the same or are reasonably similar. The machine does not define whether the persons, whose supposed fingerprints are on the MRCs, are genuine electors.

Stakeholder concerns emanating from the report on the FS & CME address two main issues:

- i. Multiple Registrations (MR)
- ii. Mismatched Electors (ME)

Multiple Registrations

I have been advised by the technicians in the GECOM Secretariat that preliminary investigations pertaining to the 5374 (not 6373 that has been published in advertisements in the press) revealed that many of those reported as duplicate registrations actually are not and that some reasons for the occurrence of the MRs are (i) data collectors in the past might have used their own fingerprints to complete Registration Forms during past registration exercises; (ii) persons who had changed their addresses since being (first) registered felt that they were required to become re-registered; (iii)) persons who had changed their names since being (first) registered felt that they were required to become re-registered; and (iv) persons who had been registered when they were below 18 years old, but who felt that having reached this age, they were required to be registered in order to be able to vote

In order to better analyse the results of the FS & CME, the technical Secretariat staff has placed its findings into various categories and has proposed solutions for the Commission to consider.

Category I:

This category contains DOUBLE REGISTRATIONS. Here the photographs and biographic data correspond, but the Multiple Registration Cards (MRCs) numbers differ.

The solution here is simple. As is done in Jamaica and elsewhere, the newest (latest) registration is retained and the older registration deleted.

NB: 152 identical duplicates were found in this category.

Category II:

Here the fingerprint on the MRC matches the fingerpring on another MRC.

NB: There are 230 pairs from the “absolute” and 3,029 from the “possible” in this category.

Category III:

Here the fingerprint on the MRC matches fingerprints on several MRCs.

NB: There are 110 occurrences from the “absolute” and 310 from the “possible” in this category.

Category IV:

Here fingerprints correspond with electors who are now deceased.

NB: There are 14 such cases from the "absolute" and 191 from the "possible" in this category.

The solution to the anomalies found in categories II, III and IV can be found in the following procedures:

- i. Extract MRCs and list data of the electors concerned according to Registration Districts/Divisions.
- ii. Follow procedures outlined in Section 9 of Regulation 5 of 2000: "The Chief Election Officer publishes daily, in the print and electronic media, the names and material particulars of the persons being enquired into, requesting such persons to report within the time specified to the Registration Offices nearest to them, in order that the Registration Offices could conduct enquires into the registration of the electors concerned.

NB: The Secretariat has already outlined the steps to be taken in conducting the enquiry when the elector presents himself/herself to the Registration Officer.

Mismatched Electors

This is the most easily explicable and easily solvable of the EOJ's findings. The Director of the EOJ, Mr. Danville Walker himself made it quite clear that he was just documenting a finding, and that there is nothing surreptitious and underhand about this figure of 26239.

The scanner scans fingerprints on the REgistraion Forms (RF), each of which has a number and data pertaining to the registrant. Attached to that RF would be the Form which contains the corrections relative to updated information (e.g. name change or transfer). The machine (scanner) does not deal with that attached Form. However, the corrections would have been captured in the database. Obviously, there will be a mismatch, since the scanner is only interested in the fingerprint that is on the original RF.

Investigations revealed that this situation refers mostly to persons who would have been registered since the house-to-house registration of 1996, and who since then would have applied for corrections, transfers or changes to their names. While such changes would have been recorded on the registration database, the original data would have remained unchanged on the respective (obsolete) Registration Forms and Master Registration Cards (MRCs). Since it was those Registration Forms and MRCs that were provided to the EOJ for the fingerprints to be scanned, and since it was the data from said Forms /MRCs that was compared with the 2001 OLE, it is not unusual that "mismatched names" were discovered.

The pro forma matching of these mismatched cases has already begun. No one could have been or would have been disenfranchised. This accusation is at best a distraction.

3. THE QUESTION OF GOING TO COURT TO DETERMINE WHETHER RESIDENCY IS A REQUIREMENT FOR VOTING:

This is the season of opinions. Yes, two respected lawyers did give opinions. However, four (4) similarly respected lawyers gave much differing opinions.

The Commission has decided that it will not take the matter to court, not lastly because if GECOM were to so do, it would be honour bound and be morally and ethically obliged to wait until the decision by the court is made before proceeding with the continuation of preparations for elections. The Commission would not oppose any stakeholder, including political parties, private organizations and citizens from approaching the courts for advice on the matter.

4. REPORT ON OBJECTIONS AND HEARINGS HELD

A total of 11,933 objections were filed of which 32 were withdrawn by the objectors. 11,901 hearings were held and 426 of these were upheld.

5. PUBLICATION OF THE REVISED LIST OF ELECTORS (RLE)

This publication of the RLE commenced on time and is scheduled to end on July 20, 2006

6. PROCUREMENT OF ELECTIONS MATERIALS INCLUDING THE PRINTING OF BALLOT PAPER

Already two shipments of supplies (non-sensitive materials) have arrived. Within one day (tomorrow), another shipment is scheduled to arrive. Arrangements are being made to air-freight other necessary materials on time. Two Commissioners have accepted to be in Canada to oversee the printing of the Ballot Paper.

7. RECRUITMENT/TRAINING/APPOINTMENT OF POLLING DAY STAFF

You would have seen advertisements associated with the recruitment of the Polling Day Staff. The response was encouraging. Training has already begun for those selected. The Manuals and other materials (e.g. videos) supportive of the training exercises have already been produced.

8. ESTABLISHMENT OF POLLING STATIONS

Already 1,812 Places of Poll have been identified and confirmed. This number will increase as more Polling Stations are identified to cope with the 492,638 electors nation wide.

9. ELECTORAL CALENDAR

Now that the RLE has been published, it is time to review the Electoral Calendar. Once the CEO is satisfied with the RLE, the next major step is dealing with the Official List of Electors and inviting Political Parties to present their nominations. 32 days after accepting

the nominations (on Nomination Day), we can look forward to Election Day.

Finally, allow me to state categorically how pleased I am with the current performance of the Secretariat Staff at all levels. It is quite amazing the amount of man-hours that are being expended. Mr. Boodoo, the CEO, and his team are the only ones who have a comprehensive knowledge and experience related to the complexities of the electoral process.
