



Rights of the Child Commission

**Annual Report
January - December 2013**

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CCPA	-	Child Care and Protection Agency
GAWL	-	Guyana Association of Women Lawyers
MCYS	-	Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport
MHSS	-	Ministry of Human Services and Social Security
RCC	-	Rights of the Child Commission
SKYE	-	Skills & Knowledge for Youth Employment
UNICEF	-	United Nations Children Fund
UN	-	United Nations

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CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

The year 2013 was a very good one for the work of the RCC. The year entailed an exhaustive menu of initiatives intended to establish the best interest of the Guyanese child. The best interest of the Guyanese child has been the guiding principle behind the work of the Commission.

2013 saw the Commission sustaining its engagement of the Red Cross Convalescent Home intended to ensure the protection of Guyana's children in alternative care settings. The Commission's publication of the specific guides to the Sexual Offenses Act, the user friendly lawbooks, as well as, the Paper presented to the Parliamentary Committee advocating the abolition of corporal punishment was intended to enliven those articles in the CRC which enshrine the right of the child to be free from all forms of hurt and maltreatment.

The RCC's engagement of the DPP in facilitating clarity to the Sexual Offenses Act was a significant initiative intended to make such legislation more of a working document pursuant to the protection of Guyana's children.

The workshop with the media practitioners imploring adherence to responsible guidelines when reporting on children's issues was intended to ensure that the best interests of our children are enshrined in the protocols of print and broadcast journalism. This engagement was prompted by the recognition that the media plays an important role in safeguarding and empowering children.

The Child Participation and Youth Media Workshop, along with the collaboration with Youth Media Guyana, as well as, the Youth Civic Workshop in Brazil, which were conducted in the latter half of 2013, were intended to activate and enliven article 12 of the CRC which establishes the right of the child to be an active participant in the settings of family, community, school, youth groups and even nation. The RCC recognizes that Child Participation is a novel concept to Guyana but one intrinsically important to the thrust of child and youth empowerment.

2013 was important also because the RCC was able to consolidate a staff corps in the employment of a Chief Executive Office, an Investigative Officer and an Admin Assistant. Such constitutes an important boost to the work programme of the Commission. The RCC stands ready to work with all stakeholders in the thrust of the protection and empowerment of Guyana's children and youth. It is a mandate that the commissioners and staff consider sacrosanct.

Aleema Nasir

Chairperson

INTRODUCTION

The year 2013 was a challenging and in a limited way, productive one for the Rights of the Child Commission ("RCC"). As was expected, the progress that was possible by the RCC hinged on the financial commitments of the State through budgetary allocations. In the course of this report, the activities as highlighted will reflect the level of support provided.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the RCC was supported tangibly by UNICEF and this international organisation's support is gratefully acknowledged and recorded.

The following persons served on the Rights of the Child Commission for 2013.

Representatives of Religion



Aleema Nasir – Chairperson, RCC

Ms. Nasir is a formally qualified and trained counselor and social worker of many years' experience. She is the current President of the women's Organisation of the Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana (C.I.O.G.), (NACOSA) and a member of the Central Executive of the Central Islamic organization (CIOG). She serves as the main counselor for CIOG.



Colleen Anthony – Member

(Rev) Colleen Clarke-Anthony, Deputy Superintendent and Pastor of the Guyana Missionary Baptist Church, currently employed as Senior Probation and Social Services Officer at the Ministry of Labour Human Services and Social Security, License Marriage Officer.

Rev Clarke-Anthony is a graduate of the Wesleyan Bible College (Bachelors Degree in Christian Ministry), graduate of the University of Guyana (B.Sc.SocialWork)



Sarojanie Rambaran – Member

Mrs. Rambaran represents the Hindu religion. She is a counselor and educator of many years' experience. She is also a member of the Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha and has served for many years as a member of Mahela Mandele, its women's arm.

Representatives of women



Rosemary Benjamin-Noble – Deputy Chairperson

Mrs. Benjamin – Noble is a West – Indian trained Attorney – at - Law and has worked for many years on women's and children's issues primarily through her membership of the Guyana Association of Women Lawyers and association with other women's organisations. She holds a Master's Degree in International Education. She also served several years ago as the co – ordinator of the Children's Bills Project (in collaboration with MLHSS) which resulted in five new pieces of children's legislation.



Sandra Hooper – Member

Mrs. Hooper is a formally qualified social worker of over forty years' experience. She worked as a Government Youth Officer for sixteen years, followed by seventeen years as Director of the Municipal Daycare Service. She has held principal positions in various social organizations and in the Anglican community serves on the Diocesan Council and chairs the Family Life Commission. Mrs. Hooper was also a member for several years of the precursor to the RCC i.e. the National Commission on the Rights of the Child - Presidential commission (now defunct).

Representatives of service



Yvonne Fox - Member

Mrs. Fox is a trained educator, having been a teacher and later principal for many years. A graduate of the George Meany Labour College, USA, Mrs. Fox also has given yeoman service representing the Guyana Teacher's Union (GTU) including as President of its women's arm. Throughout the years Mrs. Fox served as Co – ordinator of the Teachers upgrading classes in the Georgetown District for years, and is a former Vice – Chairperson of the Legal Aid Clinic of Guyana. She is a member of the Education sub – committee of the Rights of the Child Commission and was honored by the Women and Gender Equality Commission in August, 2011.

Ms. Yvonne Fox received the Guyana Teacher's Union "Jean Persico Award" in 1990 and the "Presidential Award" in 1992.

Representatives of youth



Kaloutie (Pamela)Nauth – Member

Ms. Nauth is a professional social worker and court – appointed mediator. She is the current President of the Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association (GRPA) and Director of Help and Shelter Inc.

Pamela Nauth is a Professional Social Worker / Counsellor and Consultant.

Ms. Nauth is one of the founding members of the Mediation Institute of Guyana and served in the capacity as Company Secretary and Vice – President for the past three terms. She is also a Court Appointed Mediator.

Additionally, she is the President of the Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association, the Vice – Chairperson & Director of Help & Shelter, Commissioner of the National Commission of the Family and Past Secretary of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Advisory Board.

Rich in her experience she has been devoting her time in promoting the development and capacity



Marissa Massiah– member

Ms. Massiah is an undergraduate in International Relations, and is currently reading for a Masters Degree in Project Management. She is a certified Community Facilitator. Her work experience includes servicing as Volunteer Relations Co – ordinator with Habitat for Humanity in Guyana (Poverty Housing Reduction).

Marissa Massiah has worked and volunteered with various youth groups and initiatives nationally and regionally.



Michelle Kalamandeen – Member

Ms. Kalamandeen represents the Rights of Children (ROC) organisation. She co-founded ROC in 1998 and has conducted child rights advocacy training workshops throughout Guyana and community opportunity for addressing issues. She also developed numerous youth campaigns aimed at racial harmony, co-developed the preamble of the Guyanese Constitution and is a board member of the Guyana Human Rights Association. Michelle is an environmental lecturer at the University of Guyana.



Suelle Findlay – Williams – Member

Suelle Findlay-Williams is the Youth Representative on the Rights of the Child Commission. She enjoys working with young people and believes that every child and youth deserves to be loved, respected and accepted. At every opportunity, Mrs. Williams encourages young people to adopt principles that will help them to live a pure, loving and industrious life. Suelle Williams holds a Bachelors of Science Degree in Public Communication from the University of Guyana and is currently reading for a Master Degree in Public Administration. She has also had training in Cognitive Behavioural Intervention for Trauma in Schools, Suicide Prevention, and School Health Programmes.

Representative of Education



Bibi Shariman Ali – Member

Mrs. SharimanAli is a qualified teacher and educator of a significant number of years' experience. She currently serves in a senior administrative position within the Ministry of Education.

Representatives of Human services



Kwame McCoy – Member

Mr. McCoy is one of two nominated representatives of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. He is formally trained in public communications and has served in several capacities related to public relations within the state and government structure within the past fifteen years.

Representatives of other (related) interests



Hyacinth (Cynthia) Massay - Member

Ms Massay has worked in the area of disability for almost four decades and as former Director of Rehabilitation Services in the Ministry of Health was responsible for the development of Guyana's first National Policy for Persons with Disability which was laid in Parliament in 1997.

She is a member of the Board of the Step by Step

model school for children with autism and the board of the recently formed Guyana Epilepsy Foundation

Ex – officio Commissioners



Nicole Cole – Rep. of the Women & Gender Equality Commission (WG&EC)

I am a graduate of the University of Guyana-Class of 2007 (BSc Credit) I am a clinically trained Social Work Practitioner who is officially gazetted; Ms. Cole is currently enrolled @ Stanford University completing a Course in International Women's Health and Human Rights, she is also a student of the Confucius Institute-University of Guyana and the Venezuelan Institute of Culture and Cooperation.



Marco De Souza – Rep. of the Indigenous Peoples' Commission (IPA)

Mr. DeSouza is an active leader and counselor in the Moruca community. He has served for several years as toshau (leader) of the Moruca Amerindian Village Council.



Mr. William Orrin Boston - Chief Executive Officer/ Secretary

Mr. Boston is a graduate in management of the University of Guyana. He has held administrative and management positions in several high – profile organizations including CARICOM and USAID. He was also a teacher for several years at the Secondary school and vocational levels.

Membership of other commissions

Ms. Aleema Nasir was nominated to serve as

representative of the Rights of the Child Commission on the Ethnic Relations Commission.

Mrs. Sandra Hooper was nominated to serve as

representative of the Rights of the Child Commission on the Women & Gender Equality Commission.

Mrs. Suelle Findlay Williams was nominated to serve as representative of the Rights of the Child Commission on the Indigenous Peoples' Commission.

The Chairperson of RCC will serve on the Human Rights Commission upon its establishment.

WORK PROGRAMME 2013

Vision Statement:

To advocate and sustain the development of an enabling environment which ensures that the rights of the child in Guyana including children with disabilities are respected, protected and enforced.

The Mission Statement:

1. To promote the rights and interests of and respect for the views of children.
2. Ensure that the rights and interests of children are taken into account at all levels of government other public bodies and private organizations when decisions and policies affecting children are taken.
3. Monitor compliance and make recommendations for the compliance with international instruments to which the government accedes from time to time including those already acceded to and which relate to the purpose of the commission.
4. Monitor, evaluate and make recommendations on policies, procedures and practices organizations, bodies and institutions in order to promote the rights of the child.

Engagement with the Red Cross Convalescent Home

Throughout the year 2013, the RCC cultivated a relationship with the Red Cross Convalescent Home. In view of the particular vulnerability of the children in care at the Convalescent Home, the Commission has sought to pay keen attention to the operation of the Home so as to ensure that the best practices established by the Ministry of Human Services as well as UNICEF are maintained. This relationship was materialized by a number of visits and follow up communication by the investigative sub-committee of the Commission.

Receipt of UNDP Consultants' Report.

During the first quarter of 2013, the Commission received the UNDP report on institutional strengthening of the Rights Commissions. The UNDP had conducted a comprehensive study of the operations of all three Commissions, identifying in the process, strengths and weaknesses. The report documented the consultants' specific recommendations relating to the enhancement of the capacity of the Commission. The Commission had embraced the findings

of the study and viewed it as a relevant addendum to the Commission's strategic plan.

Publication of specific Guides to the Sexual Offences Act.

In 2013, the RCC in collaboration with UNICEF, commenced work on having published, specific guides to the Sexual Offences Act. These include a *Social Work Practitioners Guide, A Medical Practitioners Guide and a Guide for Members of the Public*.

The publication of these Guides represents the conviction of the Commission that sexual offences against children must be eradicated. These guides will serve as critical instruments of education and national awareness.

Paper to Parliamentary Committee supporting the abolition of corporal punishment.

In the second quarter of 2013, the RCC presented to the Social Services Committee of the National Assembly, a position paper supporting the abolition of corporal punishment in schools. The paper essentially made the point that based on the wide ranging consultations held by the Commission, it had arrived at a consensus position, that the negative impacts of corporal punishment, exceedingly outweigh, any seemingly positive arguments in support of same.

Publication of User Friendly lawbooks.

Publication of user friendly versions of the following Acts: Adoption of Children, Status of Children and Custody, Contact, Guardianship and Maintenance Act.

A collaboration with the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, the publication of the Acts was finalized in the second quarter of the year, and subsequently printed. Such publication was prompted by the realization of the Commission that the aforementioned Acts needed to be repackaged, in terms of language and presentation, so that its contents might be availed to a wider cross section of societal stakeholders than just the legal fraternity.

Moreover, the publications represent the realization of the Commission that the legislation enshrined in the Acts constitutes very important guidance to the establishment and maintenance of a societal ethos conducive to child rights.

The booklets would be distributed via the different ministries

and other relevant stakeholders. Also, they would be used at all RCC workshops, conferences etc.

Workshop with Media Practitioners on the Responsible Coverage of Children's Issues.

In the second quarter of 2013, the RCC conducted a workshop with media practitioners on the need to adhere to responsible guidelines when reporting on issues related to children's welfare and development.

The workshop was conducted in collaboration with UNICEF and saw presentations from the University of Guyana Centre for Communication Studies and the RCC.

Some of the guidelines shared with the media included:

1. The need to strive for standards of excellence in terms of accuracy and sensitivity when reporting on issues

involving children;

2. To avoid programming and publication of images which intrude upon the media space of children with

information which is damaging to them;

3. To avoid the use of stereotypes and sensational presentation to promote journalistic material involving

children;

4. To consider carefully the consequences of publication of any material concerning children;

5. To guard against visually or otherwise identifying children unless it is demonstrably in the public interest.

The workshop represented a recognition of the critical role of the media in the materialization of the UNCRC.

Presentation on the Sexual Offences Act 2010 by the Director of Public Prosecutions

The third quarter of 2013 featured a presentation by the Director of Public Prosecutions, Mrs. Shalimar Ali-Hack on the Sexual Offences Act 2010.

The DPP's presentation focused on sections 10-36 of the

Act. The Commissioners were able to seek clarification and ask queries on a number of seemingly ambiguous areas of the Act. The DPP's presentation constituted an important briefing to the investigative sub-committee of the Commission whose ambit it is to guide the process of investigation conducted by the RCC. A better understanding of the Act by this sub - committee will enhance its capacity to better pursue article 19 of the UNCRC.

Child Participation Workshop

During the third quarter of the year, the RCC in partnership with UNICEF hosted a Child Participation workshop. The theme of Child Participation is premised on article 12 of the UNCRC which establishes and enshrines the right of the Child to be a participant in the process of self, community and national development. The RCC had concluded that child participation is an important component of Guyana's unfolding democratic thrust.

This workshop saw the involvement of children drawn from each administrative region, who participated in a consultation process that would lead to the crafting of a National Child Participation Framework. This Framework was subsequently shared with the Speaker of the National Assembly as well as the two main political parties in the National Assembly.

The National Child Participation Framework consists of eight participation areas namely: religious setting, family, educational setting, civil society, public affairs, alternative care setting, health and community setting. In effect, the framework spells out tailored guidelines that should inform the child's participation in the above areas.

The participation framework would, in turn, guide the crafting of a National Child Participation Action Plan.

Youth Media Workshop

In the fourth quarter of 2013, the RCC in partnership with UNICEF, conducted a youth media workshop. The workshop was designed and conducted by the centre for Communication studies of the University of Guyana and was aimed at equipping the participants, (the same contingent who attended the child participation workshop), with specific media skills including the writing of news stories and the making of documentaries.

The objective of the workshop contemplated a situation where the participants would use these newly acquired media skills to be change agents in their communities as well as the other settings to which they belong. The fact

that students from the NOC, as well as from Hinterland Communities were present and were empowered with these skills is very significant. Such will translate to the children and youth from these settings being in the forefront of the movement towards community development.

The youth media initiative is grounded in a number of the articles of the UNCRC which collectively speak to the holistic empowerment of the child.

Collaboration with The Youth Media Initiative

The last quarter of 2013 saw a critical partnership with Youth Media Guyana. Youth Media Guyana is a grouping of young media practitioners doing substantial work in covering issues related to children and youth. In the year 2013, they had done work with a special focus on children's issues in the hinterland.

The Collaboration with Youth Media Guyana saw the group making a presentation at the RCC's youth media workshop in the latter part of 2013.

Attendance at the Youth Civic Participation workshop in Brasilia, Brazil.

The RCC in partnership with UNICEF, attended and presented at a Youth Civic Participation workshop in Brasilia, Brazil. This occurred in the last quarter of 2013. Approximately one hundred and twenty (120) participants from twelve (12) countries attended this international workshop. The participants included adolescents, young people, policy makers, leaders and other stakeholders developing programmes and policies aimed at ensuring the right to participation of young people. Two (2) persons attended through the RCC – one member of staff, Mr. Andre Gonsalves (Investigative Officer) and a student, Mr. Stephan Ferrier, who had participated in the RCC's first Children's Parliament in 2011.

Increased Personnel Capacity.

In the third and fourth quarters of 2013, full time employment contracts were signed with Mr. Amar Panday, Mr. Andre Gonsalves and Ms. Shonell Mingo to function in the capacity of CEO, Investigative Officer and Administrative Assistant, respectively.

Their employment in all critical positions has served to boost the capacity of the Commission to pursue its constitutional

mandate.

Branding Kit

With the support of UNICEF, the Commission was able to introduce its collection of Branding Kit items.

The Branding Kit is intended to support the workshops and other activities of the Commission. Moreover, it is intended to advertise the RCC and make it more accessible to its partners, stakeholders and the general public.