

**STATEMENT BY DR. STEVE SURUJBALLY, CHAIRMAN OF THE GUYANA
ELECTIONS
COMMISSION (GECOM) ON THURSDAY, JULY 27, 2006**

Yesterday was Nomination Day. GECOM has ushered the nation to this event notwithstanding the obstacles, the malignments, the detractions. The GECOM team steered the course and with a fixity of purpose and hard work brought us to this point. I am proud of the team and I congratulate each and everyone of the members of this team. Yesterday, the Political Parties, which intend to contest the 2006 General and Regional Elections, exhibited and expressed the élan, the healthy enthusiasm, the adrenaline, the positiveness that we would expect from mature and visionful political parties.

Essentially, yesterday they commenced their official campaigning, and the GECOM must do its part in ensuring not only a level playing field for all the contesting parties, big or small, but even more importantly we are duty bound (and I dare say, legally bound) to ensure that those elements which are needed for the conduct of a free, fair and transparent election process are in place.

It is within this latter context, that we felt it appropriate to tell the electorate, via the media, what the state of play is, how far the preparations have advanced and what is left to be done.

Announcement of August 28, 2006 as Election Day

The written (letter dated 21.07.2006) advice given to the President by me in my capacity as Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) referred to the Memorandum dated Friday, July 21, 2006, from the Chief Election Officer (CEO) which stated that the GECOM Secretariat was ready to commence printing and publication of the Official List of Electors (OLE).

In retrospect, I must recall that, in a letter dated April 13, 2006, after the collaborative development of the Electoral Calendar (which had inputs from the GECOM Secretariat

staff, the CEO, The Chairman, Commission members and the Joint International Technical Assessors), I had advised the President that the level of preparation precluded the elections being held before August 30, 2006.

Now that His Excellency the President, in his own wise judgment, has decided on Monday August 28, 2006 as Election Day, it is appropriate that the Secretariat's technicians review the Electoral Calendar, as they will continue to do, to determine whether the date of three days earlier can be accommodated.

For us at GECOM, the only consideration of importance is the optimal quality of an election process which reflects best practice and which can withstand national and international scrutiny.

It must be borne in mind that most of the precursor activities associated with the elections preparations and the eventual polling day have essentially been completed. Some activities which are yet to be embarked upon had to await Nomination Day:

The following activities will now be completed:

(1) The completion of the identification and furnishing of Polling Stations.

Extensive work on this activity has already resulted in the identification and furnishing of 1,916 out of a possible 1,950 Polling Stations that will be established countrywide to facilitate voting in the various Electoral Divisions.

(2) The Completion of the Recruitment and Training of Polling Day Staff.

Almost all of the work associated with the recruitment and training of Polling Day staff has been completed. Some further training and very few more recruitments may become necessary.

(3) Completion of Procurement of Sensitive and Non-Sensitive Materials.

It must be obvious that the ballot papers (classified as sensitive) cannot be printed until after Nomination Day. The Canadian company that would be printing the Ballot Papers/Statements of Poll/Tally Sheets is on stand-by to commence printing within hours of GECOM giving it the necessary specifications and permission.

GECOM has hired a Printing Control Specialist to assist, on the ground, in the alacratization of the printing and shipping arrangements even before the arrival of two Commissioners. The two of GECOM Commissioners have been identified to travel to Canada to oversee the effective printing and shipping of the ballot papers. Other sensitive materials, including transparent ballot boxes and indelible stain (ink) are already in our possession.

Distribution of the sensitive and non-sensitive materials will commence at the appropriate time.

(4) Printing of the 2006 Official List of Electors (OLE) for the Polling Stations.

Printing of the 2006 OLE to be distributed to the various Polling Stations will take two days. This activity will commence as soon as is necessary.

Of course we will provide all contesting political parties with copies of the OLE prior to the generation of copies for the Polling Stations.

(5) The examination of the Nomination Lists presented by Contesting Political Parties.

This activity commenced last night immediately after the closure of the allocated period of submissions made by the Political Parties and is ongoing even as I speak. It will continue until the CEO has determined that the nominations are in order. This determination must be completed by the thirtieth day before the elections.

(6) Balloting by the Disciplined Forces

Preparations for voting by members of the Disciplined Forces, seven days before Elections Day, are satisfactorily underway. Senior Staff of the Secretariat continue to be engaged with the senior representatives of the Disciplined Forces to ensure that this activity is carried out with maximum efficiency.

(7) Balloting by Non-Resident Electors

Preparations for voting by non-resident electors have already been completed. The respective lists of electors for Guyana's Diplomatic Missions abroad have already been dispatched.

(8) Public Information Campaign

Preparations for the production and timely nation-wide distribution of an 8-page brochure aimed at providing easily absorbable information about the elections process, the rights, responsibilities of electors, electoral offences etc is well underway. Further, the preparations of advertisements to be published via the print and electronic media are complete.

Additionally, GECOM's Voter Education Division is currently engaged in the production of individual fliers depicting various aspects of the election process. This activity focuses on equipping electors about how to cast their votes as well as providing other significant aspects of information about the elections.

(9) National ID Card Distribution

GECOM will continue to distribute National ID Cards at all of its Registration Offices up to and on Elections Day and beyond in order to provide every elector who has not yet uplifted his/her ID card to so do. In this regard we will continue the publication of relevant infomercials until Elections Day. Please permit me to use this opportunity to appeal to all such persons to make every effort to collect their National ID cards as soon as possible. They will need their ID cards to identify themselves on Election Day.

Safeguards to Prevent Skullduggery Before, During and After Election Day

At the behest of the People's National Congress Reform (PNCR) a list of safeguard measures which could provide assurance that skullduggery will not be perpetrated at any stage of the pre-, peri- and post-elections process is currently being prepared. Upon completion, this regime of safeguards is expected to provide a high level of comfort to the contesting Political Parties. It will also be shared with other stakeholders including the Donor Agencies, and Domestic and International Observers.

Finally, I must confess that there is another motive for this morning's "Meeting with the Media", and that is to implore you - No, demand of you - to be responsible and fair in your reporting of events; to desist from making scandalous, inflammatory, sensationalist and unverified statements and headlines; to entreat you to disabuse yourselves from the temptation of getting yourselves involved in rumour - a condition which creates its own momentum, its own vortex from which you cannot later, with the best of intentions, extricate yourselves.

The next few weeks will be turbulent. In this milieu of excitableness, you cannot add fuel to the fire. The nation is too fragile, too vulnerable to withstand any element of disorder.

I have already spoken with the editors of the major print media. I hope to institute dialogue with editors in the electronic media next week.

Ladies and gentlemen of the media I request of you that you walk with us, that you work with us. Your nation requires this of you. Nothing less.

Thank you.