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by

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on

“Sectoral Committees of the National Assembly of Guyana”

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Introduction

The results of the 1997 General and Regional elections in Guyana were disputed and created a great disturbance which caused the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Leaders enjoined on the Leaders of the two main political parties in Guyana to find a solution to resolve the disturbance. The two Political Leaders agreed to a shared Governance System. To this end, the Leaders of the two main political parties at that time, Mrs. Janet Jagan of the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) and Mr. Desmond Hoyte of the People's National Congress (PNC), entered into two agreements:

- the Herdmanston Accord on January 17, 1998; and
- the St. Lucia Statement on July 2, 1998.

The agreement and the statement were efforts to resolve the situation and to find a way to settle the socio-political problem in Guyana. Additionally, the Leaders embarked on a dialogue which paved the way for Constitutional Reform and enabling recommendations for the proper functioning of the National Assembly to be made.

A Constitutional Reform Commission was established and, in order to allow the Opposition to participate more meaningfully in the governance of the country,

recommended the establishment of four Sectoral Committees to ensure that the Government is kept transparent and accountable. The four Sectoral Committees are:

- Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources
- Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services
- Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations
- Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services

Background of the Sectoral Committees

The idea of establishing the Sectoral Committees was, and still is, that the National Assembly would be more deliberative, forceful, vigilant and participatory, thus fulfilling its role as the watchdog of the people of Guyana; in essence, its principal role is one of an oversight function.

The Sectoral Committees are responsible for scrutinizing all areas of Government policy and administration. They have the power to examine all policies and administration for each sector to determine whether the execution of Government policies is in consonance with the principle of good governance and in the best interest of the nation.

Roles of Sectoral Committees

The Committees allow the Assembly to perform simultaneously numerous essential functions that otherwise might not be conducted at all. These include a detailed review of proposed legislation; oversight and scrutiny of the executive branch activities; examination of and reporting on policy issues; and conducting special investigations.¹

Functions of Sectoral Committees

These four Sectoral Committees have the authority to:

- (a) *determine areas of Government activity for scrutiny or specific examination;*
- (b) *request the Minister assigned responsibilities for the sector to submit written or oral information, including government documents and records about any specific area of government policy and administration;*
- (c) *review existing legislation on government policy and administration for any of the sector;*
- (d) *summon persons to give evidence in accordance with the Legislative Bodies (Evidence) Act Chapter 1:08 of the Laws of Guyana;*
- (e) *scrutinize government documents, papers, and records;*

¹ Jackie Sampson, Supporting Parliamentary Committees, August 2009.

- (f) visit any government activity or project in Guyana as agreed and arranged by the Sectoral Committee;*
- (g) in the discharge of their mandate, utilize the services of experts, specialists and other sources of advice as the Committees may determine;*
- (h) establish a timetable for the conduct of their work;*
- (i) make recommendations to the Assembly on legislation or any other action to be taken on matters falling within their purview; and*
- (j) submit periodic reports to the National Assembly on their work.²*

The National Assembly may request a Sectoral Committee to enquire into and report on any aspect of the policy or administration of the Government within its terms of reference.³

Within sixty days of the presentation of a report from a Sectoral Committee, the Government shall, upon the request of the Committee, table a comprehensive response thereto⁴

² Standing Order 86 (2) to (5) (2015)

³ Standing Order 86 (6) (2015)

⁴ Standing Order 86 (7) (2015)

Sectoral Committees report to the National Assembly from time to time but can also report on the progress of their work for the previous year and its work programme for the ensuing year. Reports of the Committees remain confidential until they are presented to the National Assembly.

Areas of Scrutiny of Sectoral Committees

The Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources (PSCNR)

Some of the areas of scrutiny of this Committee are:

- Geology and mines
- Water resources
- Acquisition/transferral/occupation of lands
- Hydrometeorology
- Forestry
- Natural resources/environment
- Wildlife
- Land use
- Thermal & hydro power

The Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services (PSCES)

Some of the areas of scrutiny of this Committee are:

- Public works

- Communications
- Public utilities
- Regional development
- Housing
- Agriculture (rice, sugar, fisheries)
- Drainage & irrigation
- Roads
- River and sea defence
- Consumer protection
- National insurance

The Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations (PSCFR)

Some of the areas of scrutiny of this Committee are:

- Foreign trade
- International organisations
- CARICOM
- Technical cooperation/developing countries
- Foreign aid
- Diplomatic relations
- Multilateral relations
- Cabinet matters

- Organisation of Islamic Conferences
- National security
- The Commonwealth

Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services (PSCSS)

Some of the areas of scrutiny of this Committee are:

- Culture
- Libraries
- Censorship
- Youth affairs
- Primary, Secondary, Technical, and Higher Education
- Examinations local and overseas
- School Feeding Programme
- Children Services
- Adoption Services
- Probation and Welfare
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Amerindian Affairs (Indigenous People's Affairs)
- Health Services, primary health care, public hospitals, clinics, etc.
- Rehabilitation Services, Blood Bank
- Consumer Affairs

To have effective committee oversight, there must be regular questioning, monitoring, probing, and always insisting that Ministers and other executive officials provide the committee with all requested information.

Composition and Structure of the Sectoral Committees

Membership of Sectoral Committees

Each Committee consists of seven (7) Members, four (4) representing the Government and three (3) representing the Opposition. The Government and Opposition are entitled to elect one alternate Member for each Sectoral Committee.⁵

The composition provides the Committees with an ideal atmosphere for discussions and the exchange of views.

⁵ Standing order 86 (2) (2015)

Chairmanship of Sectoral Committees

Each Sectoral Committee has a Chairperson and a Vice Chairperson elected from among the Members of the Government and the Opposition, respectively. The Chairperson and Vice Chairperson alternate annually with two (2) Sectoral Committees chaired by the Government and two (2) chaired by the Opposition.⁶

⁶ Standing Order 86 (3) (2015)