

# Guyana Public Service Union

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO, MR. PATRICK YARDE OF THE GPSU ON THE OCCASION OF ITS 25<sup>TH</sup> RACE RELATIONS COMMITTEE ANNIVERSARY.

On June 9, 1997, twenty-five years ago, the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) Race Relations Committee was birthed. The formation of this committee was seen as necessary to the Union's mandate, because of the rising tensions between ethnic groups in Guyana, particularly between Indo and Afro Guyanese, the two largest ethnic groups that majorly comprised the Public Service. It was hoped that the work of the GPSU Race Relations Committee would at some point inform the national agenda in "a greater area of prominence" and to that end Prime Minister Ms. Janet Jagan, O.E., M.P. was invited to give the feature address at the launching ceremony, which was held at the National Cultural Centre.

The GPSU was also moved to make this necessary step because of a failure of the Peoples Progressive Party/Civic Government to timely establish a Race Relations Commission to study and address race-based issues in Guyana. It was not until March 8, 2002 that the Government established the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC), as was promised in October 1992.

Even after the establishment of the ERC, racial tensions sustained and politicians continued to exploit the situations to their own advantage, but to the detriment of development in Guyana. As the toxicity of racial tensions reared its ugly head, the ineffectiveness of the ERC became more pronounced. It was pellucid that the ERC was nothing more than political window dressing to cover a crucial sore in the struggling population of Guyana. The findings of Sir Herman Ouseley, a Guyana born Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality in the United Kingdom, which was reported in the Stabroek News on Tuesday March 23, 1999, had continuing relevance. According to Sir Herman, on his arrival in Guyana in 1999 he discerned "from the political leadership" that the country had problems and concluded that **"Guyanese people need and are entitled to good strong political leadership rooted in morality with a commitment to fairness, equality and justice for all Guyanese irrespective of their political, ethnic or religious origins."**

This reality is still forlorn and as I expressed at the time of the launching of the GPSU Race Relations Committee, racial tensions "threaten to assume proportions of a national crises." Hence, the monitoring of racism and its insidious effects became a part of the mandate of the committee. Over the years, and even in the current period, the committee has noted the cold, calculated, divisive and discriminatory methodologies of Government and the apportionment of wealth that appears mainly for the benefit of their political constituents, where a pellucid ethnicity predominance exists. There is also the crass denial of earned and necessary benefits for Public Servants, union bashing and avoidance of the legally established collective bargaining process.

Even though twenty-five years have elapsed since the formation of the GPSU Race Relations Committee, its struggles are still at the peak of its existence. It is assumed that the Public Service and the Country will only truly heal when our political leaders renounce their divisive strategies and put their efforts into really achieving true ethnic unity, as a strategy for the future.

Apart from that it is the responsibility of our peoples to put the political dividers to shame by mending our waning race relations by making demands to the politicians to mend their divisive ways, while creating a basis for equitable sharing of wealth and fostering of unity in Guyana.

The GPSU is however disappointed that it took time and effort to share a Race Relations concept paper with both Governments, while extending an invitation to embrace the Union in the venture, these were never responded to or ever acted upon. Contrastingly, the concerns of racism were shared with the Diplomatic Missions in Guyana and the United States Embassy sent a team to the 2017 Biennial Delegates Conference to share their country's experiences and the authorities' efforts to address same. In addition, resolutions were taken to the Public Services International (PSI), calling on them to address the scourge of worldwide racism and these were unanimously passed and confirmed at the 2002 PSI World Conference in Ottawa, Canada. This action resulted in a programme being instituted to address racism and xenophobia in the Americas and the Caribbean.

Nonetheless, the GPSU is satisfied that its efforts to combat the scourge of racism is bearing some fruit and would like to challenge all Guyanese to join the vanguard against racism, xenophobia, discrimination, etc. that threaten the development of our beloved County, Guyana.

The GPSU is determined to effectively pursue this campaign, even if alone. As a consequence, it is currently refining a plan of action to enhance and intensify its procedures, since the available evidence suggests that this scourge is an obstacle to fair and evenhanded treatment of all citizens and realizing Guyana's full potential of development in a unified and single direction.

June 9, 2022.