

16.04.2008.

GECOM MEET PPP/C & PNCR ON REGISTRATION ISSUES

Reinforcing its commitment transparency and inclusivity as a matter of policy, the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) has met with separate teams of Senior Representatives of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) and the People's National Congress Reform (PNCR) on Tuesday, April 1, and Tuesday, April 15, 2008, respectively.

The meetings took place as a result of GECOM's initiative to invite all of the Parliamentary Political Parties to discuss issues associated with the ongoing House-to-House Registration exercise. Both meetings were in the GECOM Boardroom just prior to the Commission's 215th and 216th Statutory Meetings respectively.

The PPP/C's team comprised Mr. Donald Ramotar – General Secretary, Mr. K. Ramanah – Chief Scrutineer, Dr. Leslie Ramsammy and Mr. Z. Mustapha.

The PNCR's Team comprised Mr. Robert Corbin, Leader, Mr. Oscar Clarke, General Secretary, Ms. Amna Ally, Chief Scrutineer and Mr. Lance Carberry.

The meeting with the PPP/C witnessed the tabling of some areas of concern which this Party believes should be addressed to give further credence to the exercise. The main areas of concern were as follows:-

1. The non-acceptance of the existing (green) National Identification Card as a valid source document for Registration as a matter of Commission policy.
2. The non-acceptance of assumed names by which potential registrants are known i.e. a name or names other than that documented on their Birth Certificates as a matter of Commission policy.
3. Difficulties associated with accessibility to Birth Certificates, pertaining especially to persons from the hinterland areas.

Responding to the concerns documented at 1. above, Dr. Steve Surujbally, Chairman of GECOM, emphasized that the basis for the Commission's policy decision not to accept an ID card as a valid source document for Registration is directly linked to the integrity of the National Register of Registrants Database (NRRDB) that is to be established as a result of House-to-House Registration. He reinforced the decision by reminding that in previous Registration exercises, but not during Continuous Registration, some persons had been registered on the basis of having provided Baptismal Certificates, letters from priests, elders, headmasters, Village Captains/Touchous and Justices of the Peace thus becoming registered in the National Register of Registrants (NRR) and would have been issued ID cards. This had led to the registration database which was used for the creation of the Official List of Electors (OLE) for the 2006 elections being questioned.

The Chairman pointed out that any potential registrant who has been using a name or names other than that documented on their Birth Certificates, and who was desirous of being so registered must, regularize his/her name(s) by way of Deed Poll to become registered, otherwise there is no legal basis for his/her registration by the preferred name(s).

Pertaining to 3. above, the Chairman noted that GECOM is aware that there would be many persons who might (i) not currently be in possession of their Birth Certificates and other supporting source documents, (ii) whose births might have never been registered (particularly in hinterland areas), (iii) whose Passports might have expired and (iv) who might have been using names other than those under which their births were registered. He assured the PPP/C that these concerns had led the Commission to have

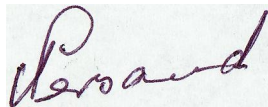
consultations/exchanges with Ms. Priya Manickchand, Minister of Human Services and Social Security, Ms. Carolyn Rodrigues, former Minister of Amerindian Affairs and Representatives of the Ministry of Home Affairs including past and present Ministers and Mrs. Greta McDonald, the Registrar General. The Commission was assured that these Ministries and the General Register Office are working assiduously towards registering the births of all persons who are now not registered.

During the meeting with the PNC/R, Mr. Corbin sought assurances from the Commission that the Commission's decision pertaining to the unacceptability of an ID card as a source document for registration remained unaltered. Similarly, the PNCR Leader stressed that his Party is expecting that new ID cards will be produced at the end of the House-to-House Registration exercise. Dr. Surujbally gave the assurance that the Commission's decisions on these matters were still current.

Ms. Ally queried whether, as was initially intended, the Commission would be displaying monthly publications of the progressive list of registrants. Mr. Gocool Boodoo, Chief Elections Officer (CEO) pointed out that the Secretariat could not have so done to date because of the need for compliance with the multi-tiered quality control measures. He assured however, that the first list of registrants was on the verge of being prepared for internal use by all Registration Officers. He said that electronic copies of this list would be shared with the Parliamentary Political Parties, as would be the lists of the particulars of new registrants to be added thereto.

Both Parties expressed concerns about initial teething problems and (i) episodes of non-cooperation on the part of Temporary Registration Staff and Scrutineers, as well as inaccuracies in the documenting registrant's particulars resulting in revisits to the residences of the relevant applicants for registration. However, Mr. Ramannah and Ms. Ally conceded that the problems encountered by their Parties' Scrutineers were easily resolved through consultations with the CEO, and that occurrences of inaccuracies were far less than what obtained at the commencement of the exercise due to the improved efficiency which comes with practice.

Notwithstanding their respective concerns, both Teams expressed satisfaction and congratulated GECOM on the satisfactory pace of the House-to-House Registration exercise.



Vishnu Persaud, MCIPR
Public Relations Officer