

GECOM CLARIFIES PUBLIC MISINFORMATION

14.06.2006

The Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) has noted the comments attributed to Dr. Rupert Rupert Roopnarine (Co-Leader of the WPA) at a Press Conference on Monday, June 12, 2006 as reported in an article titled "WPA urges national approach to finding solution" on page 6 of the Guyana Chronicle (Tuesday, June 13, 2006) and another titled "Sept. 12 being floated as new date for elections" page 16 of the Kaieteur News (Tuesday, June 13, 2006).

GECOM deems some of the comments attributed to Dr. Roopnarine to be grossly inaccurate and misleading. Consequently we believe that the false impressions given should be corrected as we hereby proceed to do.

According to the Chronicle article, Dr. Roopnarine accused the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) of a "dereliction of its duty" to verify the 2001 electoral list which was used as the basis of compiling the 2006 PLE, and posited that the Commission is not on top of its game. The matter of verification is also mentioned in the Kaieteur News article. GECOM is aware that the 2001 OLE and Addendum were subjected to various aspects of verification, the methodology of which we repeat below for easy reference and clarity.

Verification of the 2001 Official List of Electors (OLE) and Addendum

STEP 1

The records for those persons appearing on the 2001 OLE were copied to the new Database.

A Cyclic Redundancy Checksum (CRC) check sum comparison exercise was carried out to ensure that these persons' data have been copied intact.

STEP II

The transactions from the Addendum were applied to the new Database (in

Step 1).

STEP III

The text data stored in the Multiple Identity Document Issuing System (MIDIS) was checked against the records held in the new Database. This has produced a list of all the corrections made directly in the MIDIS that are not reflected in the 2001 OLE. This list was reviewed before these corrections were applied to the new Database.

STEP IV

The list of those deceased persons (as documented and forwarded to GECOM by the General Register Office) was applied to the new Database.

STEP V

The identity and residency of all electors who have given notification of change of address (i.e. the transferees) were verified.

STEP VI

The inked fingerprints of electors listed on the 2001 OLE have been scanned and cross-matched by the Electoral Office of Jamaica (EOJ) and Management Services and Support Inc (MSSI). The results of this exercise will be in GECOM's hands before the end of this week. This is an independent exercise to verify the magnitude of possible multiple registrants.

- Eliminate duplicates, multiples, etc. (A separate methodology is being developed for this).

The unverified registrants will then be the OLE with the following group flagged:

- deceased electors
- verified transferees
- duplicates, multiples identified via the cross-match of inked fingerprints.

In view of the foregoing, we have to assume that Dr. Roopnarine's reference to

verification of the 2001 OLE is associated with house-to-house visits to establish the residency status of persons listed on the 2001 OLE. Accordingly, we must point out that **it was never GECOM's duty (nor is it now) to verify the 2001 OLE by house-to-house verification. There is no law which makes it obligatory for GECOM to conduct any verification of the 2001 OLE.** This is made absolutely clear in the independent legal opinion which GECOM sought and received from Mr. Ashton Chase, Attorney-at-Law.

In terms of GECOM not being “on top of its game”, we must point out that the Commission and its Secretariat are working towards holding the elections in accordance with its Electoral Calendar. This Electoral Calendar is the subject of review by the Commission/Secretariat with assistance from two Joint International Technical Assessors (JITAs). At this time, GECOM is convinced that it will be able to bring off the elections as scheduled in the Electoral Calendar, unless it is thrown off track by political interferences. Against this background we find Dr. Roopnarine's comment that GECOM not being on top of its game quite inaccurate and misinforming.

The Chronicle article asserts that Dr. Roopnarine is claiming that the problems that are arising, where people who are alive and resident here (in Guyana) are being objected to, and that this situation would not have occurred had the 2001 compilation been verified by GECOM. To this we say that even if GECOM had conducted a HHV exercise, there is/was no law which provides for persons who are not found at their registered addresses to be removed from the 2001 OLE. To do so would be an illegality for which GECOM could be taken before the courts for disenfranchising eligible electors. Therefore, the position taken by Dr. Roopnarine that verification by house-to-house visits would have prevented “people who are alive and resident here being objected to” is baseless. This could have occurred even if house-to-house verification was done. Of course there would also be the question of electors who might have changed their addresses between the close of the first cycle of Continuous Registration and Claims and Objections.

We find Dr. Roopnarine's argument that it is the job of GECOM and not the job of political parties to authenticate the list to be quite disingenuous and to have been made in isolation. As we have indicated above. The 2001 OLE was subjected to different aspects of verification. In addition, all of the Parliamentary Political Parties, and the entire nation, are aware that GECOM commissioned the Electoral Office of Jamaica and Management Services and Support Inc (also of

Jamaica) to conduct a project involving the scanning, capture, storing and cross-referencing of inked fingerprints of the persons listed on the 2001 Official List of Electors and Addendum in a move to determine whether multiple registrations exist therein and what is the magnitude of such duplication.

Dr. Roopnarin's suggestion that, because of the problems that have arisen, the polling date could be shifted to a date later than September 12, which would necessitate the recall of Parliament that could only be done by the declaration of a state of emergency might be true. However, we must point out that, whether that were to happen or not, GECOM continues to be guided by the legal provisions associated with preparations for and the holding of elections.

While Dr. Roopnaraine and his party are interested in the quality of elections rather than when they are held (so that the losers would have no reasonable cause for complaint, thereby avoiding the threat of post-elections violence), GECOM remains committed to bringing off the upcoming elections in a free, fair and transparent manner within the confines of the governing laws.

GECOM takes specific note of Dr. Roopnaraine's contention that the current elections-related problems are not building public confidence in the electoral process. To this we can only say that unfounded and inaccurate public comments by leaders in our society do not and will never contribute to building public confidence in the electoral process. In fact such will contribute to undermining public confidence in the Commission. Accordingly, we call upon all stakeholders, especially the leaders in our society, to support GECOM as we move along in preparation for, and the holding of, the upcoming elections in compliance with the governing laws and in accordance with international best practice. We believe that it is only this that would bring to realization that "the losers would have no reasonable cause for complaint, thereby avoiding the threat of post-elections violence".

Vishnu Persaud, MCIPR
Public Relations Officer