

**USAID Quarterly Report**  
**GUYANA: STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY**  
**Grant No. 504-G-00-95-00009-00**  
**January 1 to March 31, 2000**

**I. SUMMARY**

Since 1996, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) has worked in Guyana to strengthen the electoral process, legislature, civil society and local government, and to support the constitutional reform process. NDI has assisted in the development of these institutions during a continuing political stalemate and uncertainty surrounding the creation of a new constitution. This quarter, NDI accomplished the following:

- \$ Programmatically and administratively supported the continued strengthening of the Women's Millennium Caucus (WMC), a nonpartisan, multiethnic, multiparty organization aimed at increasing the visibility of women's involvement and issues in national life. In its capacity as an advisor, NDI worked closely with the WMC urging the Caucus to be pro-active in its role as an advocate for issues concerning women.
  
- \$ Supported the constitutional reform process by bringing an expert to Guyana to work with the Oversight Committee for Constitution Reform to assist in the development of options for an electoral system.
  
- \$ Provided the International Foundation for Elections Systems (IFES) with a subgrant to assess the electoral environment and design activities in support of the anticipated January 2001 general elections.

Under a second agreement that USAID awarded NDI in January 2000, NDI conducted additional consultations and activities to help strengthen democracy in Guyana, which the Institute will describe in separate semi-annual reports. NDI's future activities under both awards will build upon these efforts to promote constitutional reform and strengthen democratic institutions in Guyana.

**II. BACKGROUND**

Years of controversial elections, undemocratic rule and racial tensions have weakened government institutions in Guyana and have led to public disenchantment with the political system. Since holding its first generally accepted democratic multiparty elections in 1992, Guyana has made some progress in its transition toward political democracy. However, weak political institutions, a centralized power structure, a highly politicized racial divide and frustration with the political process

remain. Tensions between the two major parties, instability and the threat of street protests pose a continuous challenge to the fragile political situation.

In order to diffuse the tension that followed the December 1997 elections, diplomats from the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) brokered the Herdmanston Accord between the two major parties **B** the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) and the People's National Congress (PNC) **B** calling for an international audit of the elections, the establishment of an independent commission to review the constitution, and new elections to be held by January 2001. After months of delay, the National Assembly appointed a parliamentary select committee to establish the Constitutional Reform Commission (CRC), and by January 1999, the Commission began its work, almost one year after the signing of the Accord.

The CRC moved to establish a multiparty secretariat and a timetable for the conduct of its work. Within six months, the CRC conducted 88 public hearings to solicit proposals for reform from citizens around the country and held more than 100 plenaries, committee and sub-committee meetings to discuss the 4,601 proposals it received. Seven international experts and a number of local experts assisted Commission members in discussing the proposals and formulating recommendations for reform on topics such as the electoral system and fundamental rights.

On July 17, the Commission presented its report to the chairman of the Select Committee for Reform of the Constitution. With the dissolution of the CRC and the Select Committee, another Select Committee embarked on a three-month process to review the report of the CRC. Despite tensions between the parties, the Committee completed its review of the CRC's recommendations by its October 31 deadline, at which time Parliament moved to establish an Oversight Committee (OSC) charged with drafting the new constitution.

In the meantime, CARICOM representatives and the donor community in Guyana worked to restart the stalled political dialogue between the two major political parties. Discussions finally began to move forward toward the end of 1999. St. Lucia Prime Minister Dr. Kenny Anthony, designated by CARICOM to oversee the implementation of the Herdmanston Accord, visited Guyana to hold discussions with the leaders of the two political parties. Most notably, his efforts have resulted in the formation of an Ethnic Relations Commission.

In late July 1999, President Jagan stepped down from office due to ill health and was succeeded by Minister of Finance Bharat Jagdeo.

In recent weeks, the OSC has planned and monitored the drafting of the new constitution. Among numerous challenges, the OSC must recommend an electoral system with geographical, proportional and gender representation **B** elements which the Constitution Reform Commission prescribed. In the meantime, the main parties remain committed to holding national elections in January 2001, while many Guyanese and the international community have expressed concern about the country's ability to prepare adequately for elections by that date.

Many analysts fault Guyana's centralized power structure for the country's poor economic performance and alienation of citizens from the political and economic system. Since 1996, NDI has conducted a wide range of programs, including: strengthening the technical capacity of the parliament, members of parliament and parliamentary staff by building a modern parliamentary library; institutionalizing training for local officials by assisting the Ministry of Local Government in increasing the pool of local trainers, developing training materials and improving training techniques; and supporting the conduct of elections by providing technical assistance in the form of computers and other materials, helping the Elections Commission in its public outreach activities, and working with a domestic election monitoring group.

In 1996, NDI began a program to promote an inclusive political structure grounded in the emerging national discussion about constitutional reform. Based on providing comparative information on constitutional reform, NDI's program included: inviting two Southern African legislative experts to Guyana in 1996 to share their experiences with reconciliation and constitutional reform; organizing a visit of Guyanese political and civic leaders to Northern Ireland in 1998 to study the peace and reconciliation process in that country; and hosting the 1998 return visit of a South African parliamentarian to speak about public participation in the reform process. The program has provided both practical information and inspiration among Guyanese to overcome their differences.

A prominent civic leader and participant in the Northern Ireland visit said, "If they can do it, so can we. Our walls are still only in our minds."<sup>1</sup>

In 1999, NDI launched a major program to support the CRC. NDI organized the visits of five international constitutional experts to work with commission members in resolving issues pertaining to structures of government, electoral systems, gender issues and fundamental rights. The Institute has also worked with a number of civic organizations to increase their involvement in the reform process. The CRC, which adopted many of the recommendations that the experts made, expressed repeatedly to NDI the value of their assistance.

Furthermore, in October NDI and the Ministry of Local Government published a ten-module local government trainer's manual and publicly presented 500 copies to the ministry. At the presentation, Minister of Local Government Harripersaud Nokta expressed gratitude for the manual, "I wish to say thank you . . . for all the effort and hours spent to produce such a detailed training manual which would be an asset to the ministry and the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils." NDI will continue its efforts to help strengthen democratic institutions in Guyana and support Guyanese as they undergo the final stages of the constitutional reform process.

### **III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

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<sup>1</sup>Attorney Miles Fitzpatrick, Stabroek News, August 16, 1998.

During this quarter, NDI continued to help strengthen democratic institutions and support the constitutional reform process in Guyana. To design a more effective program and gain the buy-in of local stakeholders, NDI conducted continuous consultations with Guyanese civic and political leaders regarding activities and results.<sup>2</sup>

## **Support for Constitutional Reform**

### *International Experts*

At the request of the OSC's Elections Task Force, NDI sponsored the work of elections systems expert Dr. Andrew Reynolds, a professor of government and international studies at the University of Notre Dame in the United States. Reynolds traveled to Guyana in March, during which time he met with the OSC's Task Force on Elections, as well as representatives of the government, political parties, civic organizations and the private sector to assess the electoral climate and offer various electoral systems options. In his interim report, Professor Reynolds outlined for the OSC three possible options that met the criteria stated in the "Terms of Reference for Expert on Electoral Systems for General Elections," which were based on the two broad recommendations made by the CRC and accepted by the National Assembly.<sup>3</sup> The following options were presented to the OSC:

- a) status quo - 53 directly elected members of parliament (MPs) drawn from party lists in regional constituencies based on the ten administrative regions of Guyana, with ten indirectly elected members chosen by the Regional Democratic Councils and two indirectly elected MPs chosen by the National Council of Local Democratic Organs.
- b) regionally based list PR B 53 directly elected MPs drawn from party lists in regional constituencies based on the ten existing regions of Guyana with 12 directly elected members drawn from national party lists with seats allocated to parties to ensure overall proportionality between votes cast and seats won on the national level.
- c) mixed member proportional system B 40 directly elected members of parliament from First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) single-member constituencies and 25 directly elected MPs drawn from national party lists with seats allocated to parties to ensure overall proportionality between votes cast and seats won on a national level.

In order to clarify any preconceived misconceptions about his public presentation, Professor Reynolds met with members of the media prior to the event. The presentation, which was widely and accurately covered by the media, was held in the main chamber of the National Assembly. In addition, NDI has been compiling the names of experts on constitution drafting and race relations should the Institute receive a similar request for assistance.

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<sup>2</sup>With the award of additional funding in January, several activities and consultations that NDI conducted this quarter were covered by the new agreement, and a discussion of them will appear in the semi-annual report for the new agreement in July.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for the OSC terms of reference and NDI trip agenda for Professor Andrew Reynolds.

## **Increasing Women's Participation**

### *Women's Millennium Caucus*

NDI continued to support the work of the Women's Millennium Caucus (WMC). In January, the WMC issued an action plan, outlining activities for the quarter and the group's budget.<sup>4</sup> In February, NDI provided the administrative and technical support needed for the WMC to finalize its constitution and officially register with the government of Guyana as a Friendly Society organization.

NDI also provided assistance in identifying potential funding possibilities for the WMC once it obtained official status.

During this time period, the WMC concentrated its efforts on general economic issues and how they impact women by sponsoring a variety of activities. Members of the WMC met with the Minister of Finance to lobby for the development of a mechanism by which gender-related issues can be given a priority in the national budgetary process. The WMC celebrated International Women's Day with a two-day program in which it hosted an open forum on the impact of globalization on Guyanese women from both the private and public sector perspective.<sup>5</sup>

The WMC sponsored a television call-in program focusing on the role of women in economic development in which a number of its members served as panelists. The majority of those who called in expressed concern about domestic violence, and the panelists established a link between economic justice and gender justice. Following the call-in program, the WMC received numerous requests for its members to address other groups.

In its role as an advisor, NDI has played a crucial role in assisting the WMC that goes beyond the programmatic and logistical support for the above-mentioned activities. NDI has also provided capacity building support, in particular, focusing on the Caucus's role as an effective advocate as well as the need for the WMC to establish itself as a solid, unique organization that will eventually be self-sustaining.

## **Strengthening Democratic Institutions**

### *Parliamentary Library*

To provide parliamentarians and the public with information about parliament and its resources, NDI and the Clerk of the National Assembly engaged a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) web page developer to construct a web site for the parliament of Guyana. During this period, NDI worked at refining the web site, establishing e-mail accounts for Parliament Office staff, registering the site's domain name, and checking into various browsers to determine major variations in its appearance. NDI also circulated invitations to parliament office and legislative staff and technical experts within the Institute to solicit feedback on the structure and content of the web

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix B for Women's Millennium Caucus Activities and Action Plan.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix C for event and examples news coverage of the event.

site. NDI is currently reviewing these comments in preparation for the launching of the web site. A draft version of the web site is located temporarily at [www.sdn.org.gy/temp2](http://www.sdn.org.gy/temp2) for testing.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, the Parliamentary Library continues to fulfill the research needs of parliamentarians and the public. In this quarter, 75 individuals visited and used the resources of the library.

### *Local Government*

Building on several years of local government work in Guyana, this quarter NDI conducted a series of consultations with partners and stakeholders involved in local government. These consultations were part of NDI's preliminary work in preparation for a local government/civil society partners and stakeholders roundtable, at which NDI and participants will discuss the details and modalities of the local government program and how it relates to the three constituencies – women, Amer-Indians and children – on which NDI will focus its new project.

Additionally, NDI responded to a request for local government materials, including copies of the *Guyana: Building Effective Local Governance* trainers' manual. Several local government officials and others have expressed interest in NDI's local government work in Guyana. There seems to be a growing interest in local government issues, especially as they relate to local government autonomy, revenue generation and property assessment.

### *Elections*

NDI's efforts were crucial in ensuring the input of U.S. implementing organizations into the early stages of the elections process. NDI negotiated a role for IFES, its partner in the new agreement, and provided the organization with funding to travel to Guyana to: assist the European Union (EU) elections assessment team by providing information and first-hand experience on the 1997 elections; establish a crucial link for its future election work by inserting the partners in the new agreement into the EU assessment process; and conduct its own assessment of the electoral climate and determine a plan for activities. The IFES delegation comprised former Ambassador to Guyana and IFES consultant George Jones and IFES Program Officer Rebecca Reichert. They were instrumental in identifying the key components of the election process that will be essential for Guyana to conduct free and fair elections in its next national election. These key components are included in the EU's final report, which will serve as a guide for international donor support for the upcoming election.

NDI also supported the EU assessment through extensive consultations with EU representatives in Guyana and its assessment team. NDI helped the team to assess Guyana's electoral environment and system needs by making available Professor Andrew Reynolds to the EU assessment team.

## **IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

### **Support for Constitutional Reform**

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix D for a mock copy of the web site.

### *International Experts*

Reynolds's trip received extensive and accurate press coverage, thereby presenting electoral system options to the public that conform to the recommendations made to the Constitutional Reform Commission. Headlines included, "Expert suggests three options for elections reform," "Task force to study options on electoral system reform," "Electoral systems expert begins consultations."<sup>8</sup>

The OSC has invited Reynolds to return to Guyana to help educate the public about the new system once the committee has selected one. In the meantime, the OSC has called upon Reynolds for clarification on technical aspects of his report.<sup>9</sup>

### **Increasing Women's Participation**

#### *Women's Millennium Caucus*

The WMC's public activities are giving the group the momentum it needs to make a significant impact as an organization of women working together on issues of common concern to women regardless of ethnicity or political persuasion. Additionally, such activities have resulted in the WMC establishing itself as a reputable organization with a unique niche among other women's organizations.

### **Strengthening Democratic Institutions**

#### *Parliamentary Library*

The parliamentary library continues to serve the needs of parliamentarians and researchers. More than 75 people used the library's services during this period, including a number of MPs and parliament office staff on a regular basis. The parliament of Guyana's web site has been completed and will be on-line for public viewing within the next quarter.

#### *Local Government*

NDI and the Ministry of Local Government's trainers' manuals have already contributed greatly to local government development in Guyana. Several organizations have requested copies since its production. Feedback from these organizations include the following comments: "[The training manual] is a very useful tool," Guyanese Islamic Trust. "[The training manual] will benefit my organization greatly," Guyana Organization of Indigenous Peoples. "Could be very useful in my municipality," town clerk, Rosehall town council.

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix E for examples of press coverage of Reynolds' trip.

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix F for a copy of Reynolds' report.

## *Elections*

NDI helped to strengthen Guyana's capacity to conduct free and fair elections through the provision of the IFES technical experts to the EU's assessment. Jones and Reichert were instrumental in identifying the core elements required for Guyana to conduct general elections in January 2001.

## **V. FUTURE ACTIVITIES**

NDI's future activities will build upon earlier efforts to promote constitutional reform and the strengthening of democratic institutions in Guyana. Next quarter, NDI will continue to work with the WMC in organizing activities that increase women's participation in political and social life, such as a second national consultation, the publication of a quarterly newsletter, additional outreach programs on the allocation for women in the national budget, and the development of an action plan to address common critical issues of concern to Guyanese women.

NDI anticipates completing the parliamentary library web page, and will design activities to support the constitutional reform process, perhaps through a second visit by Reynolds. The Institute will continue to support local government development as part of its new program. NDI looks forward to planning activities to support constitutional reform and the strengthening of democratic institutions into the future.

**List of Appendices**  
**GUYANA: STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY**  
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- A. Terms of Reference and Agenda for Expert on Electoral Systems for General Elections
- B. Women's Millennium Caucus (WMC) list of Activities and Action Plan
- C. Press Coverage on WMC Activities
- D. Mock Copy of the Parliamentary Library Web Site
- F. Press Coverage of the Use of Electoral Expert Andrew Reynolds
- G. Copy of Reynolds' Report Submitted to the Oversight Committee (OSC).